



Benefits of Web Conferencing

WHITE PAPER



To compete in the global marketplace, businesses must constantly look for ways to streamline operations, reduce costs and boost productivity. This is particularly important in an economic or industry downturn when they often have to perform at their best simply to survive.

A growing number of companies are discovering that web conferencing can save them time and money, improve internal and external communications and stimulate their business. If you're not already using web conferencing, you may be missing out on a technology that can make a real impact on your bottom line.

Web Conferencing Basics

Web conferencing makes it possible for you to conduct live meetings with other participants over the Internet. The visual portion of the meeting is displayed in a window on the participants' computer screens. The audio portion is transmitted simultaneously by telephone or delivered over the Internet (VoIP).

Although commercially available web conferencing solutions have existed since the mid-90s, advances in Internet security and broadband technology have made it possible to deliver increasingly robust, easy-to-use web conferencing solutions. As a result, the industry is growing rapidly, driven by the popularity of web conferencing. In October 2008, Gartner, Inc. reported five consecutive years of annual growth exceeding 20%.¹ Web conferencing is now a mature industry with dozens of providers offering products and services to meet the needs of businesses both large and small.

Key Features

At its most basic, web conferencing makes it possible to deliver presentations over the Internet. You can show slides from a PowerPoint presentation, for example, including pictures and other graphical images. Mouse-controlled pointers allow you to draw attention to various aspects of the slides as you present them. Markup tools allow you to annotate the slides and highlight important information for the participants, or write on a virtual whiteboard. In addition to presentations, you can also show specific applications or your entire desktop. For instance, you can display an Excel worksheet as you modify it. Or, you can demo a software product.

Communication Features

As the host, or chairperson, of a web conference, you can

manage the interaction among participants in several different ways. For example, you can selectively mute and unmute audio lines to allow comments and questions from the participants. Also, you can temporarily grant control of the meeting to other participants so that they can present slides or show applications on their desktops. Presenters and participants can communicate by text during the conference through chat. Participants can also use a raise-hand feature at any time to notify the chairperson or presenter if they have comments or questions. The chat and raise-hand features are very useful for Q&A sessions. Polling features also allow you to collect information from all the participants during a conference.

Web Conferencing Terminology	
Web Conference	Meeting held over the internet
Web Seminar or webinar	A seminar, lecture, or workshop delivered over the Internet, allowing for interaction with the participants. Also known as a "Webinar."
Broadcast Audio or webcast	A non-interactive event broadcast over the Internet with streaming video.
Video Conference	A meeting facilitated by two-way, simultaneous video and audio transmissions using various telecommunication technologies including the Internet.
Audio Conferencing	An audio-only meeting held by phone or over the Internet with VoIP. Also known as a teleconference.
VoIP	Two-way audio delivered over the Internet. Stands for "Voice Over Internet Protocol."

¹ www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=788813

Web Conferencing Terminology	
Streaming Audio	Non-interactive live or recorded audio delivered over the Internet in real time.
Streaming Video	Non-interactive live or recorded video delivered over the Internet in real time.
Chat	Real-time text messaging over the Internet within the conferencing service.
Chairperson	The host, or person in charge of a web conference
Polling	Surveying participants during a web conference.

Collaboration Features

In addition to disseminating information, web conferencing can be used for collaboration. Advanced web conferencing features allow you to temporarily grant control of individual applications or your entire desktop so that another participant can “drive” your computer. Alternatively, another participant may grant you control of their applications or computer so that you run them remotely. This provides real-time collaboration capabilities useful for training, customer support and problem-solving needs.

Recording Features

Web conferences can be recorded for later use. The recordings can be edited, archived and posted. This allows meeting attendees to refer back to the recordings later if necessary. It also allows those who were unable to participate in the original web conference to replay the meeting at their convenience. Recordings can be repurposed for other uses. They can also be distributed as podcasts.

Miscellaneous Features

A number of web conferencing providers now support streaming video (movies and video clips) and live video (from a webcam). Some web conferencing solutions include support for scheduling meetings, notifying and registering participants and collecting participant information and feedback.

Benefits of Web Conferencing

Web conferencing has many advantages over in-person meetings. These are some of the ways web conferencing can benefit your business:

Save Time

Meetings take a lot of time – to arrange, to get there and back and to sit through. Web conferencing can save time in all of these areas.

Some web conferencing solutions allow you to manage meeting notification and registration on-line. Many of the tasks of arranging a meeting are automated, including sending out meeting reminders and collecting feedback from the meeting. For large meetings, the timesavings can be significant.

Obviously, web conferencing saves time by eliminating travel because you attend meetings where you are. This can save hours or days if the meeting is in another town. Even if the meeting is just in the building next door or up two floors and down the hall, getting there and back takes time that could otherwise be spent doing something useful.

Also, web conferencing tends to make meetings more efficient and productive, and that can lead to fewer and shorter meetings.

Save Money

Everyone knows how expensive travel can be, and in an economic downturn, it's one of the first costs companies cut. Even in good times, most companies are careful with their travel expenses.

Comparing the cost of travel versus the cost of web conferencing is difficult because travel costs vary so much. There's no real comparison in any case; it's safe to assume that travel costs are at least one or two orders of magnitude higher than web conferencing costs, and the difference grows quickly for large meetings. One thing is certain: travel costs continue going up while competition is driving the cost of web conferencing down.

This isn't to say that travel and face-to-face meetings aren't necessary. They're great for establishing personal rapport and building relationships. Sometimes, you have to go on-site to fix a problem. Some people like to travel and see it as a job perk that contributes to job satisfaction. For most companies, however, a large portion of travel can be eliminated by web conferencing, saving many thousands of dollars annually.

Work Smarter

A worldwide 2005 Microsoft Office online survey² found that workers spent an average of 5.6 hours each week in meetings. In that same survey, 69% said meetings aren't productive. Given that 25 million meetings take place daily in the U.S. alone³, a lot of productivity is lost.

²www.microsoft.com/presspass/press/2005/mar05/03-15threeproductivedayspr.msp

³www.enebuilder.net/theayersgroup/e_article000450602.cfm?x=b11,0,w

Web conferences provide a structure that encourages good meeting practices such as starting and ending on time and sticking to the subject. You have complete control over the content and execution of the meeting. The result is that web conferences accomplish more in less time.

Perhaps the biggest productivity improvement from web conferencing is the meetings that wouldn't have been held otherwise. Ad-hoc and collaborative meetings can be called nearly instantaneously, bringing key players together from a variety of locations to address critical issues, solve immediate problems, or discuss unexpected opportunities.

Expand Your Reach

With web conferencing, you can meet with anyone, anytime, anywhere. This means you can work from home or any other remote location and still attend meetings you would otherwise miss. And if you have prospects, customers, or operations in other parts of the world, you can meet with them whenever you want, without the time and expense of travel.

Best of all, the convenience of web conferencing can attract an audience that you might not otherwise reach due to travel restrictions, time constraints, or work priorities. Logging into a web seminar is much easier than attending an actual seminar, for example.

Feel Good

According to the International Civil Aviation Organization, a passenger traveling roundtrip between San Francisco and Chicago generates 550.76 kg of CO2 emissions⁴. Getting to and from the airport in both cities can easily generate another 44 kg or more⁵. Multiply this by the number of people traveling in your company and the number of trips they take each year, and the environmental impact of business travel becomes obvious – and a little scary.

While reducing your carbon emissions may not have a direct impact on your company's bottom line, it does have an impact on the environment's bottom line. If that's important to you, using web conferencing is something you can feel good about.

Web Conferencing at Work

Web conferencing can be used in many different ways to save time and money, improve communications and boost productivity. Here are some examples of ways you might put web conferencing to work for your business:

Uses of web conferencing by business function	
Sales, Marketing	Deliver sales/marketing presentations Hold thought leadership seminars Give product demos Make product announcements Conduct sales status meetings
Customer Support/Training	Provide customer training Solve customer support issues Conduct technical seminars
Other organizations	Deliver development and compliance training Deliver financial results, hold investor meetings Conduct department meetings Collaborate on product planning and development

Give Presentations

You can deliver the same presentations over the Internet with web conferencing that you would in person. Whether it's generating leads with sales presentations, nurturing those leads with case studies or technical presentations, or delivering financial results and forecasts to investors, your audience will see the presentation slides on their computers as you go through them on yours.

Conduct Meetings

Web conferencing is ideal for recurring status or department meetings, especially when the participants are scattered across different work locations. Examples include project development status meetings and sales report meetings. Web conferencing features allow you to grant temporary control of a meeting to another participant to present slides and information on his or her desktop.

Hold On-line Events

With the ability to support hundreds, even thousands of participants, web conferencing is ideal for holding large, on-line events or seminars. Examples include reaching your entire customer base with new product announcements, establishing thought leadership through technical and expert seminars and conducting large-scale marketing events.

Deliver Training

Web conferencing is ideally suited for delivering training, both internally (HR and management training) and externally (customer and distributor training). The ability for you to share

⁴http://www2.icao.int/public/cfmapps/carbonoffset/carbon_calculator.cfm

⁵www.carbonfund.org/site/pages/carbon_calculators/category/Assumptions: 100 miles ÷ 20.3 mpg × 8.87 kg CO2 per gal.

your desktop, annotate your presentation and conduct Q&A sessions with web conferencing make the training sessions productive and interactive. A major benefit of web conference training is that the training sessions can be recorded for later use. It's also much easier for most people to attend web conference training, so the potential audience is larger.

Give Demos

Web conferencing tools allow you to share your desktop with your audience. This makes it possible to give demos, because you can run other applications on your computer and your audience will see them. For example, you can demonstrate the key features of a Computer-Aided Design application to prospective customers, or the new features of a CRM system to existing customers.

Collaborate

The real-time desktop-sharing features of web conferencing allow you to meet and work collaboratively over the Internet. Work teams can review design specs, go over contracts, critique building plans, develop engineering solutions, create presentations and even address customer support issues, all in real-time as if they were meeting in person.

Deal With The Unexpected

Not all meetings can be planned. Sometimes things happen that you need to handle immediately with the help of others. You can hold a web conference at any time, at a moment's notice and share the information you need to respond to a crisis or take advantage of an unexpected opportunity.

Collect Sales And Marketing Data

The event management features provided with web conferencing products allow you to collect a variety of information from potential participants through the registration process and follow-up communications. You can customize on-line registration forms and create post-event surveys to meet your information requirements, for example.

Record Meetings

Both the audio and video portions of a web conference can be recorded, archived and replayed later. This is handy for those who miss a meeting or want to refer back to it. Seminars or demos can be recorded and distributed as marketing collateral. Training sessions can be recorded and viewed when it's convenient, as many times as needed.

Web Conferencing Pricing

The cost of web conferencing continues to decline as it becomes more widely used. Prices are very competitive across the industry and pricing plans are similar among vendors. These are the most popular ones:

Per Minute

Also known as "on-demand" or "pay-per-use" plans, you simply pay for the minutes you use. Prices vary but are typically around \$0.20 per minute per participant. For example, an hour-long conference for 5 participants at this rate would total \$60 ($\$0.20 \times 5 \times 60$).

Subscription

Also known as "flat-rate" plans, you pay a monthly or yearly fee per "seat" or "user" to hold unlimited meetings up to a maximum number of participants. Again, rates and participant limits vary, but a typical fee is \$50/month, or \$40/month based on an annual subscription for 15 participants. Obviously, a monthly or yearly subscription is more cost-effective than a per-minute plan if you hold even a few web conferences.

Enterprise Licenses

Many vendors offer corporate licenses so that everyone in your organization can hold unlimited web conferences at a fixed price. In some cases, the web conferencing software can be "branded" to look like an in-house solution. Enterprise license prices are typically negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Special Services and Options

Most web conferencing vendors provide additional services and options. For example, they may offer event planning and management services for large-scale web seminars, operator-assisted conference services, recording and archive hosting and other support services. In some cases, these services are included in other plans. Usually, they are additional.

In general, the more you use web conferencing, the lower the price and the more influence and flexibility you have with the vendor on the price.

Refer to ReadyTalk's pricing web page (www.readytalk.com/services/pricing.php) for an example of web conference pricing.

Getting Started With Web Conferencing

It's easier to start using web conferencing than you might think. Most web conferencing software is simple to set up and use, and requires little or no training. Also, most web conferencing companies offer free trials of their products.

If you have never attended a web conference, they're a good way to get familiar with the technology. Many businesses hold web seminars on a variety of topics, free of charge. For example, ReadyTalk sponsors a web seminar series by industry experts on relevant business topics (www.readytalk.com/web-seminar-series). Look around, find a web seminar that interests you, register and participate. You'll get an idea of how a web seminar is conducted and see web conferencing capabilities in action.

The next step is to give it a try. All you'll need is a presentation and an audience. Sign up for a free trial and hold a meeting or two. Your first web conferences probably won't be perfect, but you'll have a lot of fun. And you'll quickly see what you've been missing.

For more information about ReadyTalk and how we can help your organization, please contact ReadyTalk Sales at 800.843.9166 or sales@readytalk.com

About ReadyTalk

ReadyTalk is committed to helping customers conduct successful audio and web conferences of all sizes – from small, ad hoc meetings to large, formal events. Visit www.readytalk.com to learn more about our full range of technology and services including:

Audio Conferencing / Web Conferencing / Event Services / Recordings and Podcasts