

Effective Virtual Platforms for Online Meeting

Arul Vallarasi. S
Guest Lecturer,
SOEL,
The Tamilnadu Dr. Ambedkar Law University,
Chennai.
and
Dr. Regi, S
Assistant Professor of History
Holy Cross College (Autonomous),
Nagercoil.

Abstract

As far as human beings are concerned, communication with one another is a necessary for themselves. Through there are many ways to communicate with each other, during the unexpected natural calamities and outbreak of epidemics and pandemics, need of online meeting platforms are felt most important. Obviously the development in the telecommunication sector also played a vital role. Therefore the outbreak of Covid-19 Pandemic and new normal situation resulted in the overwhelming production of online meeting platforms to combat the situation. These softwares are widely used in business communications in the beginning. Abruptly Covid-19 pandemic changed the situation. At present, these virtual meeting applications are not only used to have informal meeting with friends and relatives, but also to be used to have formal meetings in business and education sector. In this article an attempt has been made to list out the effective online meeting platforms.

Keywords: Online meeting, virtual meeting, conference, software, platform, application, sharing, video conferencing, white board and business.

1. Introduction

Man is a social animal. He cannot live alone for a longer time. He needs to communicate with his fellow being to have a smooth and peaceful life style. Communications ease out his mental stress. There are two types of communication verbal and non-verbal. Both are having their own effectiveness with the help of the telecommunication technologies. Wherever men cannot have a direct communication he uses technology for communication. They may be papers, palm leaves, messengers and pigeons as in the case of ancient times and electronic equipments as in the case of modern times. As one to one communication is done with telecommunication technologies, group communication also relies much on them.

In the normal situations, larger business enterprises and people working in IT sector used this group communication or meeting technologies in a wider scale. However, the spread of Covid-19 changed the situations upside down. There were lockdowns all over the world. Therefore, for their own survival, small and medium scale industries and enterprises also took over online meeting platforms for their communication. The major sector where the

switch over adopted vehemently is education. Since all the schools and colleges are close without knowing the date of re-open, the administration sees these online platforms as the only solace to conduct the classes without any interruption. Nevertheless, the availability of virtual platforms is also tremendously increased during this new normal situation. Hence forth, gradually the switching over of physical meeting to virtual meeting is happening.

2. Online Meeting Applications

At this juncture, it is the duty of every person, particularly the academicians to know atleast the list of effective online softwares that are helpful and feasible for conducting the virtual meetings and classes. Therefore, through this article a step has been taken to put forth some of the important online meeting platforms for the perusal of the academicians, businessmen and common people. There are free virtual conferencing software providers and cost based virtual conferencing software providers. After analyzing the advantages and disadvantages and have a comparative study on the unique and salient features of these online meeting platforms, one can select any of it for his or her usage. To make the process easy, this analytical study has been done. As a result, some of the widely using virtual conferencing applications are listed herewith.

2.1. GoToMeeting

GoToMeeting is one of the highly popular virtual conferencing services. It could be easily recognized by its name itself. Even in the free plan, this software provides an opportunity to host conferences and meetings. However GoToMeeting's free option is limited to audio conferencing alone. It comes with the option for VoIP voice chat. Video conferencing is offered to paid plans. GoToMeeting also has screen sharing facility. Meetings can be kicked off through applications like Microsoft Office program, chat links, and email. Further in the free plan, there is a limit for the number of people who can join a conference. Only hundred persons can join a meeting at a time using GoToMeeting in its free plan. Therefore anyone looking for a quick virtual conferencing for a limited group can consider GoToMeeting.

2.2. RingCentral Video

RingCentral Video provides fine integrated video, message, and telephonic communication. It is available both in the free plan and in the paid plan. Further, it can be operated on all major platforms. Though it is not having the screen sharing option it is considered as one of the unified, fast, trusted, and open online meeting application. RingCentral Video affords HD video and HD audio conferencing. Organizations and individuals can use RingCentral Video without having to download the application, as it opens on the web browser automatically.

2.3. Pexip

Pexip is considered as one of the greatest virtual meeting platform, because meeting can be hosted even by individuals. Further one can held meetings using Pexip on cloud services like Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud, or Amazon Web Services. It includes the features like adjusting the service size and to sync with the traditional video operations.

2.4. TeamViewer

TeamViewer helps to conduct several remote contemporary sessions. Host can send a message to participants to inform them about the updates of the meeting. It is having the features like video conferencing, presentation and telephonic conversations also. On the security grounds TeamViewer can be compared with Cisco, since it is well protected by its remote support.

QuickJoin is an add-on application of TeamViewer. The features of TeamViewer QuickJoin can be accessed without the administrator rights or completing an installation process. The participants can connect only through the application and not through any other mode. The presenter can determine the time at which the members can view the presentation windows, though they have joined in the particular meeting.

2.5. Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams is a sub-feature of the Microsoft Office 365. In Microsoft Teams one can host a meeting with up to 300 participants. As like that of others, Microsoft Teams also has video conferencing, phone calls, chat box and calendar, along with sharable files with 2 gigabytes per person, and 10 gigabytes per group. Along with teams there is an option to have channels in Microsoft Teams. At present Microsoft Teams is available in free plan with a sign-up of an email address.

2.6. TeamLink

TeamLink is one of the most advanced video and online meeting applications. The creator of the meeting is called as host and the participants are known as attendee. TeamLink enables the host and the attendee to work together from anywhere at any time. Active participants will be automatically displayed in the video window. The maximum number of participants in a meeting with a video window is nine. All participants can do screen sharing, file transfer, chat, audio and video switching except the meeting recording which could be done with the prior permission of the host. TeamLink is also offered for free of cost at present.

2.7. ezTalks Meetings

ezTalks Meetings is considered one of the best free video conferencing service. Along with free HD online video conferencing, ezTalks Meetings provides an online whiteboard collaboration tools. In a free plan ezTalks Meetings can hold up to 100 participants on one meeting.

2.8. Cisco Webex

Webex, which is ranked as the best virtual meeting platform, is hosted, owned, and developed by Cisco. In the free plan only three can participate in a conference on Webex Platform. People who are concerned about security prefer Webex for conducting online meetings. Even they are ready to pay for it. Further, it is interesting to note that Cisco Spark can also be integrated with Webex.

2.9. Skype

Skype is a popular name in video conferencing. Screen sharing in Skype is free of cost. It is an easy to use application. Up-to 25 participants can be added in the conference on the free plan. After signing up Skype is ready to use even by individuals and groups. The most important feature of Skype is that, the conference participants must be added to the contact list. Since it is having audio and visual display issues, buffering delays and calls being dropped, many other new online meeting platforms replaced this.

2.10. Zoom

Zoom is available in free and paid version. Not only online meetings but also training seminars and webinars can be conducted using Zoom. However, only 40 minutes of conferencing is allowed in Zoom's free plan. During Zoom meetings, participants can at once share messages and documents with each other using Zoom chat tool. The most important features of Zoom meeting are video recording in MP4 format, creation of the personal meeting ID, Desktop sharing and a virtual whiteboard.

2.11. Apache OpenMeetings

OpenMeetings has simple design and user interface. OpenMeetings is one of the free online conferencing platforms. OpenMeetings application has video conferencing, screen sharing, whiteboard sharing, messaging, collaborative document editing and session's audio recording.

2.12. Join.me

The free plan of join.me is limited to conferencing and screen sharing. However, in the paid version one can select even the URL as he pleases. It can be integrated with Google Calendar, Outlook and Microsoft Office 365. The special feature of join.me is that creation of a permanent meeting location.

2.13. Google Hangouts

Google Hangouts, a no-cost application of Google offers phone calls and instant messaging up-to 10 people using VoIP calls. Google Hangouts gives screen sharing option and real time video call streaming in YouTube. It needs a Google mail account to use it. The major limitation of Google Hangouts is that more than 10 people cannot have a video chat simultaneously.

2.14. Google Meet

Google Meet is an updated and improved version of Google Hangouts. In a free plan up-to 100 participants can be added in a single meeting. However, the free plan is available till September 2020. Comparatively, this is a user friendly online meeting platform.

3. How to Select the Best Platform?

Though there are lots and lots of virtual meeting platforms are available, one could select it according to his need and future references. Here are some of the points that to be remembered while selecting the platforms.

3.1. Cost

Though there are so many free plans are available, they are having limitations in the number of participants and future references. So, if one should select a paid version, he or she should be aware of the cost credentials and its reliability.

3.2. Dependable

The quality of the audio and video should be very important. Consistently high resolution visuals can attract the attention of more viewers for a longer period. Ultimately it ensures a higher impact or productivity.

3.3. Desktop Sharing

In a video conferencing people are not willing to see only the faces of fellow participants or the host or the presenter. Obviously they wanted to have a slide sharing option. Further they need some interactions too. Therefore, apart from high quality audio, screen sharing, chat box and edit options are also considered necessary.

3.4. Easy to Operate

Before selecting a platform one should have a thorough knowledge about the ways and means of operating the software. The video conferencing platform should be easily accessible, by the host and by the participants. They should not feel bored or get exhausted in the time of joining itself

3.5. Future references

Recording for future references is must in virtual conferences. Therefore, before selecting the platform one should know the features available in that particular software for future references

3.6. Instant Messaging

Participants may need an instant messaging system without disturbing the course of the meeting. Therefore, an easy to use chat window should be available and it should be synced with other devices.

3.7. Time Constraints

In a free plan, most of the virtual platforms have time limit. So before opting for an application, one should have a thorough checking about the time constraints and the actual time period needed.

3.8. Video Conferencing

As these are the virtual meeting platforms, it is mandatory for them to have a quality video conferencing feature. Without video conferencing feature, it would be considered a waste.

4. Advantages of Virtual Meeting Platforms

Virtual meetings or online conferences or webinars are having so many advantages. The following are some of its kind.

It saves the cost of travelling to be present in the physical conferences. Not only the organizers but also the participants travel cost is being saved because of this virtual meeting. Further in virtual meetings, the time period for the meeting would be fixed. So there won't be any wasting of time. Obviously in a virtual meeting more people can participate and learn many things. Besides, in a virtual platform flexibility of fixation of time is also available. If the resource person is from different time zone this flexibility in time is of great benefit. It is interesting to note here is that the convenient or suitable time for business meeting is Tuesday 2-3 PM. However the virtual meetings which are conducted for academic purposes are held at anytime and any day with varied time durations

Obviously it is a proven fact that the virtual conferences increased the productivity in business. As the goals are clearly mentioned and the doubts are virtually clarified, production or productivity increases tremendously. In academic sector also virtual teaching becomes a talk of the day. Even in classroom environment ICT enabled blended teaching is given due importance. Therefore the classes conducted using the online applications are seen as a blessing in disguise. Further, in the virtual conferences, getting the immediate feedback is possible.

Since these meeting could be conducted through live streaming mode and recorded modes, it is easy for both the organizers and the participants to fix their works accordingly. Further the meetings could be scheduled earlier and informal to the fellow participants with quite longer time before

5. Short Comings of Online Meetings

As every coin is having two sides, all the human activities are having both advantages and disadvantages. This online meeting is not an exceptional one. In a virtual meeting, direct face-to face interaction or physical face-to-face interaction and eye contacts are missing. Eye contact is always important while speaking with other people, because, it would establish a connection between the speaker and the audience. In a confined meeting or in a conventional

classroom environment eye contact is a necessity to avoid distractions and to have a full fledged attention of the students of that class. Apart from this, for a speaker always looking at a camera is embarrassing, as he or she could not get the intense reactions of the students or the participants.

Another important disadvantage of virtual meeting is the requirement of high speed internet connection and the electronic gadgets. In many cases there would be unstable internet connection and more interruptions in the connectivity due to rain, wind flow and electricity problem. Further, always there would be a problem of hacking in the online mode. Virtual conferencing could also be easily hacked and the information of the host as well as the participants could be misused by the hackers. Further during the meeting the improper postures also could be seen even after giving proper instructions again and again.

The next most expensive disadvantage of video conferencing was the health issues. Sitting in a same place for hours together would create back pain and joint pains. Researches say that because of continuous online classes and virtual meeting, students and participants would easily prone to eye problems. Above all, the unwanted advertisements and the undesired sites would lead to psychological and moral problems.

6. Conclusion

Though the online meeting is having both merits and demerits, in consideration of the ongoing pandemic situation and the need of social distancing, conducting virtual meetings and conferences is inevitable. Further, there is no other go to conduct the smooth running of business meetings and sharing the academic insights to the fellow beings scholars and students. Obviously, the need of the hour is to have a day to day activity successfully, without much compromise. Therefore, one can proudly say that the online meeting platforms are a blessing in disguise.

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