Video Conferencing Softwares: a Quick Review

Executive summary. Many video conferencing softwares are in existence. Which one suits you best? Which ones are easiest to use? Here's one users' opinion.

What do these softwares do? The concept is simple: hold a "face-to-face" meeting with colleagues from anywhere across town or around the world. And it works.

Participants are invited via an email link to a meeting and then utilize their laptop, phone, tablet, or desktop computer cameras and microphones to talk real time with each other. Some softwares even allow screen sharing.

You don't even have to attend via your computer. The invite usually comes with a phone number to allow call in (of course you will not have the benefit of sharing your face or seeing others).

Do they work? Yes, they work pretty well. Sometimes the picture may be a bit blurry or delayed. Sometimes the audio is choppy. But, overall it works well.

What does it cost? It's not very expensive, and often times free. It's free to those who are invited to a meeting. The limitations on the free products are number of people in a meeting and/or the duration of time in a meeting. When the time, usually about 40 minutes, is up, the session just turns off.

Can I use this technology for large meetings? Yes. These softwares come with a chat box which allow participants to enter written messages to the entire group or to selected participants via a dropdown selection box. In a large meeting or seminar situation, it is best to have one facilitator who reads the chat messages and passes the comments or questions to the proper responder.

Which one should I use? Just like buying a car, each product here has its own pros and cons. Here's my order of preference:

- Google Meet – it's free, or very inexpensive for a business license, and works easily with your Google calendar. It has screen sharing but doesn't allow you to control your friend's computer.
- Zoom – easy to use and about $15/month for access. Even my elderly parents find it easy to use.
- Webex – Very popular with my larger clients.
- GotoMeeting – I'm still trying to learn how to use this one. It has many features, but I still haven't conquered the basics of simply using my mic and my camera with confidence.
- Skype – I used it in a 35-person meeting with great success. However, it embeds itself into your computer and getting it removed is a challenge. It sucks up resources on your computer and creates pop-ups I just don't need to see on daily basis. It's annoying.

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My story. I used it last week to walk a construction project with a guy 2,500 miles away. I needed help on how many feet per day we could install. It was great.

With the arrival of COVID-19, I'm on a video conference daily. I'm even on Zoom every Saturday with my parents and family. My parents and uncle are in their 70s and they have even figured it out! Work safe!

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