



Web Conferencing: Technology You Can Use

At its core, Web conferencing is a communications tool. It lets you share information and build community through collaboration. Here's what you need to know.

By Scott King

Many nonprofits are turning to technology to meet their communication needs, and Web conferencing software is becoming a go-to tool. Web conferencing employs a myriad of functionality, such as document sharing and editing, support of multiple presenters, call recording, integrated chat (IM), polling of participants, and platform support. With Web conferencing software, you can hold meetings via the phone, over the Internet, or both at once, giving people great flexibility in the way they connect, learn, and share information.

Benefits to Web Conferencing

A number of benefits emerge when nonprofits add Web conferencing to their technology mix:

Control costs. With domestic and international toll-free dialing, Web conferencing is a cost-effective way to connect geographically dispersed participants. Per-minute pricing plans can also reduce communication costs.

Train staff. Training volunteers, paid staff, and board members is critical to success. Web conferencing lets you meet with a few, a few hundred, or a few thousand people, sharing documents, information, and updates. Recording these sessions for future playback provides an easy way for people to review material later, deepen their knowledge, and continue their education.

Create a sense of community. Stakeholders want to feel part of something bigger than themselves. Web conferencing allows people to connect seamlessly, have a shared experience, and disseminate content through recordings of their meetings.

Web conferencing software is becoming a go-to tool.

Offer easy access. Good Web conferencing software lets users from multiple operating systems connect easily, regardless of whether they're familiar with the software or not.

Keep accurate records. Not only do stakeholders want notes from budget and resource meetings, but donors need accurate information about the programs they're supporting.

Educate people with Webinars. You can bring in speakers to talk to small or large audiences via the Web. Webinars can be interactive so that the audience can ask questions and you can poll the audience for their input. Offering Webinars on timely topics is an effective way to attract new supporters to your organization.

What to Look for in Your Software

Here are a few things to consider when choosing Web conferencing software:

Integration with other tools: Good Web conferencing software

can be easily integrated with other technology to leverage your existing tools and databases. For example, exporting contacts from a CRM and uploading them into Web conferencing software makes it easy to invite people to Webinars and training events. A good Web conferencing package will also work with Facebook, Twitter, and other social media to help you contact people, draw a larger audience to Webinars, and share recorded content after your Webinar presentations.

Operating system and browser support: The Web conferencing software must be able to support the many operating systems and browsers that exist today. Your constituents are technologically diverse; be sure your service provider takes that diversity into account. Also consider whether participants will be required to download anything in order to join your Web meetings and presentations. If so, what are the requirements to do so? If a participant doesn't have the right software, what are the alternatives?

Flexible audio options: Work with a service that provides multiple access options for audio conferencing. You should have the option to use audio-and-Web, audio-only, or Web-only. Web-based audio controls should be available no matter

Such software works seamlessly with other technology tools.

which option you choose. Also consider the international calling options—toll, toll-free, and direct-dial—that are right for your organization.

Sharing: The right solution will allow you to share applications and documents easily without conflicts between systems. Look for a provider that gives the chairperson an opportunity to grant control to participants so that they can share their presentations, too.

Recording: The ability to record meetings lets you store and disseminate content for training and marketing use. Seek a provider that offers a robust recording service so that you can record both the audio and visual presentation. Make sure the provider doesn't charge extra for their recording service and allows unlimited playbacks at no extra charge.

Don't let the support burden fall into your lap.

Flexible pricing: Any good provider will work with you on pricing that satisfies both parties. Company-wide usage, as well as per-minute pricing, should be available. Providers that work as partners with nonprofits will offer special pricing packages.

Partnering: Select a provider that acts as a true partner. Such companies will offer consulting services, coaching, and special rates. They'll understand nonprofits' unique requirements and provide dedicated account representatives.

24/7 live support: Seek a company that stands behind their product and offers live 24/7 support. Participants in your conference calls and Webinars will have varying degrees of technical expertise. Choose a provider that will help your participants get connected quickly and easily so that the support burden doesn't fall into your lap. Make sure wait times are negligible and live operators are always available.

Whether you're looking for a way to make team meetings more collaborative or to educate large groups at once, Web conferencing is an efficient and affordable tool to help. ■

Scott King is vice president of sales and marketing at ReadyTalk. For more information on ReadyTalk's audio and web conferencing please call 800-843-9166 or visit www.readytalk.com.



Resources

- ReadyTalk, www.Readytalk.com
- Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network (N-TEN), www.nten.org
- The Society for Nonprofit Organizations, www.snpo.org

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