



You Asked About...

Teleconferencing & Web Conferencing

Face to face meetings can be expensive, time consuming and the travel to and from meetings can have a substantial impact on the environment. Teleconferencing and web-conferencing can be useful alternatives to regular face to face meetings. Are remote meetings right for you? The tips and information in this fact sheet may help you decide.

Tele-Conference Calls

Conference calls are probably the most common means of remote group communication. To set-up a conference in Nova Scotia dial 1-800-561-7338. You'll be connected to an operator who'll ask you the following questions:

- Do you want the call to be Operator handled or customer dial-in ? With Operator handled calls (the more expensive option), the Operator calls each participant at the time of the call. With customer dial-in, each participant in the call is given a phone number, either toll free or local, to call directly. If you choose this option you'll be given two codes. One is the chair person's code and the other is for the participants.
- What is the billing phone number (the number that the call will be charged to)?
- What is the name of the person chairing the meeting and their phone number?
- How many lines will you need? This means the number of phones that will be connected. You will be billed for each minute of use on each of the lines that are in use. If a number of participants are using a single speaker phone then this is considered one line.
- What is the date and time of conference call?

Once you've answered those questions the call will be set up.

Web-based Meetings

Web-based meetings are another form of remote group communication. Web-based meetings allow participants to view and interact with visual as well as voice information.

What Software is Available for Web-based Meetings ?

On-line or web-based meeting technology is improving at a rapid pace and there are several on-line platforms to choose from including Webex www.webex.com Microsoft Office Live Meeting www.microsoft.com/office/uc/livemeeting and Gotomeeting www.gotomeeting.com. Most of these sites offer free trials so you can try before you buy.

The features and services vary between providers. For example, Webex Meeting Center, one of the most commonly used platforms, allows you to deliver presentations, edit documents, share applications, and even share your desktop in real-time. The only requirement for the participants is a web browser. This is combined with a phone/ teleconference link up to allow discussion among group members.

Presenters and participants can annotate and make notes on documents as if on a white-board. Webex also allows you to record and edit meeting content for future viewing and/or summarization.

There are two different fee structures for Webex. The meeting host can pay a monthly fee for unlimited meetings or Webex can be used on a pay for use fee structure (\$0.33 per minute per user).

WebEx has even been covered by the popular "For Dummies" series. See WebEx Web Meetings For Dummies by Nancy Stevenson at www.dummies.com/WileyCDA/DummiesArticle/id-4129.html to learn more.

Choosing an Appropriate Meeting Format

Here are some things to consider when determining whether a face to face meeting, a teleconference or web-based meeting is best suited to the activity or event that you are planning:

Either type of remote meeting might be a good choice when:

- the group dynamics have been established
- travel costs and travel time far exceed the time required for the meeting
- frequent short duration meetings are required
- the purpose of the meeting is routine work or continuation of ongoing projects

Web-based meetings might be a good choice when the purpose of the meeting is to:

- provide update information (including visuals)
- demonstrate web sites, software, databases or other applications
- allow a group to edit or refine presentations

Either type of remote meetings might be a poor choice when:

- establishing new working groups or teams (it's harder to build relationships in virtual meetings)
- travel costs are minimal
- meetings are of long duration (you may lose participants full attention as they turn to email and other tasks at their desks)
- high level of interaction is required (some participants are inhibited by remote meeting technology)
- the meeting is about highly charged or contentious issues
- training related to new material and/or new skills is being delivered (without body language it's difficult to gauge audience interest or understanding of a presentation)

In addition, in some cases the use of web conferencing may be limited by the location of the participants, the range of connection speeds and the availability of software.

Tips for a Successful Web-based Meeting

Generally speaking, the majority of problems that come with web conferencing arise from users (and sometimes presenters/facilitators) who are not familiar with the technology. The following tips will help you to run a smooth and effective web meeting:

- Prior to the event, practice using the technology until you are familiar and comfortable with it.
- Provide your users with an introduction to the technology either prior to or all the beginning of a meeting.
- When working with a new group, host a practice session where everyone can log in and ensure that the technology will work with their computer system and ISP.
- Have participants complete simple tasks, like typing in the text box to answer a question (What is time is it in your area?), raising or lowering their virtual "hand", and other features you might want them to use.

The Final Analysis

Teleconferencing is well established while web-based meeting technology is rapidly evolving and offers a number of additional benefits over traditional teleconferencing. Be sure to consider the real costs and benefits of remote meetings before selecting an appropriate format for your next event.

In some situations the time, travel and environmental costs of a face-to-face meeting tip the scales in favor of remote meetings. In other situations, a remote meeting format is not well suited to either the group, the issue, or the group dynamics. A common hidden cost of remote meeting is the additional time required for discussions. Finally, don't forget to consider the "corporate culture" of the participants. Considering all of the factors presented in this fact sheet will help you select the meeting format that best supports and enhances the relationships within your group and lead to the greatest productivity.