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Choosing a Videoconferencing Platform

To Zoom or Not to Zoom? Choosing a Videoconferencing Platform

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The COVID-19 pandemic and need for social distancing have forced those involved with publication to change their traditional workflows. Authors now engage in scholarly activities primarily from a distance. Nurse editors can no longer hold face-to-face meetings with their editorial boards or other constituents. Publishing companies must also modify work for remote activities, as employees are operating from distant locations. To ensure timely publication of articles and journals, all those involved with publishing have adapted to these changes and developed new ways of meeting and conducting business. Many rely upon interactive video conferencing to engage in their work activities and participate in virtual meetings. However, before moving forward with these options, it is crucial to make sure you are using the best technology to meet your needs. This article will provide an overview of popular online video conferencing platforms and collaboration services and guide you through things to consider during the selection process.

COMPARING ONLINE MEETING OPTIONS

Think about the following factors when choosing the best online meeting platform for your publication needs. Important considerations include cost, security and privacy, available features, number of allowed attendees, operating system requirements, and support and training. Many of these platforms have free services that may or may not be appropriate for your meeting. If you are part of a larger business and need additional security or special features, a closer evaluation of paid plans would be essential. Security and privacy measures have heightened to prevent "Zoom bombing" incidents, where an uninvited third party enters and wreaks havoc on the meeting. Security features increase with paid packages, especially if HIPAA or FERPA compliance is needed. Security features may be less important, depending on the purpose of the meeting.

Another factor that varies based on the package plan includes available features that the platform offers to both the host and attendees. One feature that is often essential the ability to screen share so that the other participants can see the presenter's screen. Screen sharing can make editing and information sharing easier and provide real-time feedback. Additional features include file sharing, background effects, screen control, live-captions, and recording ability. The maximum number of users allowed is also tied to cost and features. All the platforms place various limits on the number of attendees at one time or meeting time limits. It is important to keep these limits in mind to determine which platform or plan is best for your specific needs. The platforms provided in this review are available on both Windows and iOS (Apple) devices; however, some only work with more recent software versions. Lastly, evaluate technology support and training when adopting these programs. User support may vary based on the package plan, from basic online help forums to 24/7 live support. Evaluate user needs, both host and participant, to determine if the program is user-friendly or if any additional training is available. There are many online meeting platforms available—we have reviewed five of the more popular platforms you might consider for your authorial and editorial needs: Zoom, Cisco Webex Teams, Skype, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet/Google Hangouts.

Zoom

Zoom is one platform that many use for both personal and business nee download the desktop or app version from zoom.us. If you only plan to join as a participant, you don't need a Zoom account. However, if you are setting up meetings as the host, you will need to create a user account. There are four packages available: Free, Pro, Business, and Enterprise. The Free and Pro versions allow up to 100 participants while the business plan allows up to 300, and the enterprise option allows up to 500. You can use Zoom for an unlimited number of 1:1 and group meetings, but the free version limits meetings to 40 minutes. All versions include the following features: screen sharing, recording, breakout rooms, virtual background, meeting ID, chat, host controls, whiteboard, and multi-share. Support is available for free accounts only through an online ticket request; Pro accounts can access live chat; Business and Enterprise accounts can use online tickets, live chat, and phone support. All accounts provide communication encryption for security. The paid plans include additional security measures not found in the free accounts.

Cisco Webex Teams

Cisco Webex is a platform for both meetings and team options. In a team, you can collaborate with your team members by sharing files and other communication tools such as video and chat options. With Cisco Webex, both external and internal callers can join the meeting. Additional features include whiteboarding, scheduling, meeting recording, muting capabilities, screen sharing, a guest lobby or waiting room, and joining external meetings through the app. There is a free option and additional service package plans. Package plans include Starter, Plus, Business, and Enterprise. Free meetings allow for up to 100 participants for 50-minute meetings. Longer meetings or adding additional hosts require a paid package plan. Online help support is available for free accounts. Additional chat, call-in, and a dedicated support representative are available with paid plans. All plans are secured with encryption options, meeting passwords, locking meeting rooms, and are HIPAA compliant.

Skype

Skype is one of the oldest online meeting platforms—it initially launched in 2003. To use Skype, you need to download and create a profile. Skype's features include video calling, call recording, live subtitles, screen sharing, chat, ability to call mobile and landline phones, background effects, file sharing, and real-time translation. Skype is free for calls made between two Skype users. If calling landlines, mobiles, or international phones, you need to buy credits for this ability. Skype allows up to 50 participants for free. User support includes online help and a virtual agent. All Skype-to-Skype communication is encrypted, but any calls to mobile or landline phones are not. Skype for Business is now Microsoft Teams.

Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams can be accessed through a free version or monthly subscriptions through Microsoft 365. There are four packages available: Free, Microsoft 365 Business Essentials, Business Premium, and Business 365 E3. Features include audio and video calls, screen sharing, background effects, meeting scheduler, unlimited chat, file attachments and file sharing, live captions, integrated apps, and web versions of Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Meeting recording is available through the paid plans. You no longer need a Microsoft Teams account to join a meeting, as you can now join as a guest. However, in the guest status, you may have limited access to certain features. Up to 300 participants can use the paid plans. Business 365 E3 also allows for online events of up to 10,000 people. User support for the free account includes basic online help. Paid accounts have access to phone and web support around the clock. Data encryption provides communication security. Paid plans have additional security features such as multi-factor authentication and advanced auditing and reporting.

Google

Google has two video conferencing platforms: Google Google Hangouts is aimed toward smaller groups of up to 10 participants and more informal communication. Google Hangouts has basic features including, video calls, phone calls, chat, and screen sharing capabilities. Google Meet is for larger groups and has additional paid plans. In April 2020, Google made Meet free for everyone with a Google Workspace Account. Note that Google Workspace was formerly known as G Suite. Google Workspace packages include Starter, Standard, Plus, and Enterprise. There is also a free Google Meet option, although everyone joining the meeting must sign in with a Google account. The Workspace plans allow for an unlimited number of meetings, live closed captions, screen sharing, adjustable layouts, messaging, and Google drive storage. They also include other Google applications such as Gmail, Calendar, Docs, Sheets, and Slides. External participants are also able to join meetings. The free plan allows up to 100 participants with a time limit of one hour. The Starter plan allows up to 100 participants, and Enterprise is up to 250 participants. User support for the free plan includes self-help online and community forums, while the paid plans provide additional 24/7 online support. Google Meet provides security with encryption, anti-hijacking features, secure meeting controls, and 2-step verification. G Suite is HIPAA and FERPA compliant.

The Online Meeting Platform Comparison Table (Table 1) provides a general overview of the platforms discussed above. For more information on any of these platforms, refer to the company website.

CONCLUSION

Now that we have reviewed some of the popular platforms, it is up to you to decide which one would work best for you and your collaborators. As stated above, many of the platforms have free plans or free trials, in which you can try the platform for yourself and determine whether to continue use, upgrade your plan, or not. Discuss these options

with your colleagues and determine which one will help you meet your publication needs.

TABLE 1: ONLINE MEETING PLATFORM COMPARISON TABLE

This table provides a general overview of five online meeting platforms. For more information on any of the platforms, refer to the company website.

Platform Name	Features Overview	Price	# of Participants	Training/Support
Zoom	Unlimited group and 1:1 meetings	Free: No cost	Free: up to 100	Free: Zoom technical support ticket only
	Free meetings restricted to 40 minutes	Monthly subscriptions: Pro: $149.90/yr for one license	Pro: up to 100	Pro: Zoom technical support ticket and live chat
	Recording available			
	Screen sharing			
	Breakout rooms	Business: $1,999/yr for 10 licenses (may purchase more)	Business: up to 300	Business & Enterprise: Zoom technical support ticket, live chat, and phone support
	HD virtual backgrounds			
	Meeting ID			
	Chat			
	Host controls	Enterprise: $19,990/yr for 100 licenses (may purchase more)	Enterprise: up to 500	
	Remote control			
	Whiteboard			
	Multi-share			

Cisco Webex Teams	Meetings and Teams available	Free: No cost	Free: up to 100	Free: Online support only
	Free meetings restricted to 50 minutes	Monthly subscriptions:		
		Starter: $14.95/mo	Starter: up to 100	Starter: Chat and call-in
	Allows external callers/collaborators	Plus: $19.95/mo	Plus: up to 100	Plus: Chat and call-in
	Whiteboard	Business: $29.95/mo	Business: up to 200	Business: Chat and call-in
	Meeting scheduling			
	Recording available	Enterprise: contact sales	Enterprise: up to 100,000	Enterprise: Chat, call-in, and dedicated representative
	Guest lobby			
	Ability to mute others	Note: 10% discount if paid annually		
	Screen sharing			
	Ability to join external meetings through the app			
Skype	Video calling	Free: No cost for Skype user to Skype user	Free: Up to 50	Online help and Virtual Agent
	Call recording			
	Live subtitles	Purchased Credits: To make calls to landlines and mobiles. Credits range from $5-$25.		
	Screen sharing			
	Chat			
	Ability to call mobile and landline phones			

	Features	Cost	Capacity	Support
	Background effects File sharing Real-time translation	Subscription fees start at $8.39/mo. International calling is also available.		
Microsoft Teams (Previously Skype for Business)	Audio and video calls Screen sharing Background effects Schedule meetings Recordings (paid plans) Unlimited chat Guest access File attachments and sharing (file size limits based on plan) Integrated apps Web versions of Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint Live captions	Free: No cost Monthly subscriptions: Microsoft 365 Business Basic: $5/user/month Business Standard: $12.50/user/mo Business 365 E3: $20/user/month	Free: up to 500,000 Business Basic: up to 300 Business Standard: up to 300 Business 365 E3: up to 500,000 + online events up to 10,000	Free: Basic online help Monthly subscriptions: 24/7 phone and web support
Google Hangouts	Video and phone calls Chat Screen sharing	Free: No cost with Gmail account	Video calls: Gmail and G Suite Basic: up to 10	Free: Self-help online and community forums

		Monthly subscriptions: 24/7 online support and community forums

Google Meet	Unlimited number of meetings Free meetings restricted to 60 minutes and participants must sign in from a Google account Paid Accounts: Join from a browser External participants allowed Live closed captions Screen sharing Adjustable layouts Messaging Google drive storage (size based on plan)	Free: No cost Monthly subscriptions: Business Starter: $6/mo/user Business Standard: $12/mo/user Business Plus: $18/mo/user Business Enterprise: Contact sales	Free: up to 100 Business Starter: up to 100 Business Standard: up to 150 Business Plus: up to 250 Business Enterprise: up to 250	Free: Self-help online and community forums Monthly subscriptions: 24/7 online support and community forums

*Note: prices are current as of October 15, 2020

WEBSITE RESOURCES

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