

Videoconferencing and Teleconferencing Technologies

WE LIVE in a global society that connects people from around the world via the Internet. Videoconferencing apps allow students to experience virtual field trips and learn from experts from that would never make a trip to their school. In this lesson you will explore the benefits of virtual meetings for business.



Objective:



Describe the types and operation of commonly used office equipment.

Key Terms:



| | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| agenda | conference call feature | teleconference |
| brick and mortar organization | dead air | video conference |
| cloud-based | headset | virtual meeting |
| videoconferencing | icebreaker | virtual organization |
| | online platform | |

Videoconferencing and Teleconferencing

VIRTUAL MEETINGS

The environment for business operations continues to change as technology develops. Although traditional business operations were brick and mortar organizations, more frequently upstarts operate as virtual organizations. A **brick and mortar organization** is a place with a physical location or building for gathering stakeholders, completing work, and functioning in

general. A **virtual organization** is a place that generally has no commonly shared physical space where stakeholders gather. Even the most traditional business operations have some components of virtual organizations. As telecommunication and Internet technology has advanced business have become more connected globally. Many businesses have multiple locations as they work with employees, customers and vendors from around the world. Most organizations will implement technology tools to conduct virtual meetings in order to connect various stakeholders. A **virtual meeting** (also called remote meeting) occurs when people use video, audio and text to share information and data in real-time from different locations. There are several apps and software available to make the virtual meeting process more efficient. Virtual meetings frequently have a video component and involve remote access to electronic files through cloud storage.



FIGURE 1. Most organizations will implement technology tools to conduct virtual meetings in order to connect various stakeholders. A virtual meeting occurs when people use video, audio and text to share information and data in real-time from different locations.

Teleconferencing

A **teleconference** is a meeting that is conducted over phones between two or more people who are at different locations. It is also referred to as audio conferencing. The primary equipment needed for a teleconference is telephones with a reliable connection. For a teleconference, the phones should include a conference call feature. A **conference call feature** allows multiple participants to engage in a conversation. In addition, participants may need a computer with access to shared files that may be reviewed and discussed during the teleconference. Depending on the teleconference participant's environment, a headset may be preferred to conduct the call. A **headset** is a pair of headphones that includes a microphone. A headset allows the participant to hear and be heard better while remaining hands free to use a computer during the meeting.

Videoconferencing

A **videoconference** is a meeting that is conducted using computer networks between two or more people who interact through live video. A reliable internet connection is necessary for videoconferencing. The primary equipment needed for a videoconference depends on the structure of the videoconference. If conducting a traditional video conference, participants will

need computers, webcams, some form of display (computer monitor, TV, etc.), speakers and microphones. Another option for videoconferencing is cloud-based. **Cloud-based videoconferencing** uses online software that does not have to be installed on participants' devices. In order to use cloud-based videoconferencing, the users must have computers or with webcams or smartphones and reliable internet connections. In addition, an **online platform** (program for hosting the meeting that is web-based). The videoconference participants sign up for the meeting with the chosen host which connects them for the meeting.

Advantages

The advantages of teleconferencing and videoconferencing include the following:

- ◆ Both options save time. Since participants do not have to travel to one location for meetings, they save time that may be used for other productive tasks.
- ◆ Both options save money. Participants are not required to pay for transportation and lodging costs. In addition, businesses avoid paying for things that would be expected at a traditional meeting or conference. If a business hosts a traditional conference, they may be required to rent a space big enough for all participants, extra staff may be required, as well as refreshments.
- ◆ Computer software and applications used to conduct virtual meetings provides participants with consistent recordkeeping by logging meeting information.
- ◆ Because teleconferencing and videoconferencing are easier to conduct, they may happen more frequently and encourage communication among stakeholders.
- ◆ Teleconferences and videoconferences provide more flexibility for participants because they may not be tied to a specific location during the meeting. They have greatly expanded the options for conducting interviews and providing educational opportunities.



FIGURE 2. The main difference between teleconferences and videoconferences is the video component. Overall, videoconferencing engages participants more than teleconferencing and is becoming more viable as cloud-based options continue to develop.

Disadvantages

The disadvantages of teleconferencing and videoconferencing include the following:

- ◆ Participants who are not tech savvy may face challenges getting equipment ready. The equipment itself may pose technical challenges even for people who are comfortable with technology.

- ◆ Nonverbal communication may go unnoticed, particularly with teleconferencing. Body language which includes facial expressions, eye contact, gestures and posture are not seen in teleconferencing and may be only partially seen with videoconferencing.
- ◆ Space limitations make it difficult to share information in the same way it would be shared in a face-to-face meeting. For example, computer screens may not deliver all visual information at the same time. In addition, participants may not witness simultaneous actions.
- ◆ Informal interactions are limited when using teleconferencing and videoconferencing. Meeting participants often engage in small talk before or after the formal meetings that may leads to building comradery. In addition, pieces of information may be shared through informal interactions that do not get transmitted during the formal meeting. Participants of teleconferences or videoconferences do not have the opportunity to stick around after a meeting and have information discussions.
- ◆ Since participants are not meeting face-to-face, they may be tempted to multi-task during the meeting and lose focus. The temptation to do this is greater with teleconferencing because participants do not see each other at all.

Overall, videoconferencing engages participants more that teleconferencing and is becoming more viable as cloud-based options continue to develop.

GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING REMOTE MEETINGS

General Guidelines

For any meeting to be effective, planning and preparation are key. Special considerations must be given when participating in a remote meeting. Following are standard guidelines for conducting a teleconference or videoconference.

- ◆ Distribute an agenda, relevant documents and links with all participants before the meeting. An agenda is an outline of items to be done in a meeting. The agenda may also indicate the parties responsible for various items on it. By providing this information beforehand, participants know what to expect and can make sure they have prepared for the meeting.



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Explore Videoconferencing Options

VOIP Review published an article about the best free web based videoconference software. Learn more at the following link: <https://www.voipreview.org/free-web-conferencing>.

- ◆ Encourage all participants to download any updates for the software and apps being used ahead of time. This will help eliminate technology issues at the time of the meeting.
- ◆ Test all the equipment being used ahead of time. Set equipment up early and make sure the internet connection is reliable and ready.
- ◆ Wear appropriate attire. Participants should dress in the same professional manner they would if the meeting were in person. For videoconferences, participants should consider avoiding crazy patterns or excessive accessories which may be visually distracting.
- ◆ For videoconferencing, attendees should consider the surroundings that will be on camera. Clutter in the background should be cleared to avoid distractions. Stacks of papers, piles of equipment, etc. should be removed. Consider the lighting and objects that may create shadows for viewers. In addition, make sure the camera angle is set at eye-level.
- ◆ Avoid background noises that may be distracting. Since participants may literally be anywhere during the meeting, they should consider their surroundings. For example, crowded locations, children playing, and dogs barking should be avoided.
- ◆ It is a good idea for participants to introduce themselves before speaking, especially with teleconferencing, since participants cannot see who is speaking.
- ◆ Participants in a videoconference or teleconference should have a backup way to connect (wifi and phone service) for the meeting just in case something happens at the last minute.



FIGURE 3. There are several free videoconferencing options available online. Those include Go To Meeting, Skype, Google Hangouts and Zoom.

Host Guidelines

Hosts of meetings have extra considerations that should be made.

- ◆ When the meeting begins, instructions should be given for all participants regarding location of information, instructions for software being used, etc.
- ◆ The host of the meeting should make sure introductions are made so that everyone participating knows the others in the meeting. An additional option would be to include an icebreaker for the group. An icebreaker is an exercise designed to get conversation started among a group. The icebreaker may be something as simple having each person in the group answer a question. Icebreakers may not be necessary for meetings where everyone is familiar with members.

- ◆ The host of the meeting should make sure to communicate to participants when there is dead air, especially during a teleconference. Dead air is a period of silence during the meeting. If there are technical difficulties or the group is waiting for someone to proceed, the host should let everyone know what is happening.
- ◆ The host may need to make sure the members stay on task and work through the intended agenda. This may require directed questions or prompts.
- ◆ If the software being used records the meeting, the host should be sure to let all participants know that the meeting is being recorded.

Summary:



As telecommunication and Internet technology has advanced business have become more connected globally. Many businesses have multiple locations as they work with employees, customers and vendors from around the world. Most organizations will implement technology tools to conduct virtual meetings in order to connect various stakeholders. A teleconference is a meeting that is conducted over phones between two or more people who are at different locations. A videoconference is a meeting that is conducted using computer networks between two or more people who interact through live video. Overall, videoconferencing engages participants more than teleconferencing and is becoming more viable as cloud-based options continue to develop.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What are the advantages to virtual meetings?
2. What are the disadvantages to virtual meetings?
3. What is the difference between a teleconference and a videoconference?
4. What are the general guidelines for conducting a virtual meeting?
5. What special guidelines should the host of a virtual meeting follow?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



With your instructor's permission, arrange a virtual field trip to a business that interests you and your classmates.

Web Links:



Top Virtual Field Trips

<https://www.tripsavvy.com/virtual-field-trips-for-kids-3129414>

Videoconference Etiquette

<https://www.owllabs.com/blog/video-conferencing-etiquette>

Teleconference v. Videoconference

<https://www.eztalks.com/teleconferencing/video-conference-vs-teleconference-what-are-the-differences.html>

Trends in Videoconferencing

<https://www.uctoday.com/collaboration/video-conferencing/video-conferencing-trends-2019/>