

Driving Operational ROI through Collaboration & Conferencing Services

How Sales, Marketing, IT, and HR &
Training personnel can be more efficient &
productive in today's challenging business
environment

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Contents

Critical Tools for Success: Information & Decisions	3
Challenges to Worker Efficiency	3
Tighter integration of a global staff and trading partners	4
Doing more with less	4
Overcoming travel costs and constraints	5
Reducing consumption.....	5
Enhancing worker health, development and retention.....	5
Best Practices for Implementing Collaboration Services	6
Needs evaluation and solution selection.....	6
Training and adoption	8
Measuring, monitoring and refining.....	8
About the Authors	10
About Wainhouse Research	10
About Adobe Systems.....	10
About MeetingOne	11

The organizational and employee benefits of collaboration and conferencing tools that enable interactivity, voice, and video can be seen at the bottom line.

The increased flexibility of collaboration and conferencing services that relies on current computer platforms enables employees and executives to be more than one place at a time.

Subject matter experts can collaborate from anywhere in the world. Employees can stay connected and feel an integral part of the company and consumers can be stimulated to purchase a product through engaging interactions, training, and product information.

Ease of integration, ease of use, no hardware investment, flexible purchasing options all add up to a strong ROI for organizations.

Critical Tools for Success: Information & Decisions

If knowledge is power and time is money, it is no wonder that the distribution of information in a timely manner to deliver decisions is seen as a major competitive advantage in today's business environment. Information delivered in a timely fashion helps to build customer and employee trust, communicates corporate culture and expectations, and enables powerful decisions to be made at the right time. It is becoming increasingly clear that the next big wave of gains in efficiencies will be from tools that allow professionals to collaboratively create and share knowledge, identify and bring in expertise from anywhere in the world, and disseminate information securely to the right people regardless of location.

Email, VoIP, and Web sites have already revolutionized how we work, deliver information, and communicate. Now, online collaboration is becoming an important organizational sphere and expanding our associations beyond borders allowing professional networks and immediate connections to be established. These virtual environments are becoming the norm in today's business world to inform, make decisions, and deliver solutions. This paper, sponsored by Adobe and MeetingOne, examines web conferencing as one of the more mature tools available for virtual knowledge creation and dissemination. It analyzes the efficiencies that tools like Adobe Connect drive and the different ways that return on investment is realized. Finally, it will briefly review best practices in solution selection, adoption, and evaluation.

Challenges to Worker Efficiency

Wainhouse Research believes that there are several key trends that are challenging business efficiency:

- Distributed workforces, business partners, and markets – all the result of globalization and the flattening of the world.
- The need to make distributed corporate campuses and locations more efficient and more tied together – for both competitive and budgetary reasons.
- The rapid pace of the business environment, with the need for immediate access to external subject matter experts and more spontaneous and immediate decisions in lieu of planned meetings.
- The escalation of business travel hassles and costs, leading many organizations to make travel reduction central to cost savings and provide employees with travel alternatives.
- The increasing costs of energy, resulting in initiatives to consolidate work and meeting spaces, reduce equipment, and decrease commuting expenses for employees.
- The tension between a 24/7 business culture and the desire for greater work/life balance.

Companies like Adobe and MeetingOne have designed solutions and services to meet these challenges and enable interactive team collaboration, online training options, interactive distance learning, online sales activities, instant messaging, and chat rooms. Companies that have adopted these technologies

have achieved gains in efficiencies that not only drive down costs, but differentiate their business for partners, customers, and employees.

Tighter integration of a global staff and trading partners

Meeting new contacts and remote colleagues face to face for collaborative projects, sales meetings, and training is key to relationships and can't be completely eliminated from most company budgets, but extensive travel schedules are too expensive and exhausting to maintain. Leading companies are looking for tools that can assist in the development of critical relationships by delivering contact sessions with engaging, interactive communications. One such company, Thermo Fisher Scientific, has found that online collaboration services have been integral in relationship building across a number of functions. For instance, field service staff is remotely troubleshooting high-end scientific hardware and software; sales and marketing professionals are demonstrating products to customers worldwide; and company vice presidents hold Town Hall meetings via the web. Selecting tools that are simple to deploy, easy to use, and enhance relationships (as opposed to hinder) is a critical consideration. As Thermo Fisher Scientific web and multimedia designer Dudley Torres states, "We have 1,500 employees using Adobe Connect to streamline new product launches, webinars, online training, sales presentations, and day-to-day communications as commonly as they use email."¹

Doing more with less

Companies are seeking to provide better service, reach new geographies, and develop new products at the same time they seek cost savings. Here are some examples of how online meeting and collaboration tools can meet the challenge:

- Sales teams use web presentations to better qualify leads before visiting new clients.
- Trainers increase reach and quality of training by changing the focus from arranging schedules and travel plans for a series of on-site classes to creating learning modules that can be accessed on demand and re-used.
- HR departments help attract and retain talent through remote interview sessions, accessible training modules that help employees get on board quickly, and providing a variety of opportunities and modes for feedback.

Faced with development and operations teams in different continents and worldwide customers to support, Thermo Fisher Scientific, a world leader in medical laboratory equipment and workflow solutions, was looking for a way to maintain R&D excellence and a high-touch customer approach at the same time reduce travel and training costs.

Using Adobe Connect they were able to:

Reduce travel and communication costs to a fraction of previous expenditures;

Ensure parallel workflows and increase information exchange between research and engineering teams in Germany and the U.S.;

Develop rich media content in-house for training and support that can be delivered either real-time or on-demand use any time, any place;

Accelerate the learning curve and increase retention for launch information;

Increase timeliness and decrease costs of product installation and support services through remote installation, diagnostics, and troubleshooting.

¹ <http://www.adobe.com/cfusion/showcase/>

Many of these initiatives are successful because they remove restrictions of location and time and also because they allow professionals to take their focus away from things like physical logistics and focus on core tasks. The availability of end-to-end support services such as MeetingOne's event planning tools, training, and custom development services allow companies take that process one step further by fine-tuning workflows and instituting best practices for using collaboration tools.

Overcoming travel costs and constraints

Whether it involves a trip across town or around the world, business travel is costly in terms of time, natural resources, and lost productivity. Complimenting in-person meetings with interactive exchanges online can provide a more flexible way to build relationships without the constraints and overhead of travel. Selecting tools that provide a secure setting for a variety of modes and formats for interaction: real-time and on-demand; documents, video, and animated graphics; application sharing, document collaboration, and remote desktop control allows professionals to customize contact sessions to meet specific needs.

Another important benefit of using a virtual environment is the ability to bring experts from other locales into customer interactions without asking them to leave their desk. In many cases it is impractical to bring internal or external experts for consultations because of schedule conflicts, transportation and lodging costs, and travel time. Web meetings minimize or erase these constraints and enable new resources to come into play. Many companies find that clients and partners not only appreciate the benefits of having access to knowledge bases on demand, flexible meeting times and locales, and the ability to bring in expertise that may not be practical in person, but are actually growing to expect these capabilities.

Reducing consumption

Reducing consumption has now gone far beyond recycling paper and cans. Escalating costs of energy has led to consolidation of workplaces and less equipment in fewer meetings rooms. Companies are exploring ways to be significantly more productive while being conscious of their effect on the environment. Consumers are demanding that companies show they use eco-friendly solutions, while still delivering top quality service and products. Solutions such as shared whiteboards, interactive presentations and training, and unified communications capabilities enable organizations to reduce their energy consumption, paper consumption, and the need for travel, thus increasing consumer respect and reducing costs at the same time.

Enhancing worker health, development and retention

The Human Resource Professionals Association (HRPA) in Ontario, Canada connects members to a wide range of HR information, resources, professional development, and networking opportunities – for 18,000 members provided by 35 employees and 900 volunteers. To enhance member services they wanted to deliver professional development to members wherever they are located. “In order to do this, says Chris Larsen, HRPAs director of marketing and membership, “we wanted to deploy the very best in eLearning platforms...”. Continuing, Larsen states, “Delivering face-to-face learning in a province that is nearly one million square kilometers is not practical. For a volunteer-based organization with more than 15 board committees and whose governance model demands participation from all areas of the province, travel costs can get out of hand quickly.” In order to minimize time, expense, and volunteer burnout associated with travel, the HRPAs sought out an audio and web conferencing service.

After an extensive evaluation of available solutions, the organization selected MeetingOne for its rich conferencing capabilities, topnotch service, and integration with Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro. "MeetingOne provided us with features that competitors like Citrix GoToMeeting, WebEx, and Microsoft NetMeeting just didn't have," says Larsen.²

HR professionals are employing a variety of strategies to attract, train, and retain talent for their companies. A robust delivery platform that combines creating, managing, and disseminating information with feedback and tracking mechanisms can significantly contribute to the success of HR efforts. Departments in different locations and countries can coordinate benefits plans to ensure both consistency and compliance with local competitive and legal requirements. Compliance courses can be customized for a diverse workforce -- addressing the needs of temporary and long-term employees, departments with different compliance requirements, and staff with different skill sets – and then delivered live across different geographies as well as asynchronously for anytime, anywhere access.

Tools to track individual progress and performance provide feedback on the effectiveness of the courses as well as the match between the employee and the program. Adobe provides the Connect Pro Event Management application to invite attendees, register them, and record their participation to assure compliance with training and gauge their success and skill in using the product. Regular and personalized interaction encourages company loyalty and a positive work environment. Other Adobe resource centers include online user communities and forums for increased development of skill and improved collaboration and communication between users.

At the Human Resources Professionals Association:

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"... and found MeetingOne Web and Audio Conferencing solutions to be outstanding"

Best Practices for Implementing Collaboration Services

Needs evaluation and solution selection

With any capital investment, the proponents of a program or new product that is intended to improve productivity need to gather data and evidence to support the introduction of a new service. Those who can or will use the productivity tool should be included in the process through interviews and experiences that help to build a case in support of the new tool. Trial uses can help tremendously in showing the value and ease of adoption of a new service.

Studying applications and cases such as those cited in this paper can provide a starting point for evaluating how online collaboration will improve the daily function of specific employees.

² <http://www.meetingone.com/us/company/hrpatestimonial.cfm>

For example:

- Engineers working from several different locations can't meet their deadline if they take time out to travel to a joint meeting location. Collaboration services enable them to have ad hoc meetings when they need to fix a design flaw and to provide regular updates during development.
- Distributing marketing globally can pose a challenge, but collaboration services enable the marketing and sales groups to tailor training and re-use content in order to deliver their information in several steps and in more than one language with asynchronous presentations rather than travel to each country or bringing representatives to a central location.
- HR teams can deliver and track compliance and training, garner feedback from employees to improve programs, and build virtual communities that enhance the working culture.
- IT departments deploy services more quickly, can re-use training information due to ease of updating, and can maintain a stable, secure environment using a Web-based server that doesn't require additional software or knowledge by the user.
- Training departments can provide synchronous and asynchronous training around the globe that is easy to modify for specific locations, and enables reporting and feedback responses to measure and refine the program.

Each part of the process -- acquisition, setup, training, and expansion -- should be well thought out in order to deliver a rollout plan to management recommending a specific service option over others. Who hasn't been in a situation where a tool seemed perfect until the cost of training and the learning curve were encountered? Or you find out that there is no support or training included with the purchase, or that additional hardware really is required?

Finding the right provider of your solution is also key in enabling your workforce to transition smoothly. Interview your provider to assure they include training and will assist your organization in understanding about this alternative to legacy forms of meeting. Enabling delivery of your solution to multiple device types, globally positioned individuals, and in real time may be key factors to emphasize when extolling the virtues of these services to your training and communications needs.

Remote communication was not on our radar, because we didn't have the right tools. Now our online collaboration services have become essential, everyday engagement tools for on-demand training and collaboration company-wide. Dudley Torres, multimedia developer, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Inc.³

Key adoption points might include:

- Easy to access, enterprise-wide collaboration
- Rich multimedia for high impact marketing and sales presentations
- Integrated instant messaging
- User authentication
- Templates and data integration
- Scalability
- High impact, interactive training with instant anytime access

³ <http://www.adobe.com/cfusion/showcase/>

- Virtual classrooms, learner progress tracking, and feedback questions
- Compliance assurance

Traditionally, new collaboration and conferencing tools required additional hardware at each location to gain the benefits of being able to be interactive, use video, and present information. With today's new browser-based technologies building on unified communications capability already in existence, greater benefits can be realized with less expense and less investment than ever before.

Training and adoption

Employees may be overwhelmed at the prospect of adopting a new technology or process in order to improve efficiency. Ease of adoption is important to consider both in the selection and rollout of a conferencing and collaboration tool. According to Adobe Software, 98% of all computers have Internet capability and Flash viewers installed. Worldwide familiarity with the Internet and basic programs such as Flash enables a shorter learning curve for solutions that make use of these common tools. Organizations can realize an immediate “win” with a shorter learning curve—less expense is required to bring each client or employee up to speed using the technology and productivity gains are reached more quickly.

Training and adoption can actually be provided in stages for each group of employees. Those departments with a pressing business need can pave the way and provide the first testimonials and cases. These examples can encourage adoption by showing how each area of business—HR, Marketing, Sales, IT, and Training – can benefit from a common platform for collaboration and conferencing services. Presented with both the budget and the benefits gained by staff, partners, and customers, employees are empowered to become champions for this the new resource.

Many trainers have found that a combination of live and asynchronous modules utilizing the conferencing solution is an effective way to balance the need for personal support and self-paced learning. Presentations can be provided in a variety of ways, but generally, adoption becomes smoother if you do not have to ask for any more than a 30-minute time slot from your workforce. Most individuals will fit a 30-minute time slot into their day, but are not comfortable with giving an hour or more.

Measuring, monitoring and refining

Measuring the effectiveness of a program includes tracking the use of the program, and inviting feedback from users. For Philips Healthcare, the benefits of using Acrobat Connect Pro to improve training for employees, partners, and customers are measurable through the tracking ability of Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro. According to Philips Healthcare's Douglas Dell, they can “serve increasing numbers of people with on-demand and real-time training and then relate those efforts to tangible business benefits of increased competencies which translate to system optimization and customer satisfaction.”⁴

Refining your use of conferencing and collaboration tools not only relies on measurement and monitoring of use, but the feedback and input of users regarding improvements for use of the product. Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro enables the ability to evaluate content effectiveness and generate training reports through customized feedback and report generators as well as measure learner progress through unique logins and secured information.

⁴ <http://www.adobe.com/cfusion/showcase/>

Finally, reach out to other businesses that have implemented Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro with MeetingOne as their conferencing, collaboration and training solution. Developing a “best practices” list provided by companies that have implemented the solution can provide a benchmark for internal use and spark new ideas on how to leverage virtual meetings in your organization.

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About the Authors

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About Wainhouse Research

Wainhouse Research provides insight and intelligence into the global markets for audio, web (data), and video conferencing, real-time Unified Communications, enterprise streaming and webcasting, and enterprise social networking. The company publishes public and private studies, speaks at industry events and private company events, and provides both strategic consulting to industry vendors as well as end user organizations. Wainhouse Research conferences in the US and Europe provide a forum for the industry to discuss critical issues for industry growth. For more information see: www.wainhouse.com.

About Adobe Systems

For more than 25 years, Adobe has revolutionized the way the world engages with ideas and information. In print and on the web, in video and on mobile devices, Adobe's award-winning technologies and software are everywhere you look. Adobe® Flash® Player is the world's most pervasive software platform, installed on more than 98% of Internet-enabled desktops. Adobe Flash technology is used to produce most video on the web, and Adobe Reader® software has become the global standard for sharing documents and information. Adobe is the fifth largest software company in the world, and its recognizable brands — including Adobe Photoshop®, PDF, Acrobat®, Reader, and Flash — continually set new standards for producing and delivering rich content that engages people anywhere, anytime.. Adobe Connect Pro allows any PC or Mac with a Flash® Player to view presentations and documents from remote presenters. More information is available at www.adobe.com.

About MeetingOne

MeetingOne (M1) is a full service virtual training, meeting and event solution provider. Since 1999, M1 has enabled businesses and organizations around the world to communicate with employees, members, clients, investors and prospects more effectively, despite geographic distances, using innovative virtual meeting, training and event technologies and services. Its products and services are designed to facilitate such business communications as e-learning presentations, marketing webinars, sales demonstrations, new product launches, investor relations and more. MeetingOne is headquartered in Denver, Colorado and has operations throughout Europe. Today, thousands of customers throughout the world use MeetingOne as their one-stop source for virtual meetings and events through its easy-to-use audio, web, and event conferencing technologies. MeetingOne is Adobe's preferred event solutions provider specializing in services to help customers plan, organize, execute, and follow up on large scale web conferencing events such as product launches and eSeminars. More information is available at <http://www.meetingone.com> .