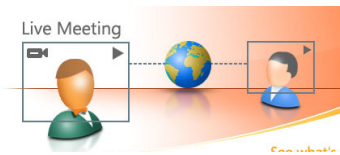


## Virtual Conferencing Comparison



Reduce travel costs 81% Involve more people 77% Save time, increase productivity 73%  
Graphics and data better than voice alone 71% Work from different locations 69% Encourages teaming and collaboration 64%

davidHarris

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## Virtual Conferencing Comparison

Business, education and communication needs are growing connections between people from around the world and ideas from across the disciplines. Virtual conferencing bridges the gap between idea and consensus at a pace appropriate for exponentially expanding markets in the face of approaching deadlines.

Large and small companies are taking advantage of virtual conferencing for many reasons. According to the Wainhouse Research Firm, these include reducing travel costs 81%, involving more people 77%, saving time to increase productivity 73%, graphics and data better than voice alone 71%, working from different locations 69%, web meetings easier to schedule 64%, and encouraging teaming and collaboration 64% (Microsoft Corp., 2009, February).

Education institutions are using virtual conferencing to meet demanding needs of growing elearning programs at an estimated pace of 30% annually. An estimated \$50 million market includes 44 states with significant supplemental online learning programs and 173 virtual charter schools serving 92,235 students in 18 states. 57% of public secondary schools in the U.S. provide access to students for online learning. 72% of school districts with distance education programs planned to expand online offerings in the coming year. (Elluminate, Inc. 2009, September).

Three of the most popular virtual conferencing solutions are Elluminate, Microsoft Live Meeting and Adobe Acrobat Connect. Although the software has many similarities, organizations need to understand their differences when selecting the best solution. Elluminate is best for education and training, Live Meeting is an enterprise-wide business solution and Acrobat Connect is best suited for small organizations.

Elluminate is designed for education and training, with the most distinctive feature being break-out rooms. The grouping tool allows instructors to move students quickly to separate virtual rooms within a synchronous session, and then quickly bring them back together. Break-out rooms are useful for small group work, as well as for one-on-one troubleshooting between a student and a moderator. A similar effect

is possible with Connect, but requires detailed coordination of multiple sessions, each with its own URL. (Schullo, Hilbelink, Venable & Barron, 2007). Live Meeting has no grouping feature within a virtual meeting, but simultaneous meetings can be executed on in-house servers. Elluminate is also the only solution that offers features designed to meet Section 508 accessibility requirements of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act (eWeek, 2006).

## Comparison Rubric

	difficulty*	support and training*	base cost	software integration	participant maximum	longevity	int./ext. server	recordable
<b>LiveMeeting™</b>	low	high	\$25/mo. +	MS	1250	2000	int./ext.	yes
<b>Elluminate™</b>	moderate	moderate	\$17/mo. +	MS, Java	enterprise	2000	int./ext.	yes
<b>Adobe Acrobat Connect™</b>	none	moderate	\$39/mo. +	Adobe	2500	2009	ext.	no

\*based on basic computer skill proficiency

Live Meeting is designed with business in mind. Live Meeting’s seamless integration with the Microsoft Office Suite makes quick climbing of the learning curve by using a familiar interface and tool set. Scheduling and Live Meeting invites with Outlook are quick and intuitive. Live Meeting offers drag and drop file viewing and sharing, quickly allowing attendees document access. Connect and Elluminate offer document viewing quickly by screen sharing, but documents have to be uploaded independently of the conference to be downloaded by attendees. Live Meeting also offers Round Table, a panoramic Web cam useful for capturing an entire conference room and broadcasting to attendees out of office.

Connect raises the high-water mark for virtual conferencing interface. Adobe has combined its multimedia features to allow businesses and individuals an opportunity to present, demonstrate, teach, train and collaborate in a secure, real-time virtual environment. Adobe has managed to integrate audio, video, chat and advanced web demonstration and collaboration features that can be seen and heard by virtually

everyone (Top Ten Reviews, 2009). Connect allows users a custom and easy-to-remember URL for their meeting space, allowing quick link sending for spontaneous meetings. Elluminate and Live Meeting have long URLs that have to be copied and pasted to arrive at the meeting. Connect also allows for moderator control of attendees' computers with permission. This is exceptionally useful for troubleshooting software issues and demonstration of product use and functions. Unlike Elluminate and Live Meeting, Connect is not recordable for later viewing by stakeholders who were not at the virtual meeting.

Elluminate uses resources efficiently, effectively connecting end users with varying connection speeds and processing power. Live Meeting and Connect have beautiful interfaces and are feature rich, but require ample wide bandwidth and processing power. Connect is Flash based, which is an advantage considering that 97% of all computers connected to the Internet in the world have Flash installed, allowing instant use without the cumbersome downloads of Elluminate and Live Meeting (Adobe Corp. 2006). Elluminate is cross platform compatible with Windows, Mac, Solaris, and Linux OS. Connect works with Mac and Windows, and Live Meeting is Windows only.

Elluminate is a task-oriented training solution best suited for educational institutions and other organizations that use virtual conferencing for training, capitalizing on low-resource use and features like break-out rooms. Live Meeting is best for enterprise-wide execution, where the institution already incorporates the Microsoft Office Suite, but Microsoft still hasn't bridged the gap between PC applications and the web (Online Meeting Review, 2009). Connect is cool and fun, but lacking basic features like recording meetings limits its use. All of these solutions are growing their interface, features and tool sets to meet the changing needs of institutions and organizations that are integrating virtual conferencing solutions into their communications portfolio.

## Appendix A - Elements

### **Live Meeting™** <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/livemeeting/default.aspx>

#### **design**

- Full Microsoft Office integration
- Microsoft Round Table for panoramic conference room video

#### **usability**

- up to 1,250 participants
- Windows OS and Broadband
- familiar Microsoft user interface

#### **functionality**

- drag and drop content for easy viewing and download
- connects seamlessly to Microsoft Outlook for invites and scheduling

### **Elluminate™** <http://www.illuminate.com/>

#### **design**

- basic design lowers required resources
- unified, task-oriented user interface

#### **usability**

- scalable to enterprise-wide deployment
- Windows, Mac, Solaris, and Linux OS, Dial-up Internet 28.8k +
- easy to monitor and control
- used by 7 million teachers and students located in 170 different countries

#### **functionality**

- designed for education and training with LMS integration and partnerships
- break-out rooms for sub-conferencing

### **Adobe Acrobat Connect™** <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobatconnect/>

#### **design**

- clean design with intuitive interface
- use simultaneous screen capture to show participants any files, Web sites or media

#### **usability**

- up to 2500 participants
- Windows or Mac OS, Flash, Broadband
- simple interface easy to master

#### **functionality**

- built to the needs of business users
- personalized, easy-to-remember URL for instant meeting access
- remote control of participants computer for collaboration

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