

VIRTUAL CLASSROOM PLATFORMS: WHICH TO CHOOSE?

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3 Types of Virtual Events: Which do you do?

MEETINGS

Opportunities to collaborate, brainstorm, discuss & decide, and create action items. Uses a "meeting" platform.

PRESENTATIONS

Sharing information in a one-way format, with little interaction. Uses a "webcast" or "event" platform.

TRAINING CLASSES

Learner-centered interactive experience with defined learning objectives. Uses a "training" platform.

Tech Issues to Consider

Type of platform: meeting, presentation, or training?

Audio types (VOIP? Integrated audio?)

Types of files supported (PPT? PDF? Other?)

Ease of connection for users.

Mobile device compatible?

Differences between mobile & desktop?

Questions to Consider when Choosing:

Why do you need a platform? Will you hold online meetings? Give webcast presentations? Facilitate training classes? Select a platform that matches.

What do you need participants to do? Which platform features will be key to accomplish the goals? Do you need whiteboards? Breakouts? etc?

What bandwidth/infrastructure needs will you have? Sending information over the internet takes up bandwidth. Add in VOIP for audio and you may run into bandwidth challenges. The alternative is integrated telephony, which has conference call costs. What's right for your org?

What programs do you already have?. Consider compatibility with existing programs, such as the organization's LMS, social media platforms, and which mobile devices might be used.

Typical Participant Tech Needs:

- Strong internet connection
- Reliable computer or laptop
- Sound card for hearing video playback (if used)
- Software for virtual classroom platform
- Hands-free headset
- Their own device to log in with (i.e. instructions not to share a screen)
- Information on how to join the audio (usually connect to platform first and then the audio)

Notes

Typical Virtual Classroom Tools

| Tool | Description |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Document sharing | A commonly used feature that allows the facilitator to share documents (such as slides) for participants to see. |
| Chat | Enables communication between and among participants through typed messages. |
| Annotate / Draw | Allows for real time drawing and typing on top of shared documents or a whiteboard. |
| Whiteboard | A blank screen that can be drawn or typed on. Similar to classroom chart paper, but in electronic form. |
| Status Indicators | Lets participants click on a button to display their real-time status |
| Raise Hand | Allows participants to raise their hand virtually |
| Poll | Asks multiple-choice or short-answer questions |
| Breakouts | Allows participants to divide into smaller groups |
| File / Material distribution | Offers handouts and other paper-based resources via electronic file transfer. |
| Tests/Quizzes | Creates knowledge-test questions on the training topic. |
| Application/ Screen sharing | Displays an application on the facilitators' screen so that all participants can see it. |

FOUR MUST-DOs for EFFECTIVE VIRTUAL TRAINING:

- Equip facilitators with the tools and prep time they need
- Upskill designers in virtual tools and engaging activities
- Prepare audience for virtual learning – it may be new to them!
- Consider admin time that will be needed. Determine who will handle all of the logistics.

Popular Platforms:

Note that this is not an exhaustive list. Visit each vendor website for more info:

- Adobe Connect for Learning (www.adobe.com/connect)
- Cisco WebEx Training Center (www.webex.com/products/elearning-and-online-training.html)
- Citrix GoTo Training (www.gototraining.com)
- Jigsaw (www.jigsawme.com)
- Zoom (zoom.us)

Others to mention: Blackboard Collaborate, Saba Virtual Classroom, and Lenovo AirClass

ABOUT CINDY HUGGETT:

Cindy is the author of three books on virtual training: *Virtual Training Tools and Templates: An Action Guide to Live Online Learning*; *The Virtual Training Guidebook: How to Design, Deliver, and Implement Live Online Learning and Virtual Training Basics*.

She helps trainers, designers, and organizations move to the virtual classroom.

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Checklist Template for Selecting a Platform

| Features | Vendor 1 | Vendor 2 | Vendor 3 | Vendor 4 |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Platform Features | | | | |
| Shared document file type requirements | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Media file playback (audio and/or video) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Chat | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Annotation/drawing privileges | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Whiteboard features | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Raise Hand/Status Indicators | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Breakout groups | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other: | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Audio Features | | | | |
| Integrated conference calling available | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| VOIP available | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Features | | | | |
| Compatible with mobile device (for participants) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Able to have multiple hosts/facilitators | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Compatible with your organization's LMS | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Internet bandwidth issues | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Considerations Unique to Your Organization | | | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |