

How To Select Your Web Conferencing Tool

New conferencing and collaboration solutions are being announced at the pace of one or more new tools per week. New versions and upgrades get promoted even more frequently and in this avalanche of claims of "this is the best don't look anywhere else" it is hard to pick the good from the average.

1. How should you select your Web conferencing tool?
2. Which companies are more reliable and how do you find out?
3. **How can you be sure you will not be disappointed?**

These are tough questions to answer today, as there are one million vendors out there and an army of supposed experts all claiming to have the best solution and all offering a different one.

Let me share with you my personal advice on how to approach these difficult questions while saving yourself a great deal of time and money.

The Twelve Commandments For The Savvy Web Conferencing Buyer

What to ask yourself before doing anything else:

1) What do I need to accomplish with this tool?

This means, what is the end result I need to obtain once I find the collaboration tool that I need? Can you list all of the results that you want to obtain? Focus on the results. Forget the features.

Tele-efficiency helps its clients to save time, improve their synergy and lower their travel expenses. Offers WEB conference services at a fixed rate, under the trademark *Conferenceware*, integrated with [CRM applications](#) and with Skype. The greeting is customizable for each client's company image with their logo. Also offers a free 30-day trial period followed by a quarterly or yearly service contract for 25.£, 40.€, 45.\$US, 50.\$CAN/month or less. Listen an [Executive presentation](#) or read a [White-Paper](#) about the business-case for WEB conferences.

2) What kind of activities do you want to carry out to achieve those end results?

Will you need to run a brainstorming session, or will you have a presentation lecture with a Q&A session after that? Evaluate the many possible delivery alternatives available to you and select those most appropriate to drive your desired end results.

Conferenceware could be used in different enterprise functions: [management](#), [marketing](#), [sales](#), [production](#), [service](#), [personnel](#), [finance](#). Concretely, we have identified best practices for: [WEBinar](#), [eSales](#), [eService](#), [eMeeting](#), [eLearning](#).

3) How many people do I need to connect with at the same time?

Meeting with a group of five or having to deliver live presentations to large crowds makes quite a big difference and so you can expect that the tools that are great for one application may not be that good for the opposite extreme.

[Conferenceware](#) support a maximum of 25 participants simultaneously.

4) What type of computers do the other people I want to meet with have?

Are they all PC users? Are some of them on Macs? Linux boxes? Other operating systems? Can you find out? If not, that is still good information, meaning that either you decide which types of users you want to serve yourself, or you go after a technology that supports the "largest" number of computer types/operating systems.

The participants in a [Conferenceware](#) meeting only need a browser with a Flash decoder (Version 7.0+) without any Plug-In.

5) What type of Internet connection your online participants will have?

Again try to be specific and to verify whether you have both high-speed Internet users and others on dial-up or if you have only one of these two types.

Many audio and videoconferencing solutions work only on high-speed Internet connections and will therefore be excluded from your alternatives if you need to serve a good number of people on dial-up lines.

High speed Internet connection, for instance cable or DSL, is recommended. Otherwise a dial-up line increase latency, suggesting to the presenter to make a brief pause between the slides of a *PowerPoint*. A dial-up line is not suitable for videoconferencing.

6) Do you want a solution that you buy and install on your PC or company server, or do you want to pay for a service on a monthly basis?

Yes, you may be wondering what is the difference anyway and why would you care about these issues. OK, let me explain: if you have a desktop solution you need everyone to be able to download it and install it appropriately for this to work. Is this an issue? If the technology is installed on a server this is generally a one-time worry after which you and your users need only to access standard Web pages. On the other hand if the collaboration technology is "hosted" by a third-party provider, this provides the least intrusion into your computer, it requires little or no technical know-how from you and it alleviates you and your technical staff from most technology-related worries.

[Tele-efficiency](#) offers a hosted WEB conference service.

How to look at vendors and conferencing providers

1) Steer away from price/per user per minute formulas. They are a rip-off.

You can get the same level of functionality with flat rate tools that cost a fraction of what those "enterprise" tools cost.

Ask for flat rates for specific number of users, or seek licensing formulas that allow you to meet online as much as you want without having to incur in time-dependent charges.

[Tele-efficiency](#) provides a free 30-day trial period followed by a quarterly or yearly service contract for 25.£, 40.€, 45.\$US, 50.\$CAN/month or less. Look our [rates](#) and [compare](#).

2) Demand VoIP. Text chat is not a substitute for talking and all of the stories about the greatness of asynchronous collaboration, apply only to specific applications. Real-time meetings, presentations, discussions and brainstorming sessions require VoIP as we expect to be able to talk to each other in real life in those analogous situations. Vendors still supporting and recommending telephone-based conferencing have a limited and

cumbersome solution in their hands. An expensive one to propose too. There is no reason on earth why you can't have reliable and quality VoIP today with whatever configuration or connection speed you may have. Who tells you this is not true doesn't know what she is talking about.

Conferenceware is integrated with Skype, a worldwide voice over IP network. In collaboration with highspeedconferencing.com, we make available for you, at no cost, a telephone audioconference service. The attendees place a long distance call that usually is charged to their telephone bill at the usual service provider's rates. Better, the Skype users might connect directly and with no cost to the audioconference. Their number is not limited to 5 like on Skype. This way, an audioconference is used as the bridge that connects the Skype users and the telephone network. Everybody can listen and speak to everybody, the voice might be recorded and synchronized with the WEB conference.

3) Pretend IM, presence, file sharing and secure storage.

Having the ability to integrate presence awareness, instant messaging that hooks into all of the major IM networks and secure rooms/spaces in which files and documents can be stored is a formula for certain success in the collaboration space. If online collaboration is at the heart of what you need to do, these features may just be something that you will not be able to do without.

Stay aware of the status or availability of your contacts, and get signaled when they connect to Skype. Visit our [Resources](#) under *SERVICE* for more information concerning Skype and to download it.

4) Seek vendors with an international outlook.

Sorry not to be represent a lot of you, but I rather take the interests of my many friends around the world in many not-first-class countries like India, Brazil or Egypt. Is the vendor a US-based colossus willing to take care of you out there? Is the company able to listen and respond to your requests without forcing you to use a US-based toll-free number? Does the vendor offer localized versions of the tool? Does it offer the opportunity to localize it for those who want to do so?

Conferenceware operate in three languages; French, English and Spanish, in 15 countries on all 5 continents. The address of its international English portal is www.tele-efficiency.net. Its interface is available in several languages.

5) Look for great documentation and customer service with a name.

Make sure that either the tool requires no manuals at all to be used effectively (an unlikely case for now), or that it provides easy and complete access to such manuals and references at no cost and prior to the purchase/subscription to the service. Does the vendor have an online forum where people can post and receive public answers? Does customer support sign up emails with a person's name or with a generic signature? Does the vendor help you install the tool and see if you are OK, or does he just send you some instructions expecting you to be a typical nerd?

Users' training

In order to facilitate *Conferenceware* apprenticeship, we have introduced a [Start-up guide](#), a [Tutorial](#), and a [Users' manual](#), as well as [On-line help](#) that explains step by step, with the aid of screen captures, how it works.

User group

Conferenceware users continually discover new applications while using it, which they share through a [discussion forum](#). In addition, they get tips and tricks when they receive the bimonthly [eNewsLetter](#).

Computer Security

We take security very seriously. Our systems are hosted in a "[bunker](#)" constantly supervised by technicians. The data is saved on site on a daily basis. Also, in order to ensure uninterrupted Internet connectivity, we take the bandwidth supply from various providers. Also, communications are encrypted ([SSL-256 bits](#)).

Technical support

Our technical support is twofold: First, on a free-service basis, we provide access to a [knowledge base](#) that registers the users' questions and the answers they received; second, we offer [technical support](#) on a 24/7 basis.

Satisfaction surveys

We care about our customer's satisfaction not only regarding our product but also regarding our relationship with personnel. Therefore, we conduct a series of brief satisfaction surveys: 60 days after the installation, after each assistance request, and, finally, yearly

6) Don't buy if you can't try.

Buy only technologies that you can try for a sufficient amount of time, unmonitored and unrestricted. Do not buy or subscribe to conferencing tools that you have seen been used only in a demo. Make sure you get access to the tool you want for a good number of days and try out all of the functions that you will be likely to use with some real attendees before ever signing anything.

Whatever justifications some companies will bring to you for why they don't offer a free try-out are just that: excuses. You have the right to try a technology before paying for it. If you have the full right to think that if you are not allowed to try out a technology it probably is too difficult to be learned by yourself in a few minutes and that not everything will work as "advertised".

Tele-efficiency offers a 30 days free trial of *Conferenceware* openly proposing to [try it](#) and discover all its power before adopting it.

Written by Robin Good on Thursday March 11 2004

Answered by Michel Dionne, Tele-efficiency, November 15, 2006