



“Virtual Meeting” Tools

Paul Hudson, Chief Operating Officer

Original: January 11, 2009

Teleconference

FreeConferenceCall.com (<http://www.freeconferencecall.com/>)

The Emergency Department Practice Management Association (EDPMA) uses this service and it appears to work quite well. The service arranges for a number (not toll free) for participants to use. Participants join the call by entering an access code, also provided by the service. There is no advertising on the service (other than notice of the service provider when you call in). The business model appears to be based on inducing those enrolled to upgrade to premium services.

From their website:

Free conference calls are simple and easy to use, requiring only a name and an e-mail address to receive an instant account.

Once you enter your name and e-mail address, you will be instantaneously provided with a dial-in number and access code for immediate phone conferencing.

Your teleconferencing line is available to you 24/7 and there is no need to schedule or make reservations. Each conference call account accommodates 96 callers on an unlimited number of 6 hour free conference calls.

I signed up for an account and have access information (as a rather detailed PDF) available.

Web Conferencing

WebEx (www.webex.com/) appears to be the market leader, and is a fee-based service.

Microsoft NetMeeting is a service with a long history and a number of satisfied users. It appears that Microsoft is moving away from this platform with the introduction of the Vista operating system. From their website: *Microsoft NetMeeting is a feature of previous versions of Windows that is not available in this version of Windows. Instead, consider using Windows Meeting Space to collaborate with other people, share documents, and make presentations.* From Wikipedia: *Since the release of Windows XP,*

Microsoft has deprecated it in favor of Windows Messenger and Microsoft Office Live Meeting, although it is still installed by default (Start : Run... : C:\Program Files\NetMeeting\conf.exe). Note that Windows Messenger, MSN Messenger and Windows Live Messenger hooks directly into NetMeeting for the application sharing, desktop sharing, and Whiteboard features exposed by each application. NetMeeting is no longer included with Windows Vista, and has been replaced by **Windows Meeting Space** and Microsoft Office Live Meeting. Windows Meeting Space only has collaboration features and lacks NetMeeting's conferencing features. Live Meeting includes the conferencing features that Windows Meeting Space doesn't offer. For internet collaboration, Microsoft has also released SharedView.

I'd read of the market entry of **DimDim** (www.dimdim.com/) and participated in some of the company's beta testing research. The product is out of beta and I'm already a registered user with a "Free Edition" account. As with FreeConferenceCall.com, the business model appears to focus on inducing users of the free product to upgrade to premium service lines with more / better features.

From their website:

Dimdim is a free web conferencing service where you can share your desktop, show slides, collaborate, chat, talk and broadcast via webcam with absolutely no download required to host or attend meetings.

Flexible.

The Dimdim Web Meeting service is available in [open source](#), [professional](#) and commercial [enterprise editions](#) capable of supporting thousands of attendees. And unlike all other web meeting solutions, Dimdim is available in both onsite (you install it on your servers) and hosted (we install it on ours) [configurations](#).

Easy. Open. Affordable.

Like you, we tried all those other web conferencing solutions and found them exceedingly expensive, difficult to implement and impossible to customize. So we created Dimdim as the easy, open and affordable web conference solution.

[Deciding on a Date & Time](#)

The EDPMA introduced me to **MeetingWizard.com** (<http://www.meetingwizard.com/>), a site devoted to assisting a group in determining a "best fit" for a time and date to conduct a meeting.

From their website:

Use MeetingWizard to arrange and schedule meetings and other events. As a productivity tool it makes the planning process easier and more effective.

MeetingWizard automatically does the following:

- sends invitations to participants proposing alternate times
- summarizes their responses
- updates you on the results
- sends confirmations

- sends optional reminders prior to meetings

MeetingWizard requires only that you and your participants have access to e-mail and a browser. It uses the simplest technologies possible, ensuring that all of your guests will be able to use the system.

MeetingWizard has been designed to be effective in more than 90% of meeting planning situations, and does not try to fulfill every possible need. However, it allows for enough flexibility to make changes, add personalized notes, make cancellations and handles most other situations that might arise.

MeetingWizard is designed for the modern workplace. It is friendly but professional.

How MeetingWizard Works

The system typically works in a 3-step process.

1. You invite participants providing a number of optional dates/times.
2. Participants respond to invitations by indicating when they are available.
3. You confirm the meeting or event after reviewing responses.

In addition, there are many other features that ensure you don't forget important details, and that all participants receive complete information about meetings.

Best of all, our basic free service allows you to schedule as many meetings or events as you like.

I've a free account established. Again, the business model (as explicitly stated on their site) is to introduce the basic service as a means to inducing these users to explore, and purchase, additional services.

Surveys

We've used **SurveyMonkey.com** (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>) for quite some time now and, having bumped up against the limits of the free version of the service and now pay a modest monthly fee for the ability to distribute the survey, and collect responses from, a greater number of participants. The site is well organized and it is quite easy to get a very attractive and useful web-based survey completed in a matter of minutes. That survey instrument is hosted on their site and a link is provided for distribution by e-mail or posting on our website. Results from the survey via a "dashboard", accessible through the same login and password used to create the surveys.