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# Choosing a Microsoft Web Conferencing Solution

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## Introduction

In today's global economy, companies need to communicate in real time with a multinational customer base. They also need to enable their employees to collaborate with virtual teams that span the world. In addition, the changing nature of the workforce means that it is increasingly common for employees to telecommute from home or work from remote locations. These factors raise the importance of Web conferencing solutions that can increase productivity and reduce the costs of inefficient communications and expensive corporate travel.

This whitepaper reviews common business requirements for Web conferencing and describes how Microsoft is helping businesses meet these requirements with two enterprise-class Web conferencing solutions:

- **Microsoft® Office Live Meeting** – a hosted service for Web conferencing
- **Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007** – an on-premise server solution that includes Web conferencing along with several other communication technologies.

The whitepaper also provides information to help organizations determine how they can best use either one or both of these Microsoft Web conferencing solutions to meet their requirements.

## Web Conferencing Requirements

Web conferencing is rapidly becoming a mainstream tool for communication and collaboration in the Enterprise. Organizations are using Web conferencing to help people work more efficiently and share information with colleagues. Today's world of work has changed, and businesses need conferencing solutions that support a range of circumstances ranging from a spontaneous meeting between two people collaborating on a document to large-scale training and events with hundreds of participants.

Businesses typically have a number of key requirements that any Enterprise Web conferencing solution must fulfill. These requirements may include:

- **Support for collaborative meetings.** Meeting organizers need a conferencing solution that will allow them to include presentations, share applications or their desktop, and chat or use a shared whiteboard with meeting participants.
- **Scheduling and management of Web conferences.** Meeting organizers often want to schedule Web conferences in advance. The Web conferencing solution should support advanced scheduling of Web conferences including sending invitations to attendees.
- **Support for ad-hoc meetings.** In many cases, meeting organizers may want to start Web conferences on an as-needed basis. The Web conferencing solution should make it easy for users to enter the working environment quickly.
- **Effective user experience for both new and advanced users.** A Web conferencing solution may offer many different features, such as audio and video capabilities, instant messaging, and application sharing. The Web conferencing solution should make it easy for new users to simply get started, while also providing features needed by more advanced users.
- **Support for integrated media.** Integrated media support allows organizations to take advantage of the cost-saving potential of duplex voice over IP (VoIP), and the added richness of multi-party desktop video conferencing.

- **Integration with other applications.** In some cases, it is necessary for meeting organizers to either start a meeting while in a line of business (LOB) application, or import or export information from a Web conferencing meeting into another application, such as a learning management system.
- **Support for multimedia.** If a presentation needs to include pre-recorded audio and video clips, the Web conferencing solution should allow the presenter to stream pre-recorded audio and video to meeting participants as part of the meeting.
- **Ability to record conferences for future playback.** It should be possible to record Web conferences, so that users who attended the meeting can review the meeting for reference. Recordings may also be used as a company training asset.
- **Support for e-Learning and training.** Web conferencing solutions can deliver effective e-Learning solutions, with additional support for features such as online testing, virtual breakout rooms, and handouts.

With the 2007 releases of Office Live Meeting and Office Communications Server, Microsoft has made significant investments in each of these areas.

## Microsoft Web Conferencing Solutions

Microsoft provides two enterprise-class Web conferencing solutions:

**Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007** is a server solution deployed and managed internally within the organization. In addition to Web conferencing, Office Communications Server 2007 provides technology for instant messaging, presence, and software-powered VoIP.

**Microsoft Office Live Meeting service** is a conferencing solution that connects and engages audiences in online meetings, training, and events through a reliable, Enterprise-class hosted service.

For a feature comparison of web conferencing capabilities in Office Communications Server 2007 and Office Live Meeting, see the appendix of this document.

## Choosing a Web Conferencing Solution

When selecting a Web conferencing solution, organizations face the important choice between conferencing as a hosted service or an on-premise server.

To ensure consistency of experience, the Office Live Meeting service and Office Communications Server 2007 are designed and built using a common Web conferencing technology platform. In addition, regardless of whether a meeting attendee is interfacing with the Office Live Meeting service or Office Communications Server 2007, they use the same Web conferencing client. Providing a single, common client for both Live Meeting and Office Communications Server 2007 assures meeting attendees of a simple and consistent experience, regardless of which Microsoft Web conferencing solution their organization deploys.

When determining which solution to use for Web conferencing, there are three sets of factors to consider:

- Priorities and resources of the IT department
- Information policies and compliance requirements of the organization
- Web conferencing feature requirements

This next section examines how each of these factors may affect the choice of a Web conferencing solution.

## **Priorities and Resources of the IT department**

The nature of the IT organization that uses Web conferencing will impact the choice between Communications Server 2007 and Live Meeting. Two key considerations include the IT competencies and resources of the organization, in addition to the costs of the solution.

## **IT Competencies and Resources**

A range of IT competencies are necessary to deploy and manage a server solution for Web conferencing, including: architecture and design, testing, deployment, administration, capacity planning, availability management, change and configuration management, protection, and support. While many smaller organizations may not have formalized processes for some of these competencies, the staff responsible for managing the servers still requires the underlying competencies

With a hosted service solution, many of these competencies are managed by the vendor, and the only essential requirement is service administration. End-user help desk support may also be required where the company chooses to provide this internally.

If an organization has access to all the competencies required, then the server solution may be preferable. However, when an organization does not have these competencies, then a hosted service solution may be optimal.

After evaluating whether the organization has the competencies described above, the next step is to assess the resources required to deploy and manage either a server solution or a hosted service solution.

A server solution for Web conferencing may require more resources initially than a hosted service solution. Staff must set up hardware, and test and deploy the Web conferencing solution in the environment. Administration tasks will need to be performed initially, and some ongoing resources will be required to maintain and support the Web conferencing server. However, the resources required will typically decrease over time.

A hosted service solution will likely require fewer resources initially, specifically to administer and customize the service. Administration tasks will include managing users, groups, and conference centers, defining user roles and policies, and customizing invitations, links, and branding. In cases where an organization lacks resources to deploy, manage, and support a server solution, the hosted service solution may be a better choice. However, if the resources are available in an organization, then the server solution – or a combination of server and hosted service – may be more compelling.

## Costs

A server solution and a hosted service solution incur different costs. The following costs apply to a server solution:

- **Hardware costs.** These costs are highest when the Web conferencing server is initially deployed, but hardware upgrades may result in additional costs later.
- **Software costs.** These costs are typically incurred when the Web conferencing server is initially deployed.
- **Licensing costs.** These costs are typically lower in a server solution, reflecting the fact that the server requires internal resources to operate.
- **Deployment, maintenance, and support costs.** These costs are typically higher initially, reflecting the time and money associated with initial deployment and initial support costs.

While a hosted service solution will require some investment to deploy and maintain, the primary costs for a hosted service will be licensing costs. These costs are typically higher in a hosted service solution, reflecting the fact that the service is managed by an external vendor.

Which solution is more cost effective will typically depend on the nature of the organization. If the organization anticipates that it will scale up the use of Web conferencing over time, then a hosted service solution can provide lower initial costs by avoiding the hardware and maintenance costs the server solution incurs. However, in the longer term, costs may be lower in a server solution due to lower ongoing licensing costs. This is particularly the case when an organization uses Web conferencing extensively.

## Information policies and compliance requirements of the organization

In some cases companies may need to keep meeting data inside the organization. While the Office Live Meeting service places a premium on security across all dimensions of the service – including login, content, networks, and data centers – it is not possible to keep communications from a hosted Web conferencing service within a corporate firewall. If it is explicitly required that all meeting information must not leave an organization's network, then a server solution is the right choice.

## Web Conferencing Feature Requirements

While Microsoft designed and built both Office Communications Server 2007 and the Office Live Meeting service using a common conferencing technology platform, some of the most important feature differences include:

- **Meeting size.** Office Communications Server 2007 supports meetings for hundreds of attendees; Office Live Meeting supports meetings for thousands of attendees.
- **Access for external attendees.** Office Live Meeting provides a web client for attendees unable to install the rich client.
- **Support for training and events.** Office Live Meeting provides additional features for training and event scenarios.

For a complete feature comparison, see the Feature Comparison table in the Appendix.

## Web Conferencing Solution Guidance

Taking into account the three factors described above – priorities and resources of the IT department, information policies and compliance requirements, and Web conferencing feature requirements – the following table provides recommendations for an organization’s optimal Web conferencing choice. Note that while many organizations will meet their Web conferencing needs with either Office Live Meeting or Office Communications Server 2007, some organizations may elect to deploy both to meet multiple business requirements.

### Web Conferencing Recommendations

Business Requirement	Solution		Notes
	Office Communications Server	Office Live Meeting	
<b>Information Control</b>			
Is there a corporate or industry requirement to keep data behind the firewall? If yes then...	<b>X</b>		Live Meeting service is hosted in external Microsoft data centers.
<b>Simplified Unified Communications Implementation</b>			
Is the organization already implementing Office Communications Server 2007 for IM, Presence, and Voice and considering adding web conferencing? If yes then...	<b>X</b>		In addition to Web conferencing, Office Communications Server 2007 provides technology for instant messaging, presence, and software-powered VoIP.

Business Requirement	Solution		Notes
	Office Communications Server	Office Live Meeting	
<b>IT Resources</b>			
Does the organization have limited IT resources to deploy, operate, and support? If yes then...		X	
<b>Meeting Size</b>			
Meetings with less than 250 attendees and composed of internal attendees.	X		Office Communications Server 2007 provides additional functionality for internal-only meetings, such as seamless integration with Microsoft Active Directory®.
Is there a requirement to support meetings with more than 250 attendees? If yes then...		X	Office Communications Server 2007 currently supports meetings with up to 250 participants. Live Meeting supports meetings with up to 1,250 attendees (or 2,500 with Microsoft Event Services).
<b>Training and Event Needs</b>			
Does the organization need to conduct training or events? If yes then...		X	Live Meeting Professional Edition supports additional training-specific functionality, such as handouts, virtual breakout rooms, and online testing.
<b>External Attendees</b>			
Does the organization have a secure extranet to deploy the server? Will external attendees be able to install the latest version of the client? Will IT be able to provide meeting support for external attendees? If no to any of these then...		X	Communications Server 2007 requires external attendees to access through a secure extranet. This requires deployment of server outside the firewall.  Communications Server 2007 requires an installed client. Live Meeting includes a Web Access client which does not require installation.

Business Requirement	Solution		Notes
	Office Communications Server	Office Live Meeting	
<b>Integrated Audio Conferencing</b>			
Participants using traditional phone networks and VoIP network need to be bridged together in a single conference		X	Live Meeting supports integrated PSTN and two-way VoIP.

## Example Web conferencing deployment scenarios

The following scenarios illustrate different situations in which Office Live Meeting, Office Communications Server 2007, or a combination of the two is most appropriate:

### Scenario A: Medium sized company with competing IT priorities

Wingtip Toys is a toy manufacturer with 1,400 employees, with administrative headquarters located in Issaquah, WA and a toy factory located in Qingdao, China. Company executives and a small sales force travel extensively throughout the United States for meetings with toy retailers, and they must frequently visit the factory in Qingdao.

In recent years, Wingtip Toys has faced financial pressures that are forcing it to reduce its operating costs in the short term. The CEO of Wingtip Toys is looking to substantially reduce travel in the coming year, without impacting the company's ability to do business.

Wingtip Toys has a lean IT budget and workforce, which is focused on maintaining existing services (hosted e-mail, supply chain management, and accounting), and on developing an effective CRM solution. In addition, IT Management has been asked to explore Web conferencing as a solution to reduce their travel costs in line with their new operating plan. There are no additional people or budget resources available within the IT department to implement Web conferencing.

The following meetings have been identified as prime candidates for Web conferencing:

- Meetings between sales executives and retailers;
- Internal meetings with senior executives, some of whom may be traveling;
- Meetings between the factory manager in Qingdao and the management board in Issaquah.

The IT Manager of Wingtip Toys must choose between a hosted service solution and a server-based solution for Web conferencing. To do so, the IT Manager prioritizes the requirements.

Priorities for Wingtip Toys include keeping costs as low as possible in the short term and deploying a Web conferencing solution that minimal IT resources can manage. The IT Manager therefore decides to adopt Office Live Meeting as its Web Conferencing solution.

## **Scenario B: Large Financial Services Company with Information Security Requirements**

Woodgrove Bank is a global investment banking firm, specializing in mergers and acquisitions, divestitures, and corporate finance for private middle-market businesses. Woodgrove Bank primarily serves companies with annual revenues of US\$1 million to \$250 million, and helps business owners in a broad range of industries evaluate, improve, grow, and sell their companies.

Due to the sensitive nature of much of its business, any software Woodgrove Bank implements must help ensure data is protected. It must also enable the bank to create rules and security policies that comply with the bank's data security rules as well as with broader industry requirements. In order to comply with corporate rules and security audit requirements, data must not leave the firewall.

The IT organization of the bank maintains competencies for deploying, managing, and maintaining servers. IT resources are fully funded and staffed for this work.

Woodgrove Bank conducts a variety of online meetings such as:

- Client meetings
- Internal management training
- Compliance affairs updates
- Virtual team meetings for special projects

The CIO of Woodgrove Bank must make a decision between a hosted service solution and a server-based solution for Web conferencing. The primary requirement for Woodgrove Bank is keeping data behind the corporate firewall; thus, Office Communications Server 2007 is the preferred Web Conferencing solution. This choice helps the bank protect its data, assists with compliance for data security rules, and still provides collaboration tools and virtual meeting space for the organization.

## **Scenario C: Large Technology Enterprise with Diverse Requirements**

A. Datum Corporation is a multinational technology company with a wide portfolio of technology products, including consumer electronics, consumer and business software, and computer peripherals.

The company is evaluating Web conferencing solutions to reduce its currently substantial travel costs. A. Datum Corporation has the core competencies required to deploy, manage, and maintain Web conferencing servers.

The following meetings have been identified as useful candidates for Web conferencing:

- Secure internal-only meetings for senior executives;
- Virtual team meetings with employees throughout the world;
- Virtual team meetings including partners, vendors, and customers;
- Customer presentations with up to 200 participants;
- Shareholder meetings with more than 1,000 participants;
- Product training for partners.

The CIO of A. Datum Corporation must choose between a hosted service solution and a server-based solution for Web conferencing. To do so, the CIO prioritizes the requirements of the company. A. Datum has a number of requirements. For example, a majority of A. Datum's meetings are internal only, which makes A. Datum well suited to the Web conferencing capabilities of Office Communications Server 2007.

The organization also plans to use functionality such as presence awareness and instant messaging in Office Communications Server 2007. Additionally, there are conferencing situations where Live Meeting would provide more appropriate functionality, such as large shareholder meetings and advanced training sessions with partners.

With this diverse scenario, the CIO decides to deploy a hybrid Web conferencing solution using both Office Communications Server 2007 and Office Live Meeting. The single Web-conferencing client supported by both Web conferencing technologies provides the easiest solution.

## **Conclusion**

In today's global economy where companies need to communicate in real time with a multinational customer base, Web conferencing is rapidly becoming a mainstream tool for communication and collaboration. Microsoft is helping businesses meet these requirements with two Enterprise-class solutions: Microsoft Office Live Meeting service and the Web conferencing capabilities available in Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007.

While Microsoft designed and built both Office Communications Server 2007 and Office Live Meeting service using a common conferencing technology platform to ensure a consistent and familiar user experience, there are some important differences between the two Web conferencing products to consider when selecting the optimal solution for your business requirements.

When selecting between these two Web conferencing solutions – one a hosted service and one an on-premise server--there are three factors to consider that have been reviewed in this paper: priorities and resources of the IT department, information policies and compliance needs of the organization,

and Web conferencing feature requirements. We have provided Web conferencing solution guidance in the previous table, which takes into account these three factors and makes recommendations for the optimal solution in order to meet specific business requirements.

## Appendix

The following table shows features of a Web conferencing solution, and how these features are addressed by Live Meeting Standard, Live Meeting Professional, and Office Communications Server 2007.

### Web Conferencing Solution Feature Comparison

Feature	Live Meeting Standard	Live Meeting Professional	Office Communications Server 2007
<b>Connected Organizations</b>			
<b>Host collaborative meetings quickly and cost-effectively</b>			
Streamlined user experience	X	X	X
Support for Web client	X	X	
Single meeting client for on-premise and hosted conferencing	X	X	X
Interactive whiteboard and annotation tools	X	X	X
Shared notes pane	X	X	X
<b>Train distributed employees and partners and conduct events that scale to support large audiences</b>			
Conferencing add-in for Microsoft Office Outlook	X	X	X
Event and class registration		X	
Public events page		X	
Advanced testing and grading		X	
High fidelity recordings	X	X	X
Shared recordings		X	
Personal recordings	X	X	X
Microsoft event services	X	X	
Meeting reports	X	X	
Meeting content storage and management tools	X	X	

Feature	Live Meeting Standard	Live Meeting Professional	Office Communications Server
<b>Engaged Attendees</b>			
<b>Keep attendees engaged with an integrated rich media and conferencing experience</b>			
Rich media presentations	X	X	X
Native live Webcam video	X	X	X
Integrated media experience	X	X	X
Integrated PowerPoint® viewer	X	X	X
Drag and drop upload to view a wide range of document file types	X	X	X
<b>interactive meetings with two-way multi-party video and audio experience</b>			
Panoramic video by Microsoft Office RoundTable™	X	X	X
Integrated PSTN and two-way VoIP audio	X	X	
Audio conference call controls	X	X	X
Speaker indicator	X	X	X
Handout distribution	X	X	X
Virtual Breakout Rooms		X	
<b>Enterprise-Class Reliability</b>			
<b>Web conferencing delivery and support</b>			
Telephone and e-mail support for internal and external meeting attendees	X	X	
Automatic client installation and upgrade	X	X	X
Intranet portal to simplify rollout	X	X	X
<b>Web conferencing service and security</b>			
99.99% historical availability	X	X	
Certified data centers	X	X	
Virus Scanning by Microsoft Forefront™ for Office Communications Server	X	X	

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