ANYTIME & ANYWHERE - EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT VIRTUAL MEETINGS

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Did you know that meetings do not necessarily have to take place in physical meeting rooms anymore?

With advances in technology, it's entirely possible to conduct or participate in a meeting from the comfort of your own home or local coffee shop. This modern style of conference is known as a virtual meeting and is ideal for the increasing numbers of workers who operate on an exclusively remote basis.

Considering how virtual meetings have existed, thus far, on the cutting edge, chances are good that you have a number of relevant queries. Below, we'll be explaining everything you need to know about virtual meetings to help answer any questions about virtual meetings you may have.

What are virtual meetings?

Virtual meetings are alternatives to in-person meetings, where participants take part by way of audio, text, or video. This is done not only to accommodate remote employees, but also to facilitate convenience and expense reduction. Typically, enterprises will conduct virtual meetings via a specific program or application, such as Skype or Google Hangouts.

The appeal of dedicated software for virtual meetings has largely to do with their features. Screen sharing, unlimited participation numbers, cross-platform support, live recording, and HD-quality audio and video are just some examples of what companies find to be valuable.

When it comes down to it, these software features enable convenience and cost-cutting just as much as the concept of virtual meetings does itself. This is especially the case when considering the alternative cost and planning it would take to facilitate an in-person gathering of all relevant persons. Costs for this begin to rise even higher when participants are located in different countries or continents. Taking these factors into consideration, it's easy to see why virtual meetings have gained popularity over the years.

What are the different types of virtual meetings?

Considering how many ways one can engage in a virtual meeting, whether it be video, audio, or text, it should come as no surprise that there are different types of virtual meets as well. Broken into teleconferencing, video conferencing, and web conferencing - the concept of virtual meetings is one that is entirely adjusted to your needs and circumstances.

Teleconferencing

If your internet connection is less than optimal, if you're on the go, or if the virtual meeting will comprise only of a small number of participants, you may want to consider teleconferencing as a group. Taking place exclusively via audio, teleconferencing may take place either over the phone or through VoIP.

Video Conferencing

Due to its inherent interactivity, video conferencing is the standard for virtual meetings. Since it enables participants to both see and hear one another, video conferences are able to take advantage of key features, such as screen sharing, that teleconferencing cannot. Unlike teleconferencing, though, video conferencing requires the use of dedicated software.

Web Conferencing

Unlike teleconferences and video conference, virtual meetings that make use of web conferencing are tied to a specific website that acts as a hub where all communication and file sharing can take place. This is difficult for those wishing to conference while on-the-go, as a stable internet connection and access is necessary.

What are the best practices for virtual meetings?

Shockingly, virtual meetings do not just spring into being, fully organized and functional. Just as with in-person meetings, it will take a certain amount of trial and error to

perfect the practices that ensure an effective and efficient meeting. As such, the following practices will give you an excellent basis to get started.

Assign Roles

By their very nature, virtual meetings are impersonal and rely on seamless technological function. It would be beneficial, therefore, to ensure that everything runs smoothly, while also giving participants a reason to care if things do not. Assigning roles, such as tech expert, leader, and timekeeper, can help to alleviate both issues.

Engage your Audience

Honestly, sometimes meetings can be boring. Unlike in real life, however, virtual meetings allow for easy distraction, since no one will notice. As such, it is important to keep your attendees engaged. Visual Aids, collaborative discussion topics, questionnaires, fast pace presentations, and time limits will all help keep everyone on task and focused.

Be Prepared

There's nothing worse than going into a meeting that was not adequately prepared. In virtual meetings, this is even more unfortunate, as some participants likely had to make special arrangements in order to ensure their attendance. Having a thought-out agenda and a clear purpose will contribute to a prepared and effective meeting.

What are the benefits of virtual meetings?

In order to sell people on any new concept, no matter the context, the best method is to explain how it will be beneficial. Like most of everything, virtual meetings come

with a variety of benefits, any of which would be appealing to organizers and participants alike. Below are the benefits that we think will be most alluring.

Increased Productivity

Unlike traditional meetings, virtual meetings present participants with the ability to multi-task while also paying attention. Therefore, by attending in a remote capacity, not only will time potentially be saved by avoiding unnecessary transit, but more time will ultimately be used on work-related assignments.

Low Cost

Between transportation and use of facilities, In-person meetings cost a lot, both in terms of time and money. Virtual Meetings, conversely, are relatively cost-free, with the only limiting factor being an attendee's internet connection. For companies that host many meetings, virtual meetings can be an easy way to cut down on expenditures.

Greater Attendance

Oftentimes, for a variety of reasons, not everyone invited to an in-person meeting is able to attend. In the case of virtual meetings, however, there's little reason for poor attendance, as participants should be able to join in anytime and from anywhere. As such, virtual meetings make such gatherings accessible to everyone.

How can virtual meetings become more interactive?

If organizers are spending their time and energy to plan out virtual meetings, with an eye towards effective productivity,

then it stands to reason that they want to see their plans come to fruition. Unfortunately, we all know that meetings have a reputation for being dry, boring affairs. In order to rectify this dissonance between goals and potential reality, many meeting organizers make an effort to emphasize interactivity in their plans. Below are a few tips to help make that happen.

Use Video

Just like in school presentations and lectures, visual aids can make even the dullest of topics interesting or memorable. As such, if video features are available in your virtual meeting - try to use them! Face-to-face interactions, screen-sharing, and other collaborative aids can aid in transforming your meeting into one that boasts interactivity.

Casual is the New Formal

Stuffy, formal meetings are relics of the past - they discourage out-of-the-box thinking and are generally not fun to be a part of. For those looking to arrange a modern virtual meeting, try loosening up! Icebreakers, on-the-spot participation, and other deviations from the norm will help make your virtual meeting feel more interactive.

Establish Goals

Virtual meetings, like calculators and GPS navigators, should exist with only a single purpose in mind. This allows meetings to become flexible within that context in order to be both interactive and productive. This is why establishing goals is so important, as otherwise, meetings can become rushed and unfocused.
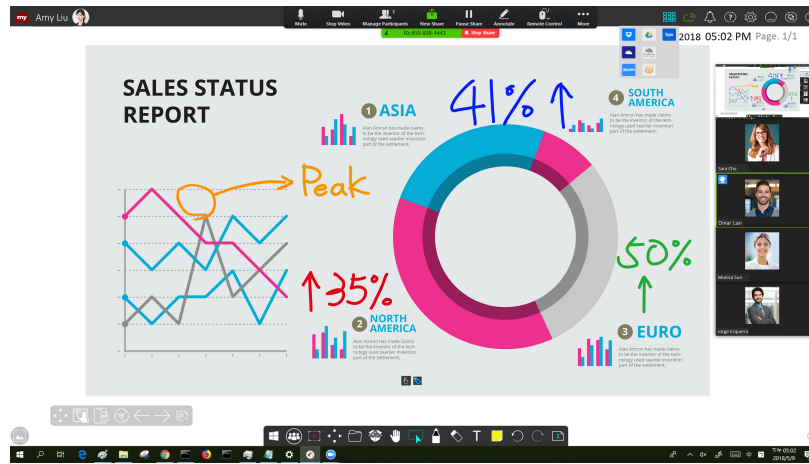
What are popular virtual meeting tools?

 As great as virtual meetings as a concept sounds, it would be nothing without proper execution. This goes for all for virtual meeting variants - teleconferencing, video conferencing, and web conferencing. In any case, glitchy video codecs, lack of features, and regional exclusivity are all possible drawbacks of virtual meeting applications. Luckily, there are several popular virtual meeting tools that have avoided these potential obstacles and have curated highly effective programs. In this lucky pantheon are software options that include *FaceTime*, *Google Hangouts*, *Slack*, *Skype*, *Zoom*, *WebEx*, and *myViewBoard*.
In every successful case, each virtual meeting application offers a suite of features designed to attract an ever-increasing number of users. Chief among these, beyond the simple requirement of basic communication, has to do with the buzzword of the day - collaboration. Great examples of this include:

- **Screen sharing**
- **Digital whiteboard access**
- **File sharing**
- **Cloud storage**
- **Live annotation**