REAL-TIME COLLABORATION THROUGH ONLINE PLATFORMS – 6 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

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Nothing leads to better results than working together. Group projects, both in business and in education — Collaboration is key.

In any project in recent years, a high likelihood exists that certain team members will be operating remotely, whether it be across the city, the country, or the world. As such, real-time collaboration by way of the internet, particularly via online whiteboards, has gained in popularity. With its fair share of advantages and disadvantages, a firm understanding of real-time online collaboration is key for any professional or academic wishing to engage in it.

Real-time collaboration in the context of online whiteboards

In almost every non-English speaking society, it's not uncommon to find a contingent of expatriates wanting to either teach English or engage in the lifestyle of a digital nomad. To merge such work scenarios would be to teach English via the internet. Although this is regarded to be a sort of holy grail within the ESL profession, digital education technology has only recently reached the proper level of viability in the past few years.

Specially referring to platforms that update in real-time, meaning those that update near-instantaneously for all users, regardless of location, digital collaboration has never been more efficient. In the context of education, digital whiteboards have ensured that students and teachers alike can engage in dynamic lessons, using the most effective resources possible, from anywhere in the world. For anyone teaching anywhere, collaboration via online whiteboards has never been better than it is today.

6 advantages of real-time online collaboration

By and large, the use of online whiteboards, particularly when it comes to real-time collaboration, is advantageous for all involved. From both the perspective of the teacher and the student, the benefits are not only strong, but appealing, and will surely be regarded as a selling point. Some of the advantages are as follows:

- **Monetary Savings**
- **Easier Project Management**
- **Speedier Project Completion**
- **Convenient Team Organization**
- **Universal Access**
- **Co-opetition**

1. Monetary Savings

Plane tickets, multiple nights of accommodation, meeting spaces, resource installations - the total, external cost of having an in-person meeting can get quite high, quite quickly. When collaborating in real-time via the internet, however, the total cost is limited to that of having an internet connection. If working out of a coffee shop, for instance, then that cost may go as low as $2. Compared to the alternative, that's quite a lot of savings!

2. Easier project management

Project management is not always the most straightforward of tasks. Long email chains, to-do lists, updating workflows, and storage of resources are just a few tasks that frequently arise therein, which have the capacity to grow to immensely complex proportions. Through real-time collaboration, whether by digital whiteboard or some other platform, these regular project management tasks become much simpler. This achieved by the ability to store all communications, documents, and lists in a single, universally accessible location.

3. Speedier project completion

With easier project management comes faster project completion. With real-time collaboration, inputs, solutions, and decisions can be implemented with ease. Compare that to an analog collaboration process, where agreement regarding problem-solving solutions might take multiple meetings over the course of several days, particularly if far-away time zones are involved in the process. The same goes for run-of-the-mill approvals, feedback, and brainstorming. Collaboration has never been so fast!

4. Convenient team organization

When working or teaching in a collaborative digital environment, those who work together do not necessarily have to be in the same region together. For instance, when teaching English to native Chinese speakers, the teacher could be a resident of Kunming while three of his or her students could be located in Shenzhen, Beijing, and Xiamen.

The same goes for professionals, whose teams might comprise of people located in the United States, Germany, Taiwan, and India. Considering the organization freedom that is allowed by real-time collaboration platforms, teams may be optimized in terms of having the best members possible, considering the subject matter, rather than those who are simply living in convenient regions.

5. Universal access

For just a moment, consider the workaholics, both the academic and professional varieties, of the world. Imagine the panic they once felt when outside of the office and/or classroom, especially for long periods of time. Disconnect from a project on which you have a lot riding can be a very real and disconcerting thing. The was particularly the case when meetings had to either take place in person or via programs exclusive to a workplace server.

Now, online collaboration programs or, notably, real-time digital whiteboards, enable users to access anywhere and anytime. With such universal access available, no one need panic about going on vacation, going out for coffee, or simply leaving their office, ever again.

6. Co-opetition

Beyond small scale collaboration, it's a beautiful aspect of the internet that allows people from all over the world to share and exchange ideas, information, and culture. While this popularly manifests today as Youtube, Facebook, and Instagram, those platforms are not everything. Derived from the hybridization of collaboration and competition, 'co-opetition' refers to how entities may work together to mitigate risk, share knowledge, and facilitate research.

Although this is often used in a business-related context, imagine the possibilities in an education capacity. At present, our digital whiteboards allow teachers to do their jobs without delay. Therein, images, diagrams, lectures, videos, and collaborative activities may be introduced and executed in any number of dynamic ways. Taking that concept forward, 'co-opetition' could enable student-centric projects, as directed by their teacher, to interact with the subject matter in a way that's symbiotic.

6 disadvantages of real-time online collaboration

Admittedly, not everything is perfect. Even the best of the best have a drawback or two. Real-time online collaboration programs are no exception. Having said that, it's up to the discerning consumer to weigh the value they place on the disadvantages and to decide whether they exceed the advantages. To that end, the disadvantages of real-time online collaboration programs are as follows:

- **Groupthink**
- **Breakdowns**
- **International Differences**
- **Personal Isolation**
- **Hidden Costs**
- **Lazy Planning**

1. Groupthink

Sometimes dominant personalities and voices usually direct the flow of conversations and meetings. As a byproduct, others may be suppressed into not speaking up. This social phenomenon is known as groupthink, and it's a problem that can notably arise when using online collaboration platforms, where face-to-face interactions are inherently not always possible.

Therein, by sheer force of will and participation, project planning and overall decision making may be undertaken by only a small number of the collective. By leaving out, or keeping quiet, other members of the team, valuable ideas and opinions may be lost, thus potentially weakening the final product.

2. Breakdowns

As with any technological product, regardless of whether it is hardware or software, glitches and breakdowns are an inevitability. When it comes to online collaboration, particularly that involving real-time digital whiteboards or professional project management platforms, the possibility of breakdowns can be a serious drawback.

If your livelihood, as well as that of the class, company or school, relies on a given project, imagine how devastating a technical or digital breakdown might be. Moreover, the potential for maintenance or upgrade-related downtime is a threat as well. The point is, when looking to invest in an online collaboration tool, be sure to research the reliability of its architecture beforehand.

3. International Differences

The international facilitation that comes with real-time online collaboration is a wonderful thing. Specialists and students originating from all over the globe can come together in the pursuit of business and academia alike. Therein, not only are you engaging in the subject matter at hand, but also in the unique linguistic and cultural aspects of those you work or study with.

However, this benefit is a bit of a double-edged sword. For all the advantages that come with being apart of a multi-cultural team, the possibility for misunderstanding is not insignificant. Cross-cultural communication is an area of study unto itself, and sometimes the efficiency of a team can be hindered as a result. As such, in this instance,

international differences within a team can be considered a disadvantage.

4. Personal isolation

Working or studying remotely, or via the internet, can be an amazing thing. Wake up when you want, eat when you want, and work when you want - for many, it is the ideal work situation. However, when working online, it may become difficult to leave your work at the office. Since we're always connected to the internet, you may soon come to feel that you're always working and that a reasonable work/life balance is a thing of the past. When working in tandem with multiple time zones, this can especially become the case, since may feel like your workday never ends.

To that end, since you're not actually working with people in a live, face-to-face manner, it's entirely possible that you may grow to feel isolated. When engaging in work based on real-time digital collaboration, remember to take your day-to-day wellbeing into consideration!
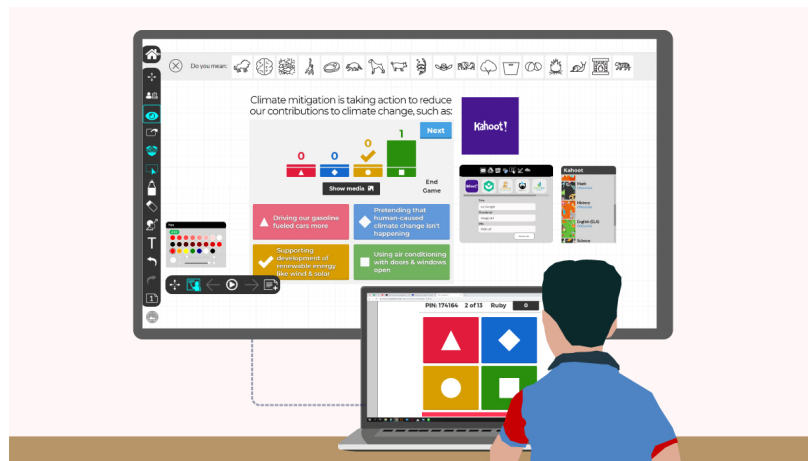
5. Hidden costs

Sometimes, the initial price you pay for a technological product, especially online services, is not the total price you'll pay when all is said and done. Hidden costs, even in the world of online collaboration tools, such as digital whiteboards, are possible. From unstated membership premiums to unneeded user charges, there is a likelihood that you could find your account charged for amounts you find surprising and unacceptable. The moral of the story - make sure to read the small print before confirming your investment.

6. Lazy Planning

Complacency in the face of technological aid is by no means a new phenomenon. When your Roomba cleans your room, why vacuum? When Uber will deliver your food, why cook?

This holds true even in the context of project management. In that regard, certain project leaders may feel that since they possess the tools and benefits of an online collaboration platform, that organizations and oversight may be no longer as essential. Even in the case of teachers, real-time digital whiteboards may supplant, in their minds, the need for a focused and well-thought-out lesson plan. Just because these tools make your life easier, don't forget to keep up your hard work!

An Online Whiteboard That Emphasizes Real-Time Collaboration

There are several online whiteboards on the market from an equally varying number of developers and distributors. The addition of real-time emphasis, while relatively new, is already growing in popularity. To meet that demand, ViewSonic has just announced the launch of ViewSonic QuickBoard for both education and business-related applications. As an extension of the already-existing myViewBoard infrastructure, QuickBoard takes universal

access to an all-new level, with nearly every platform offering compatibility.

In practice, QuickBoard makes every teaching scenario dynamic and fun for all involved - From in-class use to those professionals participating in online seminars. From automatic team distribution to spontaneous pop quizzes, the teacher's job has never been so engaging. The same goes for QuickBoard's ability to integrate and search for videos and images at an instantaneous whim. With an emphasis on flexibility and interactivity, the possibilities for a collaborative and informative lesson, in both business and education, just became endless. For more information, please visit myViewBoard's education portal.

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