Tools for Video Communication

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	WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the use of various video communication tools. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Video Communication Needs

The tools and platforms available to you for video communication generally work in more or less the same ways, though the details of features and benefits will vary somewhat. It is strong technology skills that will help you determine which tool is best for the job.

To conduct a call or meeting by video, you must first make sure you have the necessary equipment:

- A camera
  - Most computers have cameras built in.
  - You can also purchase a separate webcam. Webcams vary widely in price, from about $20 to a couple hundred dollars. Reading online reviews of webcams can help you make a choice based on your needs.
- Audio input and output
  - You should make sure the computer you plan to use has a working speaker, so you can hear others, and a working microphone, so others can hear you.

Videoconferencing is generally accomplished using a third-party application such as Skype, Zoom, WebEx, or video features in a multi-feature platform like Slack or Amazon Chime. Each offers slightly different features or different ways of accessing common features.
That said, when you are choosing a platform, consider the following parameters:

- Is this a presentation mostly led by one person, or a collaborative meeting?
  - If attention is going to be on mostly one person, consider how the video windows are arranged.
- Will the video be used only to see each other's faces, or to show products, samples, or demos?
  - If you're just looking at faces, most platforms will work just fine. If you are showing or demonstrating products, you may want to seek out the platform with the highest resolution image so that participants can follow without any pixelation or loss of sharpness.
- Does the audio sync well with the image?
  - Some older platforms can have issues with the image getting ahead of the sound. This is distracting to

watch and can lead to people unintentionally interrupting or talking over each other.

- Does it work well on tablets and smartphones as well as on computers? *Can participants switch among devices if needed?

2. Screen-Sharing/Web-Sharing

Sometimes the most important aspect of your meeting or conversation will be the ability to see someone's computer screen. You may deliver a presentation this way, share sales figures, play a video, or mark up design prototypes. In these instances, screen-sharing is your best friend.

Several of the platforms already mentioned - WebEx, Join.Me, Slack, Google Hangouts - as well as others like GoToMeeting and Highfive offer screen-sharing options.

When choosing a screen-sharing platform, there are a few things to consider:

- What is the main reason for your screen-sharing?
- If you are simply showing PowerPoint slides or going over a spreadsheet, most platforms work equally well.
- If you intend to allow participants to mark up what you are showing or copy and paste into a shared file, you will need to make sure your platform does that.
  - Google Hangouts and Amazon Chime are two platforms that offer these features.
- Will more than one person share their screen? Most platforms allow you to switch among the call participants' screens, but some make this easier than others.

3. Multi-Feature Online Platforms

So far, we've been seeing names like Slack, Google Hangouts, and Amazon Chime pop up in several categories. That's because these platforms offer a variety of features in order to create a complete virtual office environment.

In addition to communication features like voice, video, and screen-sharing, these applications also facilitate scheduling, instant messaging, file-sharing, and collaboration. They are also continually adding and upgrading features.

Chances are, if your company or team uses a tool like this, you will have been using it since day one to communicate with your immediate coworkers. Exploring the additional tools available is a worthwhile use of your time, especially if you are primarily using technology to communicate with people who are already part of your team.

Here are a few important benefits of using one platform for all your technological communications:

- You can search the whole environment for a specific item.
  - In Google Hangouts, if you don't remember whether you talked with Beth about Easter promotions via email or instant message (IM), you can simply search "Beth Easter," and get results from all message channels.
- Recording is easy.

- If you are editing a display design as a group, and you want to keep track of how and why you made specific decisions, you can do so, usually with one click. Recordings are then sharable.
- Sticking with one platform for all internal/team communication and collaboration means that you and your colleagues need to learn only one piece of software and one set of commands.

If you want more information about these platforms as a whole - not just the voice, video, and screen-sharing aspects - there are informative videos on YouTube that go into varying levels of depth on specific features. Just be sure you watch fairly recent ones since these platforms are constantly in upgrade mode.

📋 **SUMMARY**

In this lesson, you learned about the uses and functions of various video communication tools. **Video communication needs** begin with a quality camera and audio inputs and outputs. Beyond that, your technological skills, the skills of your audience, and the parameters of your video call or conference will determine what sort of features you require. Some features to be on the lookout for include **screen sharing/web-sharing functions** and **multi-feature online platforms** that can integrate workplace tasks.

Best of luck in your learning!

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