

Video conferencing has always been an important part of day to day life for some businesses since the introduction of Skype in 2003. But with the current issues affecting business from the COVID-19 outbreak, most of us are now accommodating remote working and embracing all things video conferencing.

We take a look at the pros and cons of the most popular video conferencing platforms out there. We also include our own hints and tips for stepping up your video conferencing game, making better use of light and sound, and how you can work on ensuring an element of brand consistency.



As working from home becomes a more common practice, and with company culture to maintain both now and in the future, having a high quality video conferencing system has become more important than ever.

A. The Platforms

Depending on your objectives, there is a platform out there for everyone. We are going to focus on the platforms that allow some functionality and features for free. All of which come with the ability to invite attendees, to set privacy with room codes, allow screen sharing and share with your network.

Google Hangouts

If you are a Gmail and Chrome user then Google Hangouts could be for you. Enterprise-level features meetings of up to 250 people, recording to Google Drive and is currently available for free. Participants don't need an account to join your call. It has an easy to use interface that allows multiple views as well as a live chat function.



Up to 100 participants
256-bit TLS encryption
40-minute limit for
larger meetings

Zoom

If you are on LinkedIn then I'm sure you have had the adjective 'Zoom' added to your vocabulary as a term for video conference. Zoom is the platform that has made the most gains. Its multi-user interface allows for a whole business to be on one screen and for externals to access it easily. It includes a whiteboard interface and emoji based reactions. Questions have been raised in the media over the security of the platform, with that being it only major negative point.



Up to 100 participants
256-bit TLS encryption
40-minute limit for
larger meetings

Skype

Skype is very much a household name now since its launch in 2003. With personal and business versions available, the cross-platform app also supports group video calling for up to 50 people. Skype can also be used in a browser, which is great for chatting with people without the app installed – you can simply invite them to join in using their email address.



Cross-platform support
Can be used in browser
Live subtitles
50-participant limit

Hints and Tips

Once we have all got used to working this way there comes a time when we have to shake the silhouetted image of ourselves, or the messy kitchen backdrop and present ourselves in-line with our brand and values. We have put a few tips together to up the appearance of your professional video conferencing.



A. Your Professional Branding

Now branding is much more than just a colour scheme and a logo, it is essentially the external perception of us wrapped up in an identity. As a result, branding your conferences is as simple as making it look professional by following the advice below. Beyond that, think about lanyards or name tags. Business banners can act as a good backdrop, as well as hide the pile of cables in the corner of the room. Branded merchandise like cups or water bottles can be used to give your conferences some brand exposure. Remember that brand is how people see you, and at the moment that's live in your living room.

B. The Setting

As we mentioned above the setting or location of the call is an important part of maintaining your professional brand. We advise finding somewhere with a strong wifi signal for starters. It's no good having a fancy backdrop if your wifi is rubbish. If possible, find a room with good natural light and a stable surface for your device. Try to clear away any clutter and to create a clear space behind you. Some depth between you and the back of the room helps the eye focus on you. Show some personality; pictures, bookshelves, plants, after all it is your home. Choose somewhere quiet away from day to day distractions if possible (yes, we mean the kids). Once you have your location, now it's time to make you shine!



C. Your Lighting

This is important. A few rules. Don't sit with your back to the window. This will turn you into a shadow. Instead put a desk in front of the window and face out. You'll find it's a much more enjoyable way to work, plus the natural light will increase the quality of your image. If you can't use natural light, 'ring-lights' are available for as little as £10-12 on Amazon. These use a USB and tripod or clip to give you more forward facing light. We suggest, if possible, using multiple light sources either side of your face to minimise shadows.

Light can also play a part in the background of your scene. Consider purchasing coloured LED light strips that can add some brand colour to the occasion.

D. Your Camera

Most laptops come with a built in camera these days, and although these can be great, to really up your game we suggest looking into an external wifi or USB camera that you can position anywhere. This will free up where you can place your camera, as well meaning no more shots looking up your nose! It will also improve the general quality of your image.

Filters can be used to enhance the colours and backdrop of your streams. Depending on the platform you are using, apps like Snap Camera and OBS amongst others offer some professional (if not humorous) touches.

E. Hearing Others

Now this might not seem like an issue to you, but if you use the speakers on your device, ultimately everyone else on the call can hear it too, with a slight (annoying) delay. To combat this, we suggest listening to your calls and conferences using headphones. These can be Bluetooth, wifi or wired, and will ensure the conversation doesn't start an echo, or worse, generate feedback. Headphones with a built in mic (which is most smartphone headphones) will be of greater use, as we will find out next.

F. Hearing You

If you heeded our advice above you have a pair of headphones with a mic. Case closed.

If you haven't, then you might want to look at an external mic. The same reason really for why you would use an external camera. To up the quality and to be able to locate the microphone on the person talking, not laying flat in the laptop in front of you. This can be good if the room (or house) is not so quiet. Also remember, the mute button is your friend. Save those 'clearing your throat', 'secretly eating crisps' and 'shouting at the dog' moments for the mute.

GET MORE CONTENT

Resources for digital skills and businesses planning.

Get in touch via any of our giants.

Or get hold of Lee directly at lee@sleepinggiantmedia.co.uk | 01303 240715

Sleeping **GIANT** media

