



BRIEFCASE

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By Jeffery D. Zbar

THE NEW FACE TIME

GONE ARE THE DAYS OF HECTIC AND EXPENSIVE TRAVEL. TODAY, PCS WITH BROADBAND INTERNET CONNECTIONS CAN REPLACE IN-PERSON GATHERINGS.

Paul Holstein has sat in his share of seminars. He's hosted events, and traveled to conferences.

Then several years ago, he participated in a Webinar, a seminar conducted over the Internet. He immediately saw the benefit, and realized the future of "seminars" had changed.

"The solution can save businesses money and time, and help employees stay productive," says Holstein, 43, senior vice president with CableOrganizer.com, a Fort Lauderdale-based online retailer of cable, wire and cord management solutions. "I realized the benefits a long time ago."

Web conferencing will be a \$1.37 billion business in 2008, the Gartner research firm notes, and should continue to grow almost 20 percent through 2010.

Current market leaders WebEx, Citrix GoToWebinar and Microsoft Live will continue to lead the pack, alongside a bevy of upstart competitors. Even document company Adobe has entered the

fray, as has IBM with its Lotus Sametime Unyte service and AT&T's Interwise.

Webinars can be fairly simple to set up and run. As a "Web-based" or hosted solution, typically no software is downloaded. For either a one-time fee or a monthly contract (ranging from \$39 a month to \$75 a session, depending on the service), the host can schedule an event, brand email invitations with logos and photos, distribute the invites to several or thousands of participants. Depending on the service, invitees can call in via toll or toll-free lines, log on to the Web-based service using a specific pass code, and listen and watch quietly—or actively participate.

With most products, the host can record the session to be replayed or sold in the future. Some also feature paid moderators, who run the show while the host focuses on the event.

BASIC BENEFITS

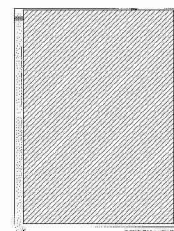
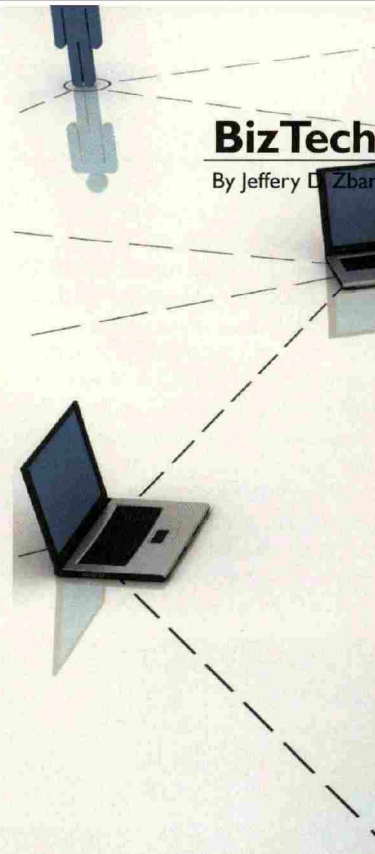
The benefits can be basic: When people cannot be in the same location, they can use their PCs with broadband Internet

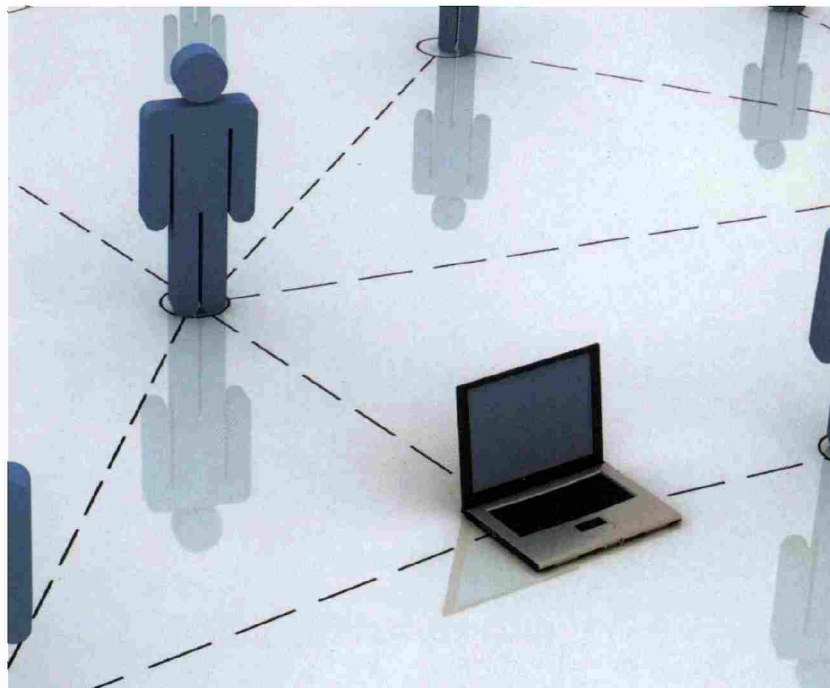
connections to replace in-person gatherings—while still enjoying "face to face" familiarity. Gone are hectic and expensive travel and even a company's growing carbon footprint borne of business trips.

Consider one recent use: Soldiers from the Massachusetts Army National Guard deployed in Iraq participated in a conference hosted over Citrix Online's GoTo-Meeting. From their makeshift classroom crafted from a utility tent, the soldiers learned business tips in a Webinar hosted by the Boston-based Northeast Veterans Business Resource Center.

To that end, the most measurable motivators behind using Web conferencing are the "high cost of business travel and restrictions on people's movements due to security or public health concerns," says David Mario Smith, a researcher with Gartner Inc.

It helps that the technology is widely available. Beyond the big brands, smaller niche players include such applications as LogMetn and Crosslink.com. Each brings the benefit of collaboration for distance





or e-learning, or online discussion and marketing programs.

THE 'YOUTUBE' EFFECT

The ubiquity of online video and audio is helping push acceptance of Web-based seminars. Call it the "YouTube" effect, notes Grace Kim, a senior marketing manager with WebEx Event Center, which serves the events market, and WebEx Meeting Center, which provides a collaboration and meetings platform.

"Companies are linking video with content," she says. "The market is very ready for that video plus audio presentation of content."

The market is maturing. More users are being drawn by applications focused on voice-over Internet Protocol (VoIP), imbedded video cameras and microphones in PCs and laptops, as well as document-centric conferencing, more robust user interfaces, and even feature-rich offerings from the free services, Gartner notes.

"This is a growing solution that allows small and medium businesses to be more

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productive and competitive in their space today," says Beth Gilbert, a manager with GoToWebinar, part of Citrix Online, which recently was named 2008 North American Web Conferencing Company of the Year by research firm Frost & Sullivan.

"This allows small businesses to compete with large companies in ways they've never been able to before," Gilbert says. "They can reach thousands of people, where even trade shows might not have helped them stand out like this." ■

HOW TO GIVE A GOOD MEETING: PLANNING AHEAD FOR A BETTER WEBINAR

A meeting is not just a meeting—especially when it's held over the Internet. From poor planning to ill-prepared presenters to distractions in the background, Webinars can invite chaos—and result in a bad event. Instead, address details in advance to ensure success. To run an effective Webinar, plan ahead, says Webinar veteran Paul Holstein. He suggests hosts:

- **Plan in advance.** Lay out a schedule for the event, and invite presenters and participants early.
- **Advise participants to prepare.** Tell them to download or load early any software— from the Webinar software, or Java or flash applications to view the presentation. Log in early to ensure the software and phone connection are working.
- **Be quiet.** From noisy locations or calls placed from cell phones, distractions abound. Ask participants to call from a landline if possible, to turn off call waiting, close their office or conference room door, and use the mute button if not actively talking.
- **Shut down other applications.** Holstein recently was on a Webinar whose host had email and IM alerts pop up on her screen. Not only were they distracting, they can slow the application. Moreover, some content can be proprietary or confidential to the sender.
- **Run a bigger screen.** Remember: Viewers often are seeing your screen, and 800 by 600 resolution might not suffice.
- **Pace yourself.** People not comfortable giving presentations tend to talk fast— even faster than the screen can refresh to show new content. Slow the presentation to ensure participants can absorb your content—and the onscreen presentation can keep pace. "Remember the other people aren't seeing it as fast," Holstein says, "and they're often seeing it for the first time."
- **Engage your audience.** If it's a small group, ask questions and invite discussion to ensure they're engaged. Often participants' minds can wander, Holstein says. "Keep them on their toes."