# OPAL: Online Meetings and Events Using Web Conferencing

A talk given by Sarah Handgraaf,
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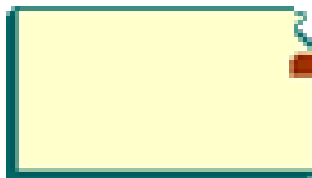
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Goals of This Session

- Overview of Web Conferencing Systems
  - Why libraries and other organizations should consider web conferencing systems
  - The ways groups communicate
  - The functions of web conferencing systems
- Types of Online Events
- Tips and Techniques: promotion, production, archiving
- Potential Future Developments
- Q&A and Discussion

The Main Points

- Web conferencing systems are an affordable and effective way for groups to communicate.

- Web conferencing systems were around before the Library 2.0 movement was cool.

- At present, web conferencing systems are not receiving much use in librarianship.

- Libraries and library-related organizations should use web conferencing systems more than they currently do.

How Groups Communicate

- Asynchronous
  - Not "live"
  - Not "real-time"
  - Email, snail-mail, journal articles, books, etc.
- Synchronous
  - Live or in real-time
  - Not necessarily in-person

Groups Meet in Various Ways

- Planned, formal meetings
- Informal, impromptu meetings
- Workshops
- Symposia
- Conferences
- Public Events
- Confabs
- Happenings
- Raves

Live Communication Options

- In-person (face-to-face)

- Telephone conference calls

- Video conferencing

- Web conferencing

- Virtual world meetings, such as in Second Life

ROCK. BRASILIANO

Web Conferencing Compared to Other Meeting Modes

- Compared to In-Person Meetings, Web Conferencing is…
  - Not as much non-verbal communication
  - As easy (easier?) to share documents
  - Easier to multi-task
  - Easier to record and archive the meeting
  - Generally less expensive
- Compared to Telephone Conference Calls, Web Conferencing is…
  - Much richer mode of group communication
  - Visual communication options (presentation slides, web, etc.)
  - Less expensive
- Compared to Virtual Worlds Meetings, Web Conferencing is…
  - Easier to record, co-browse, show slides, etc.
  - Lower technology specifications

Benefits of Web Conferencing

1. Inexpensive, easy to learn, and easy to use.
2. Avoids the time and travel expenses of attending in-person meetings.
3. Integrates communication via voice, text chatting, co-browsing, and document sharing.
4. Easy to record online meetings and events, for time-shifting, archiving, podcasting, etc.
5. Supports multiple types of online "meetings": small workshops, conference calls, large public events, conferences, reference services, etc.
6. Software is Section 508/ADA compliant

Web Conferencing Functions

- Text Chatting (public and private)
- Voice-over-IP
- Video-over-IP
- Co-Browsing
- Presenting slides, documents, spreadsheets...
- Application/Desktop Sharing
- Whiteboarding
- Polling and testing
- Recording

Public Program Possibilities

- Book and Genre Discussions
- Lectures
- Introduce a digital collection
- Author interviews
- Poetry readings and recitations
- Artist interviews
- Training and orientation sessions
- Musical performances

Tips and Techniques

- Make the speaker comfortable.
- Book discussions don't draw well.
- Genre discussions draw better.
- Informal generally is better than formal.
- Encourage people to participate.
- Don't lock down the functions of the room.
- Allow people to see who else is participating.
- Allow questions to be expressed at any time.

Usability and Accessibility

- Minimum and optimal technical specs
- Installing software (if necessary)
- Initial learning and becoming acclimated
- Accessibility for blind and low-vision users
- Accessibility for the deaf and the hearing impaired

Web Conferencing Options

- Hosted or locally loaded
- Dozens (hundreds?) of companies
- Unilateral agreements
- Consortial agreements
- Open-source options
  (free as in free kittens, not as in free drinks)

A Smattering of Systems

- Audability
- Dim Dim (open source)
- Elluminate
- Horizon Wimba (used by WebJunction's Life Space)
- iVocalize
- Live Meeting from Microsoft
- tcConference from Talking Communities
  (used by OPAL)
- WebHuddle (open source)
- WebEx

A Smattering of Services

- Click University from Special Libraries Assoc.

- Education Institute (Canada and U.S.)

- Live Space from WebJunction

- OPAL (Online Programs for All)

- SirsiDynix Institute

- URLearning from Library Journal (moribund?)

OPAL Organizational Membership Information

- Membership year can begin at any time, and new members may join at any time.

- $500 per year for a 25-seat room, plus access to the larger communal rooms.

- Rooms are available 24/7.

- OPAL organizational memberships can be shared by two or more organizations.

Administrative Modules

- Open and close the online room
- Configure the general layout of the room.
- Customize the color scheme, logos, etc.
- Manage permissions
- Change the default webpage
- Change the quality of the audio (and video)
- Usage statistics

Recording Questions

- Who is empowered to make a recording?
- Where does the recording reside?
- What is included in the recording?
- What types of files are created?
- Can the files be unbundled?
- Can the files be converted?

Archiving and Podcasting

- Editing the metadata
- Organizing the archive
- Usage trends
  - Archived programs are used much more than the live online attendance (time shifting is as important as place shifting)

Challenges of Web Conferencing

- Crowded marketplace with many choices
- Rapidly evolving marketplace
- Most web conferencing services require a software plug-in
- Mac and Unix support can be unreliable
- Problems and constraints are not infrequent

Challenges of Web Conferencing (continued)

- Different operating systems
- Different networking environments
- Security and firewall issues
- Training
- Tech Support
- Announcing and promoting online programs (esp. to the general public)

Key Issues

- Online "vs" in-person, phone, teleconferencing, and virtual
- Live versus pre-recorded
- Professional development programs versus public programs
- Worldwide audience potential
- Participatory programs

Gazing Into the Future

- Participating live without actually being in the online room (e.g., TC just announced a Facebook app)

- Proliferation of "combo" events (e.g., in-person and online)

- Web conferencing may squeeze out telephone conference calls

- Virtual world meetings may squeeze out web conferencing online events

- There's no substitute for in-person meetings

- The cost of in-person meetings will continue to rise

Thank you for your time and attention