Zoom Alternatives

Zooming seems to be a frequently used verb these days. Certainly, in the early days of scrambling for technologies to keep everyone connected as workforces immediately had to go remote it made sense to consider this platform for collaboration. However, because of security concerns which have been documented in the news and scalability challenges to maintain capacity there may be alternatives to some of their offerings worth considering.

Collaboration Considerations

The main service offered by Zoom is their collaboration service that encompasses audio, web, and video conferencing. Generally speaking, the web and video technologies tend to be similar in their features and functionality across the board. However, because this tends to be "collaborative" in nature it might not have the features you need to really customize the interface into more of a webinar, presentation-style meeting. The other complaint we hear is regarding the audio connections. Most of their connections run over VOIP and the internet can be unstable causing sound quality issues. You can pay for "Audio Conferencing Options" to use dial-in numbers but those "fee based" rates tend to be higher compared to more traditional plans. Being without an internet connection, though infrequent in today's world does happen (i.e. if the power is out) so having traditional PSTN audio conferencing as a backup is important to keep everyone connected.

I think the biggest challenge that IT, Telecom, Administration, executives, and other departments face when it comes to these technological solutions is support. Zoom tends to rely on a completely DIY experience through an intuitive interface, but sometimes when you're being relied on to support the service you need a Business Technology Expert to provide one-on-one consultation. If the goal is simply collaboration with an intuitive interface, then consider Cisco WebEx ™ Teams which offers an intuitive interface for meeting controls, is a market-share leader, and includes CCA (phone) audio in addition to VOIP. There are also smartboards and other hardware technologies that would be similar to "Zoom Conference Rooms" which can be implemented to expand and build out your Cisco environment.

Business phone in the box

There is also Zoom Phone which is an enterprise cloud phone solution since there is a shift to more cloud-based vs. on premise solutions. The challenge can again be a lack of support with implementation since it is something you buy and maintain through the internet. Keeping everyone connected is definitely not something you want to leave with an internet-based ticket system. This does not tend to be a one-size-fits-all application when you're talking about keeping an entire staff connected remotely. Another issue is that when using legacy systems, the integration between the collaboration platform and the business phone platform can be clunky. Having SIP already integrated eliminates this problem. The important thing here is having options to choose from and customize such as a Business Phone System as they offer or something more robust like Contact Center.

And in the Virtual Event Space…

Managed webinars and Events are other platforms that they've recently started to foray into given the remote nature of events today. Based on their online description of webinars and events it appears that generally they'd prefer you use the technologies in the passive environment they're designed for with you controlling everything. However, if your events tend to be high profile or have specific dynamics this tends to need more management and a more robust environment to customize. As mentioned above if you need to expand the connection capabilities to include managed event audio conferencing in tandem with the event it doesn't appear that is an option. Additionally, their pricing model for this service doesn't seem to include the "consulting fees" which also seem to have several limitations on what's included.

The Synopsis

Keep in mind too that Zoom is still focused purely on collaboration so you may at least need technologies to augment, if not replace it. Things like Safety Services and all-in-one business phone systems that can be integrated with Teams or Hoot for example. Or maybe something outside of these environments to keep everyone connected such as Mass Notification Services. Staying up to date on your entire technology stack will help ensure you have all the tools necessary to keep everyone connected and safe.

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