

# comparing software for network collaboration

Definition		Software Examples	Minimum Software Cost	Supports Real-Time Discussions	Easy to Setup	Easy to Use	Centrally Stores Documents	Archives Conversations	Structures Conversations	Fosters Personal Relationships
<b>Informal Conversations and Presentations</b>										
Conference Call	Multiple callers on one phone line	Freeconferencecall.com	Free	●	●	●	—	—	—	●
Video Conferencing	Conference call with a video display component	WebEx Hardware solutions	\$	●	○	○	—	—	—	●
Online Conferencing	Conference call with an online component (slides, documents, videos and/or demos)	GoToMeeting WebEx	\$	●	●	●	○	—	○	●
<b>Information Sharing</b>										
Email Discussion List	Email group that lets participants easily email everyone in the group	Yahoo Groups Electric Embers	Free	—	●	●	○	○	—	●
Existing Social Networking Sites	Online networking sites where users can create profiles and connect with others	Facebook MySpace	Free	—	●	○	○	—	—	●
Collaborative Documents	Users share and edit documents online, either in real-time or over time	Google Docs	Free	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Message Board	Online forums focused around questions and answers	vBulletin phpBB	Free	—	●	●	○	●	●	●
<b>Long Term Structured Collaborations</b>										
Online Project Management Tool	Users share documents, calendars, tasks, and structured conversations	Basecamp Central Desktop	\$	—	○	○	●	●	●	○
Online Community	Users share profiles, documents, calendars, message boards, and more.	Ning KickApps	\$	—	○	●	●	●	●	●
Wiki	Collaborative website, where all who can view can also edit	Confluence MediaWiki	Free	—	○	○	●	●	●	○
Blog Network	Community of linked blogs where users interact with posts and feedback	WordPress TypePad	Free	—	○	○	○	●	●	●

KEY: ● Excellent ● Reasonable ○ With Difficulty — Not Available \$ = Less than \$20 a month

# comparing software for network collaboration



## Minimum Software Cost

None of these tools are very expensive – many are free, and others start at less than \$20 per month or so. Here, we look at the minimum you could possibly pay, but more robust options could be substantially more expensive.

## Discussions in Real Time

For some conversations, it's critical to have everyone together at once. But in other situations – for instance, to accommodate different schedules or time zones – it can be useful to let participants think and weigh in at their convenience.

## Ease of Setup

Some of these collaboration methods require almost no setup – just pick up a phone or fill out a quick screen and you're ready to go. Others require days or weeks of planning, especially to define the processes needed to ensure successful collaboration.

## Participant Ease of Use

The easier a system and process is for your participants, the more likely they'll actually use it. Don't underestimate the work needed to train users and get them to buy-in on software that requires them to use unfamiliar tools or change their current processes.

## Centrally Stores Documents

If you want to create or share documents across your team, it can be useful to have a central place to store them all. A number of methods let you post links or share files, but fewer help you organize or find them again later.

## Archives Conversations

In a year from now, will you have any idea why you made a certain decision? A tool with solid archiving and documentation features lets you to store conversations and then find them again later.

## Structures Conversations

The ability to collect all discussion about a particular topic in one place, or to break down a discussion into component parts, can be useful to those looking for tools to help in gathering input and making decisions.

## Fosters Personal Relationships

Some methods help you share relevant background information and hold discussions that really feel like conversations. Others prioritize process over relationships, and make it harder to get to know your fellow participants.

NOTE: All options outlined can be set up to allow access to group members only.

## For More Information

### At Idealware

[www.idealware.org](http://www.idealware.org)

- Six Views of Project Management Software
- A Few Good Email Discussion List Tools
- A Few Good Online Conferencing Tools
- Using Wikis for Internal Documentation
- A Few Good Tools for Sharing Files with Distributed Groups
- Characteristics of Successful Online Communities

### At TechSoup

[www.techsoup.org](http://www.techsoup.org)

- Nonprofits Share Their Wiki Success Stories
- Determining Your Social Network Needs
- Overcome the Challenges of Distance with Free Online Tools
- Using Message Boards to Build Community
- Virtual Community-Building for Nonprofit Organizations

Developed by:

  causeCOMMUNICATIONS

