

Online Event Solutions for LIS Professionals

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Abstract

Technology has changed the way people learn, communicate, and conduct events. This article is about web conference and various similar tools, their features and uses. To avoid mix up between concepts like web conference, webinars, web meetings, web chats and so on, a more generic term "Online event" is used. An attempt is made to compare select online event tools in detail. Points to remember while selecting suitable tool are explained. The possibilities of putting these tools to use by library professionals are also discussed. A check list for library professionals on how to conduct online events and how to participate in them are also provided.

Keywords: *Web conference; Webinar; Online events; Information Technology for Librarianship; Communication technology; Video conference; Web talk.*

1. Introduction

The way people communicate and conduct events has undergone a drastic transformation since the advent of information technology. Web conferences and meetings have been around for a long time and are accepted as common methods of communication. Their evolution started as popular chat programmes, then to more versatile solutions to conduct larger events and finally to mega scale virtual meeting environments (Han & Liao, 2018). Several software tools have been in use for this purpose. Some of these tools were exclusively for this, while others were an extension or part of existing social media platforms. These events can be web conferences, web meetings, web talks, web seminars, web trainings, web classrooms, and so on. In order to cover all of them and avoid ambiguity, they can be brought under a generic term 'online events'. Online events, also known as virtual events are events with a specific date, time, and agenda but which take place in a virtual space rather than a physical one. They include both live and on-demand presentations and, in many cases, give people the opportunity to interact with other event attendees in a web-based virtual environment (Walters, n. d.).

The early online event tools were provided by the companies that manufactured the computer hardware. These were video conference tools. These were initially intended for connecting and conducting meetings, interviews and so on between two locations. Another type of online tool was the web chat, offered by the developers of social media as add on. These were basically intended

to engage the users of the social media and to allow them to communicate to each other.

If we look at the features offered by the early generation of online event tools, most of them had very limited features compared to their present version. In due course, several tools have emerged and tried to capture the market. Most of them have attempted to attract the business and industry as customers. However, in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, these tools have been widely put to use by the academia too, in a very widespread manner.

2. Online Events

Web conferencing is customarily alluded to "one-to-many" communications. This included introductions, preparing, and online courses. People could take an interest by means of talk or "hand-raising" yet the moderator was the key communicator. Conversely, video conferencing customarily alluded to vis-à-vis associations between equivalent members, ordinarily two individuals or a small gathering. Communication technology supports geographically distributed activity. Education, business, services, governance or any other sector, in the current globalized environment, online event tools are going to help in facing challenges and showing the way forward. (Liukkunen & Markkula, 2012)

The dividing line between web conferencing programming and video conferencing programming is obscuring. Web conferencing no longer alludes just to calls with a solitary moderator. The term currently incorporates bunch conversations, 1:1 gatherings, and video calls. Most

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web based gathering sellers offer both customary web conferencing highlights (e.g., screen sharing, introductions to huge gatherings, meeting balance) and conventional video conferencing highlights (e.g., two-way video and sound). The importance of “video conferencing” has likewise extended with the goal that now one can utilize web conferencing and video conferencing reasonably conversely and look into a similar programming.

Many online event solutions are available. Some are personal tools, like Google Meet and Zoho. Others are focused on small businesses, including WebEx, Adobe Connect and Microsoft Teams. For paid plans, web and video conferencing software usually priced according to number persons and features may vary. Similar to using multimedia tools in the normal face-to-face meetings for enhanced effect, now a vast array of multimedia tools are available for use along with the online event tools for providing a better event experience for the participants. (Buckley & Smith, 2007).

Free online event tools (and complementary plans of paid items) may have a few impediments. This may be in the form of lower video/sound quality, less highlights, and limitations on the capacity of participants. Premium versions normally have more features, functions and security. Be that as it may, they can be cost-restrictive for littler organizations, particularly in the event that online gatherings are just required now and, at that point, by a couple of people.

Online event tools have become effective tools for communication and collaboration. These solutions have evolved over a period of time based on the needs of the users and provide state-of-the-art features for and comfortable meeting experience, simultaneously with strong security and encryption (Barra Arias et al., 2011). Online event tools have been around for quite some time now. In the education sector, studies suggest that majority of graduate students would prefer to attend a course that is a healthy mix of web conference lecture and text based instruction (Islam, 2019). Students feel greatly benefitted through such a hybrid instruction method.

Since they are very much put to use, these online event tools also need to be constantly evaluated and measured systematically from time to time. This will ensure that these tools are useful for the users and provide the content, features and facilities as per the need to the users (Santoso, 2017). Technology solutions such as WebQual and so on may be used for the evaluation of online event tools.

3. Online Event Solutions

Web conferencing programming permits members to direct or go to gatherings by means of the web. This is

otherwise called web based gathering programming or once in a while essentially video conferencing itself. It empowers remote gatherings dependent on VoIP, online video, texting, document sharing, and screen sharing.

Web and video conferencing devices have gotten major to what number of associations direct business, training, or some other segment. The product empowers remote workers, clients, and accomplices to associate effectively and frequently.

3.1 Uses of Online Event Tools

- Specific uses for these software include:
- Organizing workshops / Conferences / demos and training
- Presentations / webinars / web talk / lectures
- Meetings (group and 1-on-1)

3.2 Advantages / Benefits

The top three benefits of using online event software are:

- Enhanced communications
- Reduced travel costs
- Increased efficiency

4. Features

These online event tools have made attending and organizing events easier than ever before. The developers are adding several features regularly to provide the sense of feeling similar to attending an event in the real world. (Islam, 2019)

4.1 Audio and video quality

Web conferencing programming should have audio and video conferencing. Sound and video quality is absolutely critical to web conferencing programming. Clients need to feel like they are having credible up close and personal discussions with hosts / presenters, and quality video is significant of that purpose. Apart from the quality of webcam or mic, the product itself should be helpful to improve the nature of event experience, for example, sound crossing out, auto-quiet for non-talking members, etc.

4.2 Screen sharing

Speakers should be able to show their presentation slides to participants. Screen sharing permits presenter/ speaker to show their screen with other gathering members. As online gatherings become increasingly community-oriented, this is an unquestionable requirement

for most participants. Screen sharing must be of high quality, simple to turn on and close.

4.3 Multi-Device Support

Individuals have occupied existences, so web conferencing programming has advanced to stay aware of the ever-changing manners by which representatives draw in with their work. Clients need to have the option to organize or participate in web gatherings from their personal computers, workstations, cell phones, and tablets. Also, for convenience, portable forms of web conferencing programming should be available. These applications irrespective of the device should be easy to understand and use for first time users.

4.4 Easy-to-Use Interface

Usability is basic for online gatherings to run easily. Clients should have the option to effectively—and rapidly—join gatherings whether they're in an office or in a hurry. However, setting up gatherings and overseeing them must be a straightforward procedure too. An all around planned 'User Interface' is key since it encourages coordinated effort among members and guarantees that they are locked in safely. Nobody needs to go through a few minutes making sense of where the "quiet" button is or clumsily bungling to hang up a call.

4.5 Online Meetings

Web conferencing programming permits clients to plan gatherings or start off-the-cuff gatherings. Members ought to have the option to effortlessly join gatherings and quiet themselves. The capacity to record gatherings is required. Purchasers ought to research to ensure that the selected tool meet their requirements.

4.6 Collaboration

Many web conferencing tools incorporate joint effort. For example, live chat, crowd surveying, Q&A, and document sharing.

4.7 Security

Users and organizations will require upgraded security. Security highlights incorporate client verification, consents, end to end encryption and password protection.

4.8 Mobility

Some web conferencing programming items offer a versatile application. This permits simple access to video gatherings from a cell phone or tablet. Others permit clients to login in from cell phones, or join gatherings from a versatile web interface.

4.9 Chat

Chat is currently omnipresent, from content informing to private messages across online networking stages. Web

gathering members additionally need to have the option to contact by means of text during the web gatherings. In-meeting chat feature can be used for unobtrusively passing on information to the host and different members without intruding on the progress of the event, particularly during Q&A session.

4.10 Meeting Recording

Not every person who registers can generally participate in an event. This is when meeting recording proves to be useful. Moreover, in web conferencing tools, depending on free or paid version, there are limits to total number of people who can attend it. All this necessitates recording. While looking for web conferencing tools, purchasers ought to be aware of exactly how regularly they'd prefer to record gatherings.

5. Selection

Clearly, the selection criteria mentioned are not mutually exclusive. There are a handful of components that distinguish web conferencing tools from webinar platforms, web meeting platforms and so on.

5.1 Scale

Webinar platforms are typically made for large groups, with pricing options for more participants. Web conferencing software can be scaled up to hundreds of participants or down to a handful. Therefore, always look for best options between free and paid versions.

5.2 Functionality

Web conferencing typically allows more collaboration, while webinar tools may be better suited for presenting. Therefore, before selecting a paid version always test out all the features and decide whether all features you need are available in the version that is being considered for purchase.

5.3 Features

Recording capabilities, chat features and enterprise integrations — all of these vary from platform to platform. Therefore look for the version that is best suited for based on the level of audience to whom you are considering to put it into use.

5.4 Free or Paid

Several platforms offer free and paid options. The developers tend to base pricing on the number of participants, hosts and range of features. Therefore consider carefully whether you need to procure the paid version, or whether the free version is sufficient. Moreover, paid versions can be procured for different periods, such as monthly, quarterly and so on.

6. Select Online Event Tools

6.1 Adobe Connect

Adobe Connect is a software that helps in organizing online events. Through this software users can create presentations, online training materials, and learning modules. It's a user friendly product that helps in conducting online classes. (Forrester, 2009)

6.2 BlueJeans

BlueJeans is a cloud-based solution for conducting online events. It also provides plugins and help in integration with popular apps. (Blue Jeans Network, n.d.)

6.3 Cisco Webex

Webex Meetings is a video conferencing platform provided by Cisco Systems, Inc. with built-in artificial intelligence and machine learning capabilities. It supports team meetings, webinars, online training, real-time technical support, and conference calling. (Webex Meetings and Video Conferencing Solution, n.d.)

6.4 Google Meet

With Google Meet (formerly Hangouts Meet) everyone can safely create and join high-quality video meetings up to 250 people. It allows unlimited high-definition video meetings. Meet safely – video meetings are encrypted in transit and proactive anti-abuse measures help keep your meetings safe. (Google Meet, n.d.)

6.5 Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams is a solution for collaboration in the online world. It provides conference meets, file sharing, chat and so on. (Microsoft Teams : Chat, Meetings, Calling, Collaboration, n.d.)

6.6 Zoho

Zoho Meeting is a browser-based online meeting software & web conferencing solution that lets you host online meetings & free webinars, team meeting, presentation, and more. (Zoho Meeting : Online Meeting, Free Web Conferencing Software, n. d.)

6.7 Zoom

Zoom is a very popular online event too that can be used for conferencing, talks and meetings. It provides almost all features that are required for organizing online events. (Peltier-Davis, 2011)

Table 1 attempts a comparison of select online event solutions.

7. Use of Online event tools in LIS

Library professionals were using the online event tools very effectively well before the onset of the pandemic. These events were mainly to disseminate information about the special feature of their libraries, its collection, and services. (Using the KN Raj Library for Kerala Studies : Webtalk, n.d.)

There are several areas in which LIS professionals can organize online events very effectively.

Table 1
Comparison of select online event solutions

	Adobe Connect	Blue Jeans	Cisco Webex	Google Meet	Microsoft Teams	Zoho	Zoom
Capacity\$	1500	50,000	10,000	100-250	10,000	5000	500-10.000
Free	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Paid	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Audio	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Video	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chat	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Desktop Share	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recording^	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: websites of respective products / companies

\$ Capacity varies in free and paid versions

^ Recording facility is not provided in free versions in most solutions.

7.1 Library orientation

The traditional orientation given to each and every new user of the library can be very effectively conducted online too. In fact, this can be conducted several times a year as systematic periodicity. It will lead to increased awareness about the library and its collection and will lead to its increased usage.

7.2 Special Talks

LIS professional can organize special talks on topics of interest to their user community. This can be academic and general. In-house expertise as well as external experts can be mobilized for this purpose.

7.3 Book Review

This is another area where LIS professional can organize online events. Book reviews can be conducted online. Avid readers among the library users can be invited to deliver book reviews. This event can be organized very frequently. If conducted very systematically this programme will create a positive and vibrant image about the library among the users in the long run.

7.4 Workshop / Training

Online training and workshop programmes can be organized for the user community to empower them to use the library resources in an optimum manner. This can be about various resources, database, statistical tools, academic writing tools, and so on.

7.5 Collaborative events

Librarians can conduct various events on behalf of their institution in collaboration with the Library Associations. These can be online conferences, webtalks, webinars, workshops, trainings etc. The LIS fraternity, and scholars and students of LIS will greatly benefit from such events. During the current pandemic lockout the Kerala Library Association, Kottayam Region, organized two such online events in collaboration with the Zayed University Library, Dubai. (Vimalkumar, 2020b)

8. How to conduct online events?

During this pandemic season, attending online events have left a bad and shocking sensation in most participants. Ever since the lockdown was announced, lots of industrious LIS professionals and LIS Associations are organizing online events regularly. For that matter the social media is overwhelmed by the event announcements. People are participating in such events without any formal understanding about the technology and any basic training to use such tools. Condition of the hosts and presenters also are sub-standard with respect to handling these tools.

The net result is that the content of the event never gets delivered to the participant in the optimum manner.

All the factors that are required to conduct a physical event is true in the online events too.

8.1 Registration

In a systematic manner registration of participants should be conducted well in advance of the event. All necessary details about the participants should be collected with the help of Google forms or any similar method. It should be made mandatory that participants should provide an active email address.

8.2 Publicity

The details about the event should be widely circulated through social media. The publicity matter should clearly contain the details of the event such as the (1) tool to be used with its URL, (2) Date and Time should specify which 'time zone' (eg: IST) is to be followed (Online events can be attended from all over the world, hence clarity in time zone is important), (3) Link to Registration form should be included, (4) Link to advance reading material, if any, should be included, (4) Participant limit, if any, should be specified, (5) Instructions to participants, such as keeping the video off, mute the mic, use the 'raise hand' option to ask questions etc. should be included.

8.3 Payment

If payment is required, details of online payment method should be included in the publicity matter along with instructions to include the transaction details in the registration form. Proper online acknowledgement should be issued to the participant upon receipt of payment containing the transaction details.

8.4 Connectivity

The organizer(s) / host(s) / presenter(s) should ensure good and reliable internet connectivity throughout the duration of the event. Lot of activities in the online event tool is to be done by the host, hence it will be a poor show, if the host gets disconnected in between the event.

8.5 Infrastructure

The same is true in the case of computer/laptop, camera, mic and so on too. In this context, it should be remembered that, it is better not to use mobile phone for organizing events.

8.6 Selecting an event tool

The suitable online tool is to be selected based on the financial capacity of the organizer as well as the features needed for the specific event. For smaller events several free social media chat applications can be used. While for mega events paid high-end tool would be required.

8.7 Deliverables

Handout, PPT, video of the lecture etc. as required may be created and shared through Google drive, Slide share, YouTube and so on to reduce the strain on the online event tool. Moreover, sharing deliverables in this way will facilitate in participants to visit them after the event too, and use the same.

8.8 Certificate

These days online bulk certificate generating tools are available. They can be used to create and generate certificates and shared with the participants. (Vimalkumar, 2020a)

8.9 Event management

(1) Ideally two people should be co-hosts for the event, so that in case one host gets disconnected, the other will be there as backup. (2) Conduct trial event on the previous day and ensure that all is fine, (3) Ideally the burden of hosting the event should not be entrusted to the presenter / speaker. Handling both tasks together will be too strenuous, (4) Entrust the task of monitoring the chat/messages with one of the co-hosts, and that person can bring these messages to the attention of the presenter / speaker.

8.10 Ambience

Remember to provide ample lighting (artificial or natural as applicable). Also provide a good backdrop, in case the online event tool does not support customized backdrop.

8.11 Security

(1) If the event tool allows locking the meeting room, announce this matter in the publicity material, that the meeting room will be locked 5 minutes after the start of the event. (2) Password / Code of the event should not be shared alongwith the publicity material under any circumstances. Password should be provided only to the registered participants, that too only 15 to 30 minutes before the start of the event. This is to ensure maximum security. While sending confirmation of the registration, a message can be added that password will be sent by email or Telegram message as specified above, and that the participants should not share the same with anyone else.

8.12 Support

Given that most of the participants are first time users of this technology, the organizers should provide constant technical support right from the time of registration till the end of the event. A dedicated person should be entrusted with this task.

9. How to participate in online events?

All the factors that are required to attend a physical event is true in the events too.

9.1 Registration

Please provide complete and true details for registration. Same details will be used for generating the certificate, hence observe utmost care while filling the registration form.

9.2 Payment

If payment is required, remit the same and include the transaction details in the registration form clearly.

9.3 Technology

Learn the basics about installing the software / tool and test the same well in advance.

9.4 Infrastructure

Ensure that your computer/laptop/mobile phone is in good working condition and all the necessary apps are updated. Test the camera, and mic and ensure that they are working. Use a headphone for best audio experience.

9.5 Ambience

Remember to provide ample lighting (artificial or natural as applicable). Also provide a good backdrop, in case the online event tool does not support customized backdrop.

9.6 General instructions

(1) Do not share the meeting password / code with anyone. (2) Maintain proper etiquette. (3) Maintain formal dress code. (4) Login and join the meeting at 5 minutes before start time (4) Use video and mic only when required, all other times turn off the video and mute the mic. (5) Use the 'raise hand' feature to get the attention of the host, and the host will then allow you to ask questions. (6) as far as possible, ask questions through text chat option.

9.7 Follow the instructions

Read the instruction to the participants carefully and follow the same. If required, contact the support person and seek help. This event is held for you, and there is no need to feel ashamed to ask for help. After all, you are the real purpose of these events, please remember that.

10. Conclusion

As the first Social Science Librarian from Kerala to deliver a web-talk (*Using the KN Raj Library for Kerala Studies : Webtalk*, n. d.), the author was able to observe, gain much experience and got several ideas about how to host, present and participate in online events. A reasonable attempt has been made to explain about

select online event tools and about how to organize and participate in online events.

In the near future, as well as in the years to come, LIS professionals will be called to come forward to deliver services online. And tools like this would become very much essential in such situations on a daily basis. Therefore, it is imperative that they should prepare themselves as early as possible. It would be good if LIS schools would consider including this topic in their curriculum.

Post COVID-19 era will be that of enterprising individuals. Social media was a disruption to organized publishing industry. It empowered each individual to become writer and publisher. Similarly online event tools have brought in a disruption in the academic sector too. Now each individual is empowered to become teacher / speaker / trainer and is able to disseminate their knowledge to willing learners. This may be either free or for payment. But the fact that technology has made it possible for one librarian sitting at home to host and conduct a webinar participated by more than 800 participants proves its own convenience, strength and future possibilities. LIS professional have a lot of contribute and can continue their good work using this technology.

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