Trends and Technology for Group Communication

Inquire: Online Work in the Workplace

Overview

Have you ever interviewed online? Was it strange? If you got the job, did you have to work with a group online? Have you ever thought of working from home? Thanks to the Internet, all of these options are possible and becoming more commonplace. This lesson will teach you about online collaboration and the option to work from home, conference calls and how to behave in them, online interviews, and popular online communication applications.

Big Question: How has the Internet impacted how you do your job?

Watch: Darius and Online Collaboration

Since the creation of the Internet, the world wide web has affected every step of the work process in most fields. You can apply for a job, interview, and even do your job all through your laptop at home. If you have never experienced them, you might be unsure how these things can be done. These processes come together through online collaboration. Online collaboration happens when people work together on projects over the Internet. Allow Darius to show you how he uses online collaboration at his job everyday.

Darius works at a large computer company and is the supervisor over many people. He works from home two or three days a week, and spends the rest of the weekdays in the office. This means he must use online collaboration when he works from home. On a typical day of working from home, Darius starts by checking his calendar online and checking other people’s calendars to schedule a meeting. He finds a time when everyone is available and sends out a digital invitation to accept the meeting. Next, he sends and responds to several emails with other members and departments of the company.

When the meeting time comes, Darius invites everyone to join an online conference call. He uses the online tool Google Hangouts so everyone can see the PowerPoint he is presenting on their screens. The meeting attendees unmute their microphones when they need to ask a question, and Darius is careful to pause to allow for questioning as needed.

Online collaboration has allowed Darius and the company he works for to expand and diversify the way they work. In this lesson, you will learn how technology is used in the workplace today and how to be prepared if, or when, you use these same tools!
Read: Working in a Group Online

Overview

As our world becomes more and more integrated with the Internet, it is important to learn how the Internet interacts with a work environment. This lesson will teach about online collaboration, conference calls, online interviews, and online communication software.

What is Online Collaboration?

Online collaboration lets people work together on projects through the Internet. The largest benefit of this work style is that you don't have to have team members all in one place. Online collaboration has enabled a new sort of work style where more people work from home. It also allows different companies to hire outside help for large projects. Since everything is completed online, the helpers don't have to be physically present. Another benefit is for large companies that have multiple branches. These companies can have projects that span campuses because people can work on it regardless of where they are.

Other implications that come from an increase in online collaboration are decreased costs for companies and increased resources for workers. Since companies have to operate fewer offices when employees work from home, it saves money. And since companies can bring in outside help more easily, employees have greater access to resources that help them do their jobs more efficiently.

Conference Call Etiquette

A conference call is a phone call where someone calls several others to hold a meeting. Conference calls are beginning to replace traditional meetings since they allow people to be in the meeting that would not normally be able to attend. Conference calls can bring stress, but a few tips are offered here to make them more manageable. First, schedule when the call is meant to start, when someone will begin calling people, and most importantly, who will make the call. If everyone knows who is calling, there isn't confusion about who needs to do what.

Second, be ready. Don't finish making your preparations right as the call is coming in. Give yourself time to make sure you are ready at least five minutes before you will be called. Doing so will ease any stress about the meeting and make you look professional and prepared to those in the call with you.

Third, mute yourself if you're not presenting information. Sneezes, coughs, or other random background noise is not pleasant to listen to over a microphone. Muting yourself will prevent you from causing problems for other members. It's important to remember to unmute yourself when you start speaking though.

Fourth, don't just leave the call if you need to step out. Excuse yourself so those in the meeting know you won't be at the phone for several minutes. It's okay if you need to step away for some reason, but telling others involved in the meeting lets them know that you aren't available to contribute.

Finally, even though you aren't in the room, you should act as if you are. Don't have other activities going on in the background, and don't be a distraction. Maintain a professional attitude toward the call and those in it.
How to Interview Online

Companies haven't just moved their work spaces online, they are also increasingly using the Internet for the interview process. If you get an online interview, here are some things to keep in mind to help you do well. First, act as if you were interviewing in-person. Treat it with the same amount of importance and preparation. Just because it is online does not make it any easier or less important.

Second, pay attention to what your camera will show. Employers care very much about the lifestyles of the people they hire so you want to put your best foot forward. Make sure your camera isn't showing your dirty laundry or a messy room behind you. Start yourself on the best foot possible by making sure you have a clean, professional looking background behind you when you interview; a blank wall is always a safe bet.

Third, make sure that your microphone is good and that your Internet can handle the interview call without stuttering, buffering, or dropping you. Know what background noises will come in during your interview. As you want to give the best impression of yourself, you want there to be as few distractions from you and what you can bring to the company.

Familiarizing Yourself with Online Communication Software Options

Once you get the job and start working with a company, it is important to be familiar with different communication software that you might use for collaborating. There are many tools for different jobs. This section will cover a few of those options.

Some companies use video chat services for conference calls and interviews. The two leading services are Skype for Business and Google Hangouts. These services provide video chat, as well as text chat options. Knowing how to navigate these services can be a big asset to you in a modern work environment.

Some companies don't use video services but still need chat services that allow them to communicate between different teams around the company. Two of the leading services for this feature are Slack and Discord. These services allow chatrooms to be maintained for members of different teams to share conversations, files, and products with each other. Knowing how to access these services can help you integrate more smoothly into a new company where these skills are utilized.

Reflect Poll: Is Online Work for You?

Do you think you would like a job where you work from home and collaborate online?

- Yes
- No

Expand: Telecommuting

Overview

Working from home is becoming a much preferred option for employers and employees alike. This section will take a closer look at telecommuting, and it will offer some suggestions on how to make the most of this work style.
Telecommuting

Telecommuting is the act of working from home via the Internet. As companies start to outsource more jobs to be done from home, it becomes increasingly important to learn such skills. One of the biggest benefits of telecommuting is that you have more control over your schedule. However, it is important to set a schedule; don’t allow yourself to be distracted by being at home. Have a workspace where you don’t allow yourself to engage in downtime activities. Don’t have a television that can distract you, and don’t get sidetracked by YouTube or Netflix. One of the easiest ways to avoid these distractions is to have a strict routine. Know what time you need to wake up, how long you need to accomplish specific tasks, and make sure to schedule break time as well.

Another thing to consider is that telecommuting requires you to be self-motivated enough to accomplish your work within any given deadlines. Because you are working from home, you don’t have a boss or coworker just down the hall to ask a question or check in with. You need to drive yourself to stay on task, finish tasks on time, and still contribute to the team that you are a part of. You will be able to talk to people about your job — be it with communication software, email, or phone calls — but because these don’t involve seeing someone in person, you can sometimes forget to take advantage of those communication avenues.

Employers benefit from their employees working from home, too. Often, workers are able to accomplish more when working from home, which is something employers enjoy. Telecommuting can also be cheaper for employers since they have one fewer office to worry about maintaining. As more careers utilize the Internet, expect to see more employers move toward a work from home model. If you want to work from home, approach your employer about the possibility. It might be something that they have options for already, or it might be something they are willing to let you try but have not yet established a formal program. Either way, if you approach your employer and explain the benefits of working from home, you might be surprised by what happens.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings

A video walking you through making the most of Google Hangouts
  ● Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPZb3D0500I

A video walking you through making the most of Skype for Business
  ● Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7__c4zVJ739M

A video walking you through making the most of Discord
  ● Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7xznRGg9WM

Lesson Glossary

online collaboration: the act of a group of people working together on a project over the Internet
conference call: a phone call where someone calls several others to hold a meeting
telecommuting: the act of working from home via the Internet
Check Your Knowledge

1. The background of your online interview does not matter.
   a. True
   b. False
2. More places are starting to use telecommuting for their employees.
   a. True
   b. False
3. Background noise can negatively influence an online interview or conference call
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:

Citations

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