

Online Collaboration

Online collaboration has been a boon for multi-location companies. It provides you with all the facilities of a regular conference. Attendants can see each other, deliver presentations, have discussions on an issue or work on a report or design. Video conferencing has been existence for a long time now. It never created waves in the corporate community as it was expected to, but it silently crept into the day to day functioning of many organisations. Important meetings are still held face to face, with no hardware in between.

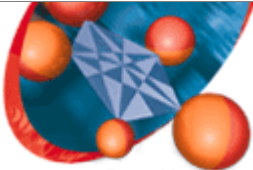

Day to day meetings & multi-location teams working on a single project benefit a lot from online collaboration. Apart from saving communication costs, it speeds up decision making or project execution if the right collaboration software is in place.

Choosing the right collaboration software is no easy task though. No web based collaboration application stands out today as the clear market leader. There have not been many success stories to bank on. These applications are today limited by their level of collaboration. Real-time collaboration is rarely seen & support for MS Office™ is limited at the best. Products are improving though & their usability factor is on a upswing. Making it easy to use is half the battle won, as proper communication ensures success in team efforts. More the tools the team uses, more is the chance of a successful collaboration, which in turn increases the confidence of participants in the system.

This comparison chart reviews 5 popular collaboration tools. We have mentioned their advantages & disadvantages. Most of these companies offer a free trial on their website.

eroom	Website	Price
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	http://www.eroom.com/	\$10,000 per server and \$199 per user
	Advantages	Disadvantages
	Drag & drop windows files	Price
	Offline editing of eRoom files	
	Syncs with MS Outlook	
SiteScape	Website	Price
	http://www.sitescape.com/	\$6,995 for one to 200 users
	Advantages	Disadvantages
	Innovative pricing, no need for SMEs to worry about individual licenses	CGI based scripting, leading to a interface that lacks the useful features of current scripting languages
		Very little support for MS Office
		Lacking in document management
Groove	Website	Price
	http://www.groove.net/	\$49 per user (standard license) OR \$99 per user (professional license)
	Advantages	Disadvantages
	Created by the inventor of Lotus Notes	Uses peer to peer technology & not client server
	Microsoft extends its support by granting it collaboration access to MS Word, MS PowerPoint & MS Outlook, MS Project in v2.	Groove's MS Office collaboration features are no match for Microsoft's OSE
	Very cost effective	Security a major concern

	Intel & Microsoft are stakeholders, making it a relatively stable company today	Central file management not available
QuickPlace	Website	Price
	http://www.lotus.com/quickplace	\$7,995 per server & \$29 per user
	Advantages	Disadvantages
	Collaboration leaders	Price
	Draws from the experience of Lotus Notes & a host of other collaboration softwares like Lotus Sametime	
MS OSE	Website	Price
	http://www.microsoft.com/office/ork/2000/five/75ct_1.htm	\$1,800 starting price for 200 MB space on OSE pre configured server & NIL per user
	Advantages	Disadvantages
	Fast initial deployment	Very limited customizability
	Has been in circulation for 2 years, major bugs fixed	
	Bugs/security holes will be discovered & fixed faster	
	Assured compatibility with future releases of MS Office	
	Cost effective	
	Steep learning curve for MS Office users	

Although we have reviewed these 5 products, there are more than a score of such products available. The criteria that we used for choosing products for evaluation was that they should be web based, the company behind the product should display some stability and the product should have some support for MS Office. Even using these criteria, we found reviews on the net where products topped comparisons, but do not feature here. There are comparison reports available on the Internet on sites like http://www.gatedway.com/cs_shop/csi_shop_rtc_Rev01.php, but rather than evaluating these softwares on the basis of written reports, it would be ideal if you could use each of the above five softwares for a few days, as most of them have free evaluations available & use the one that can deliver the goods for you.

A product, however feature rich, may not be suitable for every organisation. One of the welcome side effects of using a collaboration tool is capturing data which can enhance the knowledge of the corporation. With no facility to process the accumulated data in most collaboration tools, knowledge intensive organisations opt to build their solutions from scratch. The advantages & disadvantages of products are given below:

Advantages	Disadvantages
Fast implementation	Limited customizability
Well researched product features	Difficult to add a product feature that you may need
Product upgrades available from time to time offering new functionality (such as mobile collaboration which will feature in all major product upgrades this year)	A much needed feature for you may not get incorporated in the next update or not get incorporated at all
Cost effective in most cases	Many of the vendors are single product wonders & are highly unstable
Security loopholes will be identified & resolved faster	Will have to be completely discarded when new requirements like knowledge management arise & transfer of legacy data will be an issue

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