



# Web Conferencing Council Top 10 Web Conferencing Solutions - 2009

Council Criteria, Findings, and Recommendations for Web Conferencing Solutions

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# Contents

1.0 Executive Summary	3
1.1 Vapor-Ware not Included in Tests	4
1.2 Industry Driven Requirements	4
1.3 Depth of Features	4
1.4 Audio and Video Quality and Clarity	5
1.5 Price	5
1.6 Cross-Platform Installation	5
1.7 Ease of Installation and Usage	5
1.8 Security	5
1.9 Support Services	6
1.10 Stability and Performance	6
1.11 Miscellaneous category for technology features and technologies	7
1.12 General Testing methodology and logistics	7
1.13 Final Scoring	8
2.0 Vendor Information (Top 5 WCC Picks Only)	8
2.1 VIA3 from Viack.com	8
2.2 GoToMeeting (GoToMeeting.com)	10
2.3 WebEx (webex.com)	10
2.4 LiveMeeting	12
2.5 iLinc	12

## 1.0 Executive Summary

After weeks of utilizing and testing over 100 Web Conferencing Solutions, The Web Conferencing Council would like to present to you the council picks and recommendations for the top ten web conferencing solutions available today.

Several decision making criteria points were considered when making this decision, resulting in numerical scores and subsequent rankings to determine the number 1 through 10 spot. Some of the decision making criteria were:

- Depth of Features
- Audio Quality
- Video Quality
- Bandwidth Management
- Price / Affordability / TCO
- Stability
- Security
- Support Services
- Ease of Installation
- Ease of Use
- Ease of Management
- Miscellaneous category for technology features and technologies

The top ten vendors selected, based on the evaluation criteria, in order of their final score:

- 1) **VIA3** from VIACK Corporation ([www.viack.com](http://www.viack.com))
- 2) **GoToMeeting** from Citrix ([www.GoToMeeting.com](http://www.GoToMeeting.com))
- 3) **WebEx Meetings Center**, from Cisco ([www.webex.com](http://www.webex.com))
- 4) **LiveMeeting**, from Microsoft (<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/livemeeting/default.aspx>)
- 5) **Acrobat Connect Pro**, from Adobe (<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobatconnectpro/>)
- 6) **iLinc** ([www.iLinc.com](http://www.iLinc.com))
- 7) **Connect** from AT&T ([www.interwise.com](http://www.interwise.com))
- 8) **Sametime** from IBM ([www.ibm.com](http://www.ibm.com))
- 9) **WiredRed** ([www.wiredred.com](http://www.wiredred.com))
- 10) **Yugma** ([www.yugma.com](http://www.yugma.com))



### 1.1 Vapor-Ware not Included in Tests

The WCC has decided to NOT allow any non-commercial software to be allowed as the test, nor any software considered “Vapor-ware”.

### 1.2 Industry Driven Requirements

There are a number of industry driven requirements that were considered when measuring the overall value of each web conferencing solution. Ultimately, these requirements were the basis of this whitepaper’s recommendations for 2009.

The following are industry requirements:

- Depth of features
- Audio and Video Quality and Clarity
- Price
- Cross-Platform Installation
- Ease of installation usage adoption
- Security
- Stability and Performance
- Miscellaneous category for technology features and technologies

### 1.3 Depth of Features

Many readers, council members, and council attendees have written in that they are frustrated by the lack of features available in most web conferencing platforms. There is a distinct set of users who are seeking presentation only abilities, and they are mostly happy with most products available on the market today.

There is another set of users who are wanting to have scheduled or ad-hoc meetings, either in compliment or addition to the presentation abilities previously mentioned. There is a power-user set who wants to also have “wish-list” items like collaboration, presence, whiteboarding, and IM.

Generally speaking, almost all vendors on our test list were not able to meet the full list of previously mentioned functional areas without the addition of another product (and additional cost), and/or partnering with external technologies.



## 1.4 Audio and Video Quality and Clarity

Many readers, council members, and council attendees have written in that they are frustrated by the lack of quality in their Audio and Video for web conferencing solutions. The baseline we keep hearing is that they want them to be “better than Skype”, which was a consideration when testing the products. Crystal clear audio proved to be elusive, even with some premium services with premium add-on VOIP or video services. Some were crystal clear on audio, and some were worse than cell phone quality.

## 1.5 Price

Given today's global economy woes, it is fitting that one judging criteria for our 2009 recommendations list is price. We took into account the base price for web conferencing solutions, and added VOIP if needed.

We found some various pricing issues with many of the tier 1 solutions during our test, many of which surprised us. We likely will be publishing a “gotcha” list of hidden fees, penalties, etc.. to watch out for when purchasing your web conferencing product. Some of the final costs for an overall solution were startling, and NOT indicative of pricing on the main page. Buyer beware.

## 1.6 Cross-Platform Installation

There was a slight uptick in Mac environments as well as generic OS environments in 2008/2009, we including this in our evaluation.

## 1.7 Ease of Installation and Usage

Obviously, you shouldn't have to be a rocket scientist to find, download, install, launch, operate, and manage your product. There was a surprising amount of variance between solutions in this regard.

## 1.8 Security

With user concerns like Sarbanes-Oxley, HIPAA, and Confidential Information in general, we knew we had to find and recommend products with great security. In searching, our goal was to also find a web conferencing product that was completely secure, while at the same time providing the set of features necessary for the average user base. The ideal product utilizes AES for



encryption, and has been tested and certified for things such as FIPS 140-2 and JITC DCTS compliance.

AES is a class of symmetric encryption algorithms, called symmetric because this type of algorithm uses the same key for encryption and decryption of the data. Generally, symmetric algorithms are very efficient in terms of CPU required and the size of the resultant encrypted data. Symmetric encryption is used for protecting large amounts of data, as the algorithms are much faster, and the required key lengths are much shorter (than public key algorithms) for the same strength of protection.

The actual algorithms that are used in AES are well known – a property of a good encryption algorithm is that knowledge of the details of the implementation will not help when trying to “break” encrypted data. This simplifies the implementation and certification of a product that uses encryption, because there is no mystery about the actual encryption code (the source code can be compared with a known “good” implementation for assurance), and the analysis and testing can concentrate on the critical details of key protection and management.

## **1.9 Support Services**

When there is a problem or question regarding a web conferencing service, the place you have to turn is Support Services. We have heard some horror stories about being bounced through multiple (poorly speaking or heavily accented) people in India, China, and beyond. So we found a problem or question for every single product, and went through their support department. True to user commentary on topic on some of the Tier 1 products, we ended up speaking to multiple poorly speaking or heavily accented people in India, China, and beyond.

## **1.10 Stability and Performance**

Testing criteria dictated that we would attempt a minimum of 20 sessions or meetings with each product. Some variances added uniformly to each equation was the introduction of:

- Wired, broadband of varying types and speeds
- Wireless, broadband of varying types and speeds
- Wireless, where we flip the connection off and back on via the radio button control.



Obviously, we needed to find products that worked well under the various user scenarios.

### **1.11 Miscellaneous category for technology features and technologies**

Smaller categories were included in the scoring, such as:

- Hardware compatibility
- Download size
- Multi-party Audio
- Automatic Echo Cancellation (AEC)
- Automatic Gain Control (AGC)
- Mutli-party Video
- H.264 Video Codec (MPEG4)
- Built-in SSL and AES security
- Text Messaging (Instant Messaging)
- Public messaging (Meeting Chat)
- Slides & Slide Annotation (LiveView)
- Application Broadcasting/Sharing, Record and Playback of meetings
- Working with existing VTC Equipment & Hardware
- XMPP Compliant IM Clients, Telephone Switch Support (POTS) or VoIP
- Back Office Tools (Virtual Workspaces), and more...

### **1.12 General Testing methodology and logistics**

All tests were done anonymously, to ensure the least amount of vendor tampering and intrusion. Some vendors have been notified of final results after completion and printing of this document, but no interaction to such effect influenced this document.

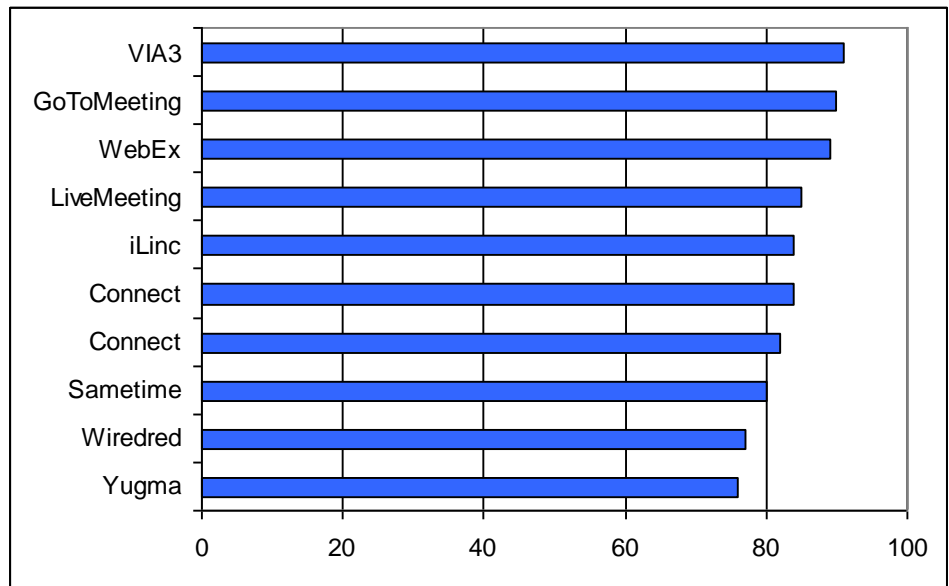
In addition, no monies of any kind were given to the WCC to influence the test. That said, unbiased consideration was given to the Gartner Quadrant Players, mostly for inclusion. (Due to Gartner taking significant amounts of money from key players in the quadrant, there was a unanimous decision to discard their actual rankings as being “influenced”, but to instead use their vendor list for testing inclusion purposes. We used their list to supplement and compliment our test list.)

Similar environments were used for testing purposes to make sure no vendor had an advantage in bandwidth, processing power, etc...

Testers were allowed to work with vendor customer service, as long as they gained or used NO propriety advantage not available to the general public.

### 1.13 Final Scoring

The below graphic is taken from the top ten section of our final scores database:



## 2.0 Vendor Information (Top 5 WCC Picks Only)

Here is a quick look at the final top ten web conferencing products. This information is a combination of WCC findings, as well as available materials from their reference sites, products, and/or user base:

### 2.1 VIA3 from [www.Viack.com](http://www.Viack.com)

VIA3 was one of the “dark horses” that exploded up the ranks of the WCC testing results. Unfortunately for many of the other products, VIA3 was tested early on in the process, and raised the bar in many categories that the other products could not touch. VIA3 is the 2009 Web Conferencing “Best of Show”.

Pros: We loved the audio and video quality, we loved the security built-in, they had fast and accurate (US based) support, more built-in features than the rest of

the list, and provide all that for an industry leading price. We liked the normal product features (presentations, meetings, whiteboard, chat, etc..) but got spoiled with the features you wont find elsewhere without adding on additional products and services. Namely their IM with presence awareness, and resident workspaces for file storage and sharing. WebEx is playing catch-up with VIA3 on features like presence, and have recently taken a step back from in-house development of this feature to adopting a white-labeled Jabber client to try and keep up with VIA3. Microsoft requires you download an additional product (Communicator) for an additional fee. Most of the other vendors don't even address this feature.

VIA3 scored the highest in VTC compatibility as well, being easy and fast to set up. (We get asked a lot about how to utilize Web Conferencing Software with VTC Hardware and Systems, so we might include a separate blog entry about our best practices when testing this feature.)

You can't crack their security, which apparently was built-in from the beginning. We flipped the wireless on and off, forcing us out of the VIA3 meeting, but were pleased to find that we re-entered the meeting immediately, and seamlessly. We were 20/20 with meetings, tried in regular meeting mode, as well as their presenter mode. We couldn't find any hidden costs

(Editors note: many of the testers involved in this process have continued using VIA3 as their primary web conferencing tool long after the testing was concluded.

Cons: Like many of the vendors like WebEx and most of the others, there is a required download. (Viack said that this is to ensure end to end security.). VIA3 runs in Windows environments, so if you have older Macs (without a Windows emulator), you will want to try other products. One reader reported in 2008 that one type of built-in laptop camera did not function properly with VIA3, but we were unable to reproduce that with our systems. Record and playback is audio only, although we loved the access to recordings from meeting-tied workspaces.

*Viack's description:*

VIACK Corporation is headquartered in San Jose, California. Viack also has numerous employees around the country (successfully) utilizing the very tool VIACK provides new, powerful, value-based tools and services which enable its clients to leverage the power of the Internet to their distinct advantage. VIACK's Via3 Software as a Service (SaaS) provide professionals and businesses the ability to reduce their travel expenses, reduce overall communications expenses while improving productivity that will ultimately lead to increased profitability.



This is achieved by combining a uniquely superior Audio, Video Teleconferencing Solution. The solution provides a real-time document sharing and editing capability, Instant Messaging and file transfer capability all in a secure pipe encrypted at each end. All channels of communication are secure and no extra hardware or communication devices are needed beyond your computer with a camera to facilitate the face-to-face meeting. VIACK offers these services at very reasonable, monthly-subscription prices. For large enterprises an on-premises solution is available.

## **2.2 GoToMeeting (GoToMeeting.com)**

According to GoToMeeting: “The intuitive interface feature of GotoMeeting allows you to setup, invite, and implement an online meeting almost immediately. There is no need for any training for this application. Its features include: One Click Meeting, where Meet Now buttons are incorporated into the email and instant messaging applications of the members for one-click online meeting participation; MSOutlook and Lotus Notes Integration, which allows you to immediately participate from your Outlook and Lotus Notes applications; Share Keyboard and Mouse Control, which allows you to securely share your desktop with the participants and selectively turn over control of the keyboard and mouse functions to them; and, Desktop Recording and Playback, which allows you to record the online meeting for later playback and distribution.”

We largely agree with them in principle, which is why they jumped to number 2 in our overall rankings. We liked many of the simplicity points of this product, and found it easy to get in and out of temporary presentations and meetings. Presentations worked well in their environment, and much of the UI had slick appeal. Clearly they have put some development time and muscle into this product.

Cons were issues with support, as well as the temporary nature of most of the usage patterns of this product. After the presentation or meeting, you are left with nothing for the most part like what we got with VIA3 and a couple of others. They seem to be going after the same market that WebEx makes their living on; the Sales and Marketing presentation hawkers. (Don't get us wrong, this is a huge market).

## **2.3 WebEx (webex.com)**

WebEx is the 800 pound gorilla in this market, thanks largely to aggressive keyword and adword purchases, aggressive marketing in general, and



aggressive telesales and email sales. What they lack in abilities they make up for in muscle.

That said, they have gotten very, very good at integrating PowerPoints and demonstration software views into their product. For the Sales and Marketing professional who doesn't care about application costs, GoToMeeting and WebEx both are great choices. They have focused on nailing functionality of presentations over slick UI or depth of features, and have greatly improved their security story from weak to strong. They have improved their cross platform play with the Mac crowd, which seems to work well. (Its almost like treating each individual platform as a dumb terminal with limited functionality, ensuring adequate stability). Integration with services like Salesforce.com seem strong.

According to WebEx:

You can accelerate your growth, and make it easy for global employees and virtual teams to work together and get things done. Get an enterprise-grade web meeting solution for secure everyday interactions across firewalls—and specialized applications for webinars and webcasts, eLearning programs, remote helpdesk and customer support, and online sales presentations and demos. And get set to take web collaboration to a whole new level with new Cisco WebEx Connect.

Cons: Again, it's a tear down temporary world most WebEx users have. Support seems exported and just ok. Installation of WebEx is like having a circus explode on your desktop. Their branding seems like it is literally everywhere. (That's not a WebEx virus, that's by design). They are one of the vendors having to "borrow" other IM functionality, such as MSN Messenger, and are playing catchup in this regard, even after recent attempts to build in-house.

Editors Note: As many of you know, WebEx bought Jabber for their IM capability rather than using AIM Pro (the previous solution, sold by WebEx for years). The issue, we hear, is that AOL is not going to support AIM Pro much longer, which created a platform and technology strategy issue at WebEx because AIM Pro was the foundation software for all of CONNECT.

One of the biggest complaints we heard was a strong-arm sales force who sneak in massive telephony costs and other hidden fees such as early contract withdrawal. If you just want to do PowerPoints remotely, don't mind paying more and being locked in (like a phone carrier contract) then WebEx (or GoToMeeting) is for you.



## 2.4 LiveMeeting

LiveMeeting seems to be one of those products which was initially inferior, but backed by such a strong bully that you couldn't ignore it. It is remarkably unremarkable, and crashed or failed on us multiple times, and again is meant to just be for temporary presentations.

That said, the Microsoft integration that is there, and the dominance of the Microsoft platforms helped this product... some. Overall it stands on its own against WebEx and GoToMeeting just fine.

Microsoft Office Live Meeting 2007 is an online meeting space that your organization subscribes to or that your organization hosts internally. You can meet with your colleagues online, which allows you to collaborate in real-time, even over long distances. Microsoft Office Live Meeting 2007 is installed on your computer, allowing you to connect to meetings (whether they are hosted on your organization's servers or on the Microsoft Office Live Meeting service). The power of live meeting is that meeting attendees can deliver a presentation, kick off a project, brainstorm ideas, edit files, collaborate on whiteboards, and negotiate deals from their personal computer at a fraction of the cost and without the hassle of travel.

*Good user experience especially for stand-alone presentation needs, although we had some connectivity issues reported during the test.*

## 2.5 iLinc

iLinc is an easy to use (but incredibly hard to set up) web conferencing applications that has a lot of the features you need, but not the full set. We loved the Advanced recording and editing features, and would say for people who put Record and Playback as number one feature should evaluate this product. There is shared web browsing, multi-point video (with decent controls). Worked very well on the Mac.

According to iLinc:

Connect securely and instantly with co-workers:

No plug-ins or add-ins required. iLinc's proven remote collaboration technology, which uses established industry-standard security protocols (SSL & AES), eliminates technical concerns by effectively navigating complex network or firewall environments. Get everyone into the session, every time.



Enhance educational initiatives with online classes:

Deliver real-time, live classes or develop recorded tutorials. The iLinc LMS provides scheduling, registration, reporting, and content management or integrate directly with other enterprise LMS systems for blended learning programs.

Large-scale webinars instead of costly live events:

Reduce costs while increasing response and leads. An award-winning webinar solution, iLinc automates many of the time-consuming tasks of scheduling and post-event follow-up. With VoIP audio, you don't have the costs of a teleconference bridge. You can deliver everything from product launches, investor meetings, road shows, online seminars, and more.

Cons: Licensing and pricing models are confusing. Hard to set up, with hard to access (at times) support. If you thought WebEx MeetMeNow and Citrix GoToMeeting iLinc are expensive, iLinc can often pass them on price.

