

## The 5 critical factors to weigh in selecting your teleconferencing company

Choosing a conference call company is not easy. Just type the phrase "conference call" into Google and you'll see lots of providers. Fortunately, most of them position their services on a handful of factors. Understanding these factors, and thinking through their relative significance to the needs of your company, is the best way to make an informed decision. Research in the field indicates that there are five elements which usually enable a user to make a prudent decision. To help you make that decision, this article reviews these five areas.

### 1. Price

All-conference calling services cost something to use. This is true even of the services that position themselves as "free." Why is that? With the exception of an entirely VOIP based system (e.g. Skype), all-conference calling services require users to dial a bridge number. In the case of services that provide toll-free bridge numbers, a per minute fee is assessed. The lowest rate you can typically get is several cents on a per minute basis and more likely you'll be paying five to ten cents per minute. This charge is levied cumulatively. In other words, if there are 5 people on a 60 minute call, a 300 minute charge will be levied. Some services still charge legacy rates and of 20 or 25 cents a minute and these plans are to be avoided! As mentioned earlier, some services are free in the sense that there is no charge levied by the provider. However, these offerings do not provide a toll-free number with their free services and therefore users will incur normal long-distance charges to participate.

### 2. Scheduling ability

Services usually fall into one of two buckets. Paid and high end corporate services often provide a scheduling interface which helps the organizer to set up the conference call. For those services that have an Outlook integration or similar type of functionality, a pin code and dial-in bridge can be allocated to the user when the user wants to do her own call scheduling. The free offerings usually provide only a pin code and dial-in bridge; the organizer of the conference call is responsible for sending individual e-mails and maintaining track of individual replies. At the present time, the sole [free conference calling](#) service available in the industry featuring both capabilities (scheduling and on-the-fly conferencing) as well as web based response tracking is Rondee.com.

### 3. Archiving or Recording

For a lot of users, the ability to store information connected to the call or even the call itself can be quite useful. Some services allow recording of the conference call in WAV format, GSM or both formats. Some companies provide this capability for free but generally it is found as a bundled feature of paid conferencing services. The audio file is usually retrieved after the conference call has ended via a link from the service provider's web site or a link e-mailed to the users. It is generally not possible to email the audio file itself because of capacity constraints. Some services provide the conference agenda to be archived. This capability is obviously not possible with services that only offer a pin code and dial-in bridge but can be offered by services that offer scheduling capability because the scheduling template captures the call specific information.

### 4. Desktop Sharing

Sometimes a conference call is not limited to the audio format. If your business necessitates visual sharing of information (e.g. PowerPoint presentations), desktop sharing will be a critical component of a successful conference call. Some users choose a best-of-breed strategy and use different services for their desktop sharing and conferencing. Increasingly, however, conference calling providers are moving quickly to bundle desktop sharing functionality into their core product. In the case of well-known brands such as GoToMeeting, this is part of a goal to capture both segments of the market. In the case of conferencing, desktop sharing is being offered as a paid functionality to generate new revenue.

### 5. Personalization

A frequent complaint from users of conference calling systems is the need to remember random dial-in bridge numbers and pin-codes. In the last year, confluence of telecom and internet technologies is solving this problem. A couple [conference call](#) providers allow for users to personalize their PIN codes to PIN codes more easily remembered. There are some systems which also offer pinless access when users call from a registered phone number. These systems, however, do necessitate user registration to enable a matching of the number.

For most users, the final choice of teleconferencing service will require weighting these (and perhaps other) factors according to your organization's needs. The good news is that the explosion of competition in this market is expanding the offerings available to you.

## About the Author

Linda Rogers has authored a series of commentaries covering the [free conference calling](#) industry. Her clients include firms such as Rondee which focus on new telecom technologies.

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