**UNIT-V**

**Other Ways To Collaborate Online**

**Collaborating via Web-Based Communication Tools**

In this final section of the book, we go beyond cloud storage and services into cloud-related communication tools. Although not all of these tools are strictly cloud based (some use the host’s proprietary servers in a traditional client/server relationship, others are peer to peer in nature),

they are all web based and all serve to further group collaboration— two of the core tenants of cloud computing. What kinds of communication tools are we talking about? There are three main categories: web email services, instant messaging services, and web conferencing tools. Groups located anywhere in the world can use these tools to communicate with other group members—and further their collaboration

on group projects.

**Evaluating Web Mail Services**

Traditional email is anything but cloud based. The type of email program you probably have installed on your PC uses a protocol called the Post Office Protocol (POP). POP email requires the use of a dedicated email *client* program, such as Microsoft Outlook or Outlook Express, and—at the ISP level—

email servers to send and receive messages. The problem with traditional POP email is that you’re tied to the client program installed on your PC. The messages you receive are stored on that PC, and you usually can’t access them when you’re traveling or away from that PC. There are none of the “anytime, anywhere” advantages you’re used to with cloud-based services.

Fortunately, there is a better way to manage your email—in the form of webbased email services, also known as web mail or HTTP email. Unlike traditional POP email, web mail can be accessed from any PC using any web browser, and all your messages are stored on the web, not locally. It’s just like a cloud service; no special software required. This lets you retrieve and manage your email when you’re out of the office or on the road. Not only is web mail more versatile than traditional POP email, it’s also easier

to set up. All you need to know is your user ID and password, and then you access a page that lets you view the contents of your inbox, read and reply to messages, create new messages, and (in many cases) store messages in folders. You can even, on some services, use your web mail account to access your

ISP’s POP email. The three largest web mail services today are hosted by Google, Microsoft, and

Yahoo! In addition, most of the web desktops we discussed in Chapter 17, “Controlling It All with Web-Based Desktops,” also have their own web mail services. So you have plenty of choices when it comes to sending and receiving email via the web.

**Gmail**

Google’s web mail service is called Gmail (mail.google.com), and at first blush it looks a lot like the other services we discuss in this chapter. Gmail is free, it lets you send and receive email from any web browser, and the interface even looks similar to its competitors, as you can see in Figure 18.1.



**FIGURE**

*The Gmail inbox.*

But Gmail offers a few unique features that set it apart from the web-based email crowd. First, Gmail doesn’t use folders. That’s right, with Gmail you can’t organize your mail into folders, as you can with the other services. Instead, Gmail pushes the search paradigm as the way to find the messages

you want—not a surprise, given Google’s search-centric business model. Gmail does, however, let you “tag” each message with one or more labels. This has the effect of creating virtual folders, as you can search and sort your messages by any of their labels. In addition, Gmail groups together related email messages in what Google calls *conversations*. A conversation might be an initial message and all the

replies (and replies to replies) to that message; a conversation might also be all the daily emails from a single source that have a common subject, such as messages from subscribed-to mailing lists.

Like most of the other services we discuss here, Gmail is a free service; all you have to do is sign up for an account. Of course, if you already have an account for any other Google service, that account can serve as your Gmail account. When you sign up for your Gmail account, you get assigned your email address (in the form of *name*@gmail.com) and you get access to the Gmail inbox page. As of June 2008, Gmail offered 6GB of storage for users.

**Yahoo! Mail**

Yahoo! Mail (mail.yahoo.com) is another web mail service, provided by the popular Yahoo! search site. The basic Yahoo! Mail is free and can be accessed from any PC, using any web browser. Yahoo! also offers a paid service called Yahoo! Mail Plus that lets you send larger messages and offers offline access to your messages via POP email clients. Whether you use the free or the paid version, Yahoo! Mail gives you unlimited storage—which means you can effectively use Yahoo! Mail as an online backup or file-storage system. All you have to do is email yourself those files you want to store, and then place those messages (with attachments) in your designated storage folder. As you can see in Figure 18.2, the Yahoo! Mail interface is more functional than that offered by Gmail. It also offers traditional folder-based organization. You get a message pane and a reading pane, just as you do with Microsoft Outlook. Yahoo! also offers users the SpamGuard spam filter and Norton AntiVirus virus scanner.



**FIGURE**

*Previewing messages with Yahoo! Mail.*

**Windows Live Hotmail**

Hotmail was one of the first web-based email services, and it’s still one of the largest. But it’s not called “Hotmail” anymore; Microsoft has moved it into its Windows Live suite of online services and now calls it Windows Live Hotmail. Like most web mail services, Hotmail (we’re going to call it by its old, shorter

name) can be accessed from any web browser on any PC anywhere in the world, for free. Microsoft gives you 5GB of storage, not quite as much as you get with Gmail (6GB) or Yahoo! Mail (unlimited). As you can see in Figure 18.3, the new Windows Live Hotmail interface is as snazzy as they come. You have your folder pane on the left, message page in the middle, and reading pane on the right. The new Hotmail also integrates with your Windows Live contacts and calendar, as well as other Windows Live

services.

**Apple MobileMe Mail**

As part of its MobileMe suite of applications, Apple offers MobileMe Mail (www.me.com). What makes MobileMe Mail unique is that it’s not limited to just computer users; you can also send and receive emails from your Apple iPhone or iPod touch, via Wi-Fi Internet or cellular network. MobileMe Mail is a web-based service that can also be accessed with your existing Mac or Windows-based email program, including Outlook, Outlook Express, and Windows Mail. It has its own native interface on the iPhone and

iPod touchUnlike the other webmail services discussed here, MobileMe Mail isn’t free. It’s part of the MobileMe suite of applications, which costs $99 per year. (But you do get a really cool .me email address!).

**OtherWeb Mail Services**

Gmail, Yahoo! Mail, and Windows Live Hotmail are the three largest web mail services (and MobileMe Mail promises to be a competitor), but there are literally hundreds more. Besides these big providers, there are dozens of independent web mail services, plus a plethora of topic-specific websites that offer

(among other content and services) their own branded HTTP email. Inaddition, just about every cloud service provider, such as Zoho, offers web mail as part of its suite; web mail is also part of most web-based desktops. So if you’re looking for a web mail service and don’t want to go with one of

the big three, here’s a short list of some of the other major providers to check out:

\_ AOL Mail (mail.aol.com)

\_ BigString (www.bigstring.com)

\_ Excite Mail (mail.excite.com)

\_ FlashMail (www.flashmail.com)

\_ GMX Mail (www.gmx.com)

\_ Inbox.com (www.inbox.com)

\_ Lycos Mail (mail.lycos.com)

\_ Mail.com (www.mail.com)

\_ Zoho Mail (zoho.mail.com)

**Evaluating Instant Messaging Services**

Email is just one way to communicate online. For many users, instant messaging is a better way to talk; it’s more immediate, because you can send text messages in real time to your friends and coworkers. No more waiting for people to respond to your emails—when both parties are online at the same time,

it’s just like having a one-on-one conversation! Technology-wise, email works a little differently from most Internet applications— and quite different from the cloud services we’ve been discussing

throughout this book. Email (both web based and POP), Usenet, and the World Wide Web operate via a traditional client/server model, with most of the heavy lifting done via a network of dedicated servers. For example, your POP email is stored on and managed by an email server, while all the pages on the web are hosted on millions of individual web servers. Instant messaging, however, doesn’t use servers at all. When you send an instant message to another user, that message goes directly to that user’s PC;

it’s not filtered by or stored on any servers. The technical name for this type of connection is *peer-to-peer* (P2P), because the two computers involved are peers to each other. All instant messaging needs to work is a piece of client software (one for each computer involved, of course) and the IP addresses of each computer. The messages go directly from one IP address to another, with no servers in the middle to slow things down. (Naturally, the data must still make its way through numerous routers to get to the other PC, but that’s part and parcel of any Internet-based application.) There are several big players in the instant messaging market today, including America Online (with both AOL Instant Messenger and ICQ), Google (Google Talk), Microsoft (Windows Live Messenger), and Yahoo! (Yahoo! Messenger). Unfortunately, most of these products don’t work well (or at all) with each other. If you’re using Yahoo! Messenger, for example, you can’t communicate with someone running AOL Instant Messenger. That means you’ll want to use the IM program that all your friends and coworkers are using—so find that out before you download any software.

**AOL Instant Messenger**

The most-used instant messaging program is AOL Instant Messenger (www.aim.com), also known as AIM. AOL claims more than 60 million users, which makes it the number-two IM service today, second only to Yahoo! Messenger. For whatever reason, AIM is especially popular among the teen and preteen crowd, although people of all ages can and do use it. AIM, shown in Figure 18.5, supports all manner of special features in addition to basic text messaging. You get file sharing, RSS feeds, group chats, ability to text message to and from mobile phones, voice chat, video chat, and even a mobile client. You can also enhance the basic AIM experience with a variety of official and user-created plug-ins.

**Google Talk**

Google Talk is the name of both Google’s instant messaging network and its IM client. You can download the Google Talk client and learn more about the Google Talk network at talk.google.com.

You can access Google Talk from a web-based Google Talk gadget, a standalone Google Talk client program (similar to what’s offered by both AIM and Yahoo! Messenger), or from your Gmail and iGoogle web pages. As with competing IM systems, Google Talk lets you send and receive both text-based instant messages and Voice over IP (VoIP) Internet phone calls. Most people will use Google Talk via the web-based Google Talk “gadget.” You launch the Google Talk gadget by going to talk.google.com and clicking the Launch Google Talk button. With the gadget, there’s no software to download; Google Talk opens in its own small browser window If you want increased functionality, such

as file transfer, you can download the Google Talk *client*, which is a separate software program. The main Google Talk client window looks a lot like the Google Talk gadget window; however, if the person you’re chatting with also has the Google Talk client installed, you can send files back and forth between yourselves, using the Send Files button. Unfortunately, Google Talk isn’t as widely used as competing IM services. I’m not sure why that is, but you’ll definitely want to make sure your friends or coworkers are using Google Talk before you settle on this service for your IM needs

**ICQ**

The granddaddy of all instant messaging programs is ICQ (www.icq.com). ICQ was birthed by a company named Mirabilis back in 1996, but was acquired by America Online in 1998. Today, AOL maintains ICQ and AIM as separate programs—so separate that ICQ users can’t talk to AIM users, or vice versa. Like most other IM programs, ICQ is totally free. You also get grouped conversations,

voice messaging, photo viewing, and other state-of-the-art features.

**Windows Live Messenger**

Not surprisingly, Microsoft is a major participant in the instant messaging market. The program currently known as Windows Live Messenger does all the main things AIM and Yahoo! Messenger do, including voice chat and the ability to page a contact’s mobile phone. With more than 27 million users, Windows Live Messenger is a solid middle-of-the-pack player.

**Yahoo! Messenger**

With more than 90 million users, the most popular instant messenger program today is Yahoo! Messenger. In addition to traditional text messaging, Yahoo! Messenger features voice and video messaging, PC-to-phone and PC-to-PC calling, voicemail, file sharing, and chat rooms. It also lets you receive up-to-the minute stock prices, news headlines, sports scores, weather forecasts, and notification

of any waiting Yahoo! Mail—all courtesy of the Yahoo! family of services.

**Evaluating Web Conferencing Tools**

Email is great for one-one-one communications that aren’t time sensitive. Instant messaging is better for time-sensitive communications, but it’s still essentially a one-on-one medium. When you need to include more than two people in your communications, or when you want to give a presentation to a group of people who aren’t all in the same location, a different communications tool is needed. This new tool is

called a *web conference*, and it’s a way to conduct live meetings and presentations over the Internet.

In a typical web conference, each participant sits at his own computer in his own location. Each participant’s computer is connected to the conference via the Internet, and each participant sees the presentation on his or her screen, in real time. A web conference can be one way, as when the presenter delivers some sort of PowerPoint-like presentation, or two way, where each participant can join in

and show the contents of their active applications or desktops. Communication between participants can be audio only (via streaming audio, VoIP, or traditional telephony) or include audio and video (typically

using webcams). Most web conferencing services are hosted on the vendor’s servers. You typically

have to arrange a conference in advance, and the hosting service will help you set everything up. Depending on the vendor, this can be a costly service, viable only for larger organizations. Make sure you check the price before you commit to using a particular service. What features can you expect from a web conferencing service? Here are someof the most common:

\_ **Application sharing**, where the presenter and participants can all access and use the same application in real time. This is useful for smaller group meetings, when all participants are collaborating on a

project.

\_ **Desktop sharing**, similar to application sharing, but with the presenter’s entire desktop visible and accessible to participants.

\_ **File and document sharing**, with individual files and documents open for all to edit, also useful for group collaboration.

\_ **PowerPoint presentations**, the core component of large presentations; the presenter gives a PowerPoint presentation in real time, complete with slide transitions and animations, using audio conferencing tools to narrate the presentation.

**Presenter notes**, which let the presenter take notes during the course of the conference for future action.

\_ **Annotation**, which lets the presenter mark up the document or presentation being shared or given, typically by drawing or highlighting on the screen.

\_ **Whiteboard**, which is a blank screen on which the presenter or participants can draw or highlight objects.

\_ **Text-based chat**, which lets participants discuss the presentation with each other in real time.

\_ **Audio conferencing**, which adds the spoken words of the presenter to a PowerPoint presentation. With two-way audio, all participants can speak—assuming that they all have microphones, of course.

\_ **Video conferencing**, which puts a picture of the presenter in a corner of the conference webtop, typically generated via webcam. With twoway video, conference participants can also show pictures of themselves onscreen.

\_ **Polling**, which lets the presenter ask questions of the audience.

\_ **Quizzes**, which lets participants answer test questions, typically with results tabulated in real time.

Some web conferencing systems will have all of these features; others will have a subset. Look for services that offer those features essential to your particular needs.

**Adobe Acrobat Connect**

The Adobe Acrobat Connect (www.adobe.com/products/acrobatconnect) software and service offers personal online “meeting rooms” for large organizations. For $39/month (and up), you get audio/video conferencing, screen sharing, whiteboard, and chat functionality. Figure 18.8 shows a typical web conference using Acrobat connect. The main window is the shared application—that is, the live desktop of the presenter. The presenter appears via webcam in the upper-left window, and individualtext chats can take place in the window below.

**Convenos Meeting Center**

The Convenos Meeting Center (www.convenos.com) is a web-based conferencing service that starts at $30/month. For that price, you get online presentations, file and document sharing, whiteboard, polling (the ability to ask questions of your audience), and integration with Skype for conference audio.

**Genesys Meeting Center**

The similarly named Genesys Meeting Center (www.genesys.com) offers similar features to that of the Convenos service. Genesys gives you online PowerPoint presentations, file and document sharing, chat, desktop video, whiteboard, and polling and E-Quizzes. Pricing is by request only.

**Glance**

Glance (www.glance.net) is a web-based conferencing service priced from $49.95/month. Its main focus is easy-to-use screen sharing, with no client software necessary to install.

**IBM Lotus Sametime**

IBM’s web conferencing service is dubbed Lotus Sametime ([www.ibm.com/](http://www.ibm.com/) sametime/), and it comes in several different versions: Entry, Standard, Advanced, and Unyte. The web conferencing service

comes complete with enterprise instant messaging, multiway chat, VoIP and point-to-point video, and integration with most major desktop applications. Pricing varies by size of company.

**Microsoft Office Live Meeting**

Microsoft Office Live Meeting (office.microsoft.com/en-us/livemeeting/) is a hosted service available in two versions (Standard and Professional). You get audio/video conferences, a PowerPoint viewer, integration with Microsoft Outlook, application and desktop sharing, and the like. Pricing is on a peruser

basis, with volume licensing available.

**Persony Web Conferencing**

Unlike most other services, Persony Web Conferencing ([www.persony.com](http://www.persony.com)) doesn’t charge a monthly fee. Instead, you pay once for the software (a hefty $995) and don’t have any usage fees. This means, of course, that Persony doesn’t host your web conferences; you need to host conferences on your company’s

own servers. You get screen sharing, presentation sharing, whiteboard, picture sharing, VoIP audio, file transfer, and chat messaging.

**Pixion PictureTalk**

Pixion’s PictureTalk (www.pixion.com) is a hosted conference solution with four different plans. The Per Minute plan charges you only for time used; the Personal plan charges you for a single 10-person virtual meeting room; the Professional Plan is priced by the seat; and the Enterprise plan lets you host

the whole shebang on your own servers. All plans feature application and desktop sharing, whiteboard, polling and quizzes, chat and VoIP, audio conferencing, and the like.

**WebEx**

Cisco’s WebEx (www.webex.com) is perhaps the most-used web conferencing solution today. Various solutions and pricing plans are available, for organizations large and small. Features include VoIP support, integrated audio and video, application sharing, on-the-fly annotation, meeting recording and

playback, and so on. In this example, a PowerPoint presentation is being annotated by the presenter, while participants are chatting in a pane on the right. The presenter, in this case, can also take notes during the course of the presentation; these notes appear in their own pane on the lower right.

**Yugma**

Yugma (www.yugma.com) offers three different plans, priced from $199.95 to $899.85 per year based on how many people may attend a meeting. Features include desktop sharing, teleconferencing, public and private chat, annotations, and a whiteboard.

**Zoho Meeting**

Last but not least, Zoho Meeting (meeting.zoho.com) is, for now at least, a free web conferencing service. It includes the expected features, including application/desktop sharing, chat, and Skype integration, as well as remote

PC control.

**Collaborating via Social Networks and Groupware**

When it comes to collaborating with a group of people who may or may not share the same physical

location, one naturally turns to the web. When all team members have access to the Internet, why not use the Internet to connect the members of the group—to enable communication, file sharing, and the like?

That’s exactly what you can do, if you use the right tools. In this chapter, we discuss two such tools: social networks and online groupware. The former is a free but limited collaborate tool, while the latter has more functionality—but a typicallyhigher price.

**Creating Groups on Social Networks**

You’re probably already familiar with social networks such as Facebook and MySpace. The typical social network is a hosted site that aims to create a community of users, each of whom posts his or her own personal profile on the site. Eachuser includes enough person information in her profile to enable other users with similar interests to connect as “friends”; one’s collection of friends helps to build a succession

of personal communities. Most profile pages include some form of blog, discussion forum, or chat space

so that friends can communicate with the person profiled. In many instances, individual users also post a running list of their current activities so that their friends always know what they’re up to. Given that social networks are personal in nature, what value do they hold for businesses, community groups, and families? Lots, if you use them properly.

You see, most social networking sites let you create your own topic-specific groups. In this instance, a group is a collection of users who share the same interest; group members can communicate via discussion boards, share photos and videos, and even upload and download documents and other files.

In other words, a social network group is like a virtual meeting or community room. Instead of posting notices on a physical bulletin board, you post notices on a virtual message board. Instead of exchanging brochures and papers by hand, you upload photos, documents, and other files for all to share. And,

because most social networks are free for all to use (in exchange for the occasional on-page advertisement), it’s a cheap way to keep the members of your group up-to-date and organized.

In this regard, I find social network groups especially useful for community groups, far-flung friends, and families. You get just enough functionality to keep everyone in touch with each other, at no cost to anyone involved. No IT support is necessary, nor do you have to lease web hosting space; the social

network site maintains all the servers and technology. And, of course, all of these sites are easy to join and easy to use, which is nice if your groups include non-tech-savvy members. These social network groups are less useful for larger businesses. In a nutshell, these groups lack the advanced collaboration features that help to keep group projects on track. In addition, the profusion of web page advertising is anathema to many businesspeople. Finally, many businesses aren’t comfortable posting their business on a nonsecure third-party site (nor should they be), especially when more secure options are available.

With all this in mind, let’s take a quick look at the two most popular social networking sites (at least in the United States) and what they offer in terms of group collaboration features.

**Facebook**

Of all the social network sites, I recommend Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) first and foremost for those serious about group collaboration. Compared to MySpace, Facebook is more of a site for grown-ups; MySpace is more suited for teenagers and preteens. When you create a group on Facebook, you end up with a group page like the one in Figure 19.1. A Facebook group includes the following collaborative features:

\_ Recent news

\_ Discussion board

\_ Uploaded photos and videos

\_ Posted web pages

\_ The Wall—a kind of chat board

Your group can be Open (public), Closed (description if public, but members have to be approved), or Secret (membership by invitation only). Unfortunately, Facebook groups do not offer file uploading or sharing.

**MySpace**

A group on MySpace (www.myspace.com) is even more limited in functionality than what you can find on Facebook; this isn’t surprising, given MySpace’s typically younger audience. There’s no file uploading, although members can upload group photos. There’s a facility for posting group bulletins, and the obligatory discussion board, but that’s it. Oh, and you have to put up with advertisements smack in the middle of your group page.If you can live with all this, by all means consider MySpace for your (limited) group needs.

**Other Web Groups**

The groups on social networking sites aren’t the only groups you can create on the web. In fact, they may be some of the less-functional groups out there; other sites do groups better. Case in point: Google Groups (groups.google.com). When you create a Google Group, you get the obligatory message forum, but you also get to upload and share files, as well as create topic-specific pages within the group; group members can be notified of new posts via email. A Google Group can be Public (anyone can join, but only members can read messages), Announcement- Only (anyone can join, but only moderators can post messages), or Restricted (only the people you invite can join). Similar to Google Groups is Yahoo! Groups (groups.yahoo.com). Here you also get a message forum (with email notification of new posts) and file uploading, and also a photo library, group calendar, and polls. You can select whether your group appears in the Yahoo! Groups directory, whether anyone can join or if you have to approve all members, and who can post messages to the group. Because of the file-uploading and -sharing options, either of these two groups might be more useful to you than a Facebook or MySpace group—even though they might not have the cachet of the social networking groups.

**Evaluating Online Groupware**

For larger businesses, a social network group probably won’t suffice. What you need instead is a collection of web-based collaborative tools that help your team members not only communicate with each other but also manage their group projects. This type of solution is commonly known as *groupware*, and when it’s based in the cloud it’s called *online groupware*. In a nutshell, groupware is collaboration

software for workgroups. Online groupware does away with the physical constraints of traditional groupware, letting members from throughout an organization, in any location, access group assets.

What does this mean? In practicality, online groupware typically includes some or all of the following tools:

\_ File and document uploading and sharing

\_ Web calendar

\_ Task/project manager

\_ Message boards

\_ Text-based chat rooms / instant messaging

\_ Wiki-like collaborative pages

\_ Blogs

Why use online groupware? First of all, it puts all your group communications (and, in some cases, files) all in one place—and that one place is accessible to group members in any location, as long as they have an Internet connection.

Second, groupware makes it easier to communicate, which should reduce the number of meetings and conferences calls, as well as your email traffic. Finally, all this should increase your group’s collective and members’ individual productivity. It’s as simple as that. For example, suppose you’re managing a community not-for-profit group. You can use online groupware to connect other managers and volunteers

across the community. You can share plans, proposals, and other documents with all members, and use the groupware to solicit and receive proposals and invoices from suppliers. And, best of all, you can do this from your own computer, which means fewer phone calls, car trips, and unnecessary meetings—

all of which translates into less time involved and fewer expenses, both of which are important for charities. So read on to learn about some of the most popular online groupware applications.

**AirSet**

AirSet (www.airset.com) provides a cloud-based website for your group. Your AirSet site can include group announcements, a web calendar, contact list, task list, instant messaging, wiki for collaborative publishing, blog, file sharing and online storage, photo albums, and music playlists. And with all these

tools, when one person in the group makes a change, everyone else sees the updated information.

**ContactOffice**

ContactOffice (www.contactoffice.com) is a web-based data management system that lets you share emails, contacts, tasks, appointments, and documents with other group members. You can create internal or intercompany groups; the latter helps you communicate with customers, suppliers, and other people

outside your immediate office. You also get a web-based calendar, address book, message forum, and real-time chat. (Figure 19.3 shows the ContactOffice’s “virtual office” dashboard page.)

**Google Sites**

Google Sites (sites.google.com), formerly known as Jotspot, lets you create a group web page (hosted by Google), like the one shown in Figure 19.4. This page is completely customizable with your choice of file uploads, group announcements, task/project management, mailing lists, group calendar, and the like. Google Sites also integrates with Google’s other online apps, including Gmail, Google Calendar, Google Docs, and Google Talk. And, as with most things Google, it’s completely free.

**Huddle**

Huddle (www.huddle.net) is a hosted environment that combines online collaboration, project management, and document sharing, using social networking principles. You create a network of collaborative team workspaces, managed from a central dashboard. You can then take advantage of Huddle’s online file storage, project calendar, RSS and email notifications, whiteboard, wiki, and other collaborative tools.

**Nexo**

Nexo (www.nexo.com) lets you create a free personalized group website. The site can include photos, videos, forums, message boards, interactive calendars, polls, and to-do lists. Nexo targets its service to

family, friend, and community groups, although it may also function for some less-demanding business groups.

**OpenTeams**

OpenTeams (www.openteams.com) is better suited for larger businesses. It offers team folders, blogging, and wiki-like collaborative pages, all monitored via a customizable Navigator page, shown in Figure 19.6. From here you can keep track of key team members, organize resources with tags, participate in threaded discussions, and monitor new content posted by team members. Pricing is on a per-user, per-use basis, starting at $0.99 per user log-on day.

**FIGURE**

*The OpenTeams Navigator lets you monitor team members and content.*

**ProjectSpaces**

ProjectSpaces (www.projectspaces.com) provides an online workspace designed especially for group collaboration. You get an online document library, email discussion lists, task management, group announcements via email and RSS, a shared group calendar, and shared group documents.

**teamspace**

Our final online groupware application is called teamspace (www.teamspace.com), with a lowercase *t*. This application offers task and project management, contact management, an online calendar, message

forum, notice board, file sharing, text-based chat, and synchronization with Microsoft Outlook. Pricing is on a per-member basis, with additional fees for storage space used.

**Collaborating via Blogs and Wikis**

Group projects are all about collaboration and communication, so it pays to seek out every possible way to communicate with other group members. We’ve already looked at web mail and instant messaging, social network groups and groupware, but there are even more ways to handle your group communications. The two communication methods we examine in this final chapter are both web based, even if they don’t always fall neatly into the category of cloud computing. Blogs and wikis can both be housed in the cloud or on dedicated servers, depending on the service. But the point is that they’re both

web based and they both facilitate group collaboration. Read on to learn more.

**Evaluating Blogs for Collaboration**

If you’ve been on the Internet for any length of time, you’ve probably heard something about blogs. A blog (short for “web log”) is a kind of online journal that its author updates frequently with new musings and information. In terms of organization, a blog is a collection of individual *posts* or messages. The

posts are arranged in reverse chronological order, with the newest posts at the top— which makes it easy to keep track of the latest developments. Older posts are relegated to the blog archives, which are generally accessible via a link in the sidebar column. And, at the end of each post, you’ll find a link to comments; this is where blog readers can register their own personal comments about any given

post. But here’s what makes blogs really powerful. A blog doesn’t have to be the work of a single author; it can include posts from multiple contributors, as well as comments on each of those posts. This makes a blog ideal for keeping track of progress on a group project. Here’s how it goes. You create your blog, hosted on your company’s servers or on a popular blogging tool such as Blogger or WordPad. You make it a private blog and assign authorship status to all the members of your team. This means that everyone on your team can initiate new posts, as well as comment on the posts of others. When you have something important to say to the group, you make a blog post. Same with the other members; when they have updated info, they post it. In addition, other members can comment on your posts—for example, you

can create a post to schedule a meeting, and have the other members comment on your post with their replies. Members of your group can access the blog by navigating to its web page to see what’s new, or subscribe to an RSS feed that will notify them whenever there’s a new post to the blog, so they’re never in the dark. Where can your blog be hosted? If you work for a large company, ask your IT department about hosting your blog on the company’s servers. Otherwise, you can check out any of the following blog-hosting communities, all of which will let you create private group blogs.

**Blogger**

Blogger (www.blogger.com) is Google’s blog-hosting community, and with more than 8 million individual blogs, the largest blog host on the Internet. All Blogger blogs are free, which contributes to their popularity. The Blogger Dashboard, shown in Figure 20.1, is where you manage all your blog activity. From here you can create new blog posts, edit comments to your posts, manage your Blogger account and profile, and access Blogger’s help system. It’s also where you create a new blog.



**FIGURE**

*Managing your blog via the Blogger Dashboard*

Creating a new Blogger blog is as easy as filling in a few forms. After you click the Create a Blog link in the Blogger Dashboard, you’re asked to enter a title for your blog and a corresponding blog address (the part of the URL that goes before Blogger’s blogspot.com domain). Next, you get to choose a template

for your blog—a predesigned combination of page layout, colors, and fonts. Blogger now creates your blog—and you’re ready to start posting. Figure 20.2 shows a typical Blogger blog— if there is such a beast as a “typical” blog. You can customize your blog with any number of different templates and color

schemes; you can also add a variety of gadgets and other nonpost page elements.

Of course, one of the things you’ll want to customize is the list of people who have access to you blog. By default, a Blogger blog is completely public, and anyone on the Internet can read it. However, there’s a way to make your blog private so that only invited guests can view it; just go to the Blogger Dashboard, click the Manage: Settings link, and then click the Permissions link. When the next page appears, go to the Blog Readers section and select who can view your blog: Anybody (keeps the blog public), Only People I Choose, or Only Blog Authors. For a group blog, the option you want is Only Blog Authors. Of course, you now have to invite the other members of your group to be blog authors; do this by clicking

the Add Authors button.

**TypePad**

TypePad (www.typepad.com) is quite similar to Blogger. You can customize your blog with a number of different designs and widgets, and you can select multiple coauthors for your blog. However, TypePad

isn’t free; you pay anywhere from $4.95 to $89.95 per month, depending on the features you want. (You need at least the Pro plan, starting at $14.95/month, to support multiple co-authors.)

**WordPress**

WordPress (www.wordpress.com) is another popular blog-hosting community. It’s a lot like both Blogger and TypePad, but perhaps a bit more customizable. You get lots of themes to choose from, sidebar widgets, and a private members- only option. You also can create multiple blogs and assign multiple

authors. And, like Blogger, a WordPress blog is completely free.

**Evaluating Wikis for Collaboration**

Our final method of group collaboration is the wiki. You’re probably familiar with the concept of wikis, thanks to the web’s most popular wiki—Wikipedia. If you’ve never used Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org), you’re in for an eye opener. Wikipedia is, in essence, a giant online encyclopedia—but with a twist. Wikipedia’s content is created solely by the site’s users, resulting in the

world’s largest online collaboration. Wikipedia articles are written, edited, and elaborated on by people of all types, from students, to subject-matter experts and professional researchers, to interested amateurs. It’s a true group collaboration.

Which is, in fact, what a wiki is—a collection of web pages where any users can contribute or modify content. The first wiki was WikiWikiWeb, a website founded in 1995 to facilitate the exchange of ideas

between computer programmers. Wikis enable all users not only to write new articles, but also to comment on and edit existing articles. Today, many organizations use wikis as collaborative applications. A group wiki can be public (open to all users), as Wikipedia is, or private—which is ideal for project groups, businesses, and other organizations. A private wiki invites all group members to create new pages on the wiki site or to edit any existing page. All writing and editing is done within the web browser, no extra software or tools necessary. In most instances, there is no review of the articles or edits before they’re accepted. The result is a collection of articles or documents, written collaboratively. The

wiki software organizes the articles behind the scenes and manages the versioning for each article.

Do you think a wiki is a good tool for your particular organization or project? If so, check out the following wiki hosting services; they make it easy to get your wiki up and running and to manage it on an ongoing basis.

**PBwiki**

PBwiki (www.pbwiki.com) offers various levels of wiki hosting. Small wikis (one to three users) are free; larger ones are priced as low as $4 per user per month. Wiki creation is easy, thanks to a variety of premade templates. You also get online file storage to help you organize your other documents as part

of your wiki.

**Versionate**

Versionate (www.versionate.com) offers hosted wikis designed for group collaboration. A Versionate wiki is business friendly, thanks to SSL-level security and full control over editing privileges; you can also import Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and PDF documents into your wiki. The company offers several

different plans: Free (500MB storage), Personal (2GB storage for $2/month), Business (unlimited storage for $25/month), and Enterprise (unlimited storage

for $2/user/month).

**wikihost.org**

The wikihost.org site (www.wikihost.org) provides free wiki hosting. Wiki creation is via the GeboBebo engine, which offers a local database structure, user and rights management, RSS feeds and email notification for new and updated articles, and image and file uploading.

**Wikispaces**

Wikispaces (www.wikispaces.com) claims to host more than 450,000 individual wikis. Standard features include image and file uploading, widget and media embedding, RSS feeds and email notifications, discussion areas, and detailed user statistics. A variety of hosting plans are available, from Basic

(free) to Private Label Premium ($800/month).

**Zoho Wiki**

Finally, from our friends at Zoho, comes their wiki application, Zoho Wiki (wiki.zoho.com). They offer free wiki hosting complete with WYSIWYG editing, versioning of wiki pages, and the ability to make your wiki public or private— all for free. Your wiki is managed from a Dashboard page, like the one shown in Figure 20.3; just click the New Page icon to add a new page to the wiki.