# Blackboard®

# The Essential Guide to Synchronous Learning, Web Conferencing and Real-Time Collaboration

## Moving beyond just-for-meeting tools, a virtual classroom solution built for training and learning

Today's dynamic global economy has increased the need for organizational training across all industries. Efficient, cost-effective training and employee development are necessary for day-to-day operations and for meeting strategic business objectives.

Many organizations turn to online meeting tools to meet their needs, and there's no shortage of options. Simple and free. Low-cost/low-feature. Enterprise-grade offerings built for business. But online learning and collaboration require more than a one-size-fits-all solution.

When training organizations use online meeting tools and platforms with limited learning features (and often old-school interfaces), it's more difficult to engage and retain learners. The ability to engage is a critical consideration when choosing an online learning solution.

This guide lays out these critical considerations, elements that can spell the difference between a solution that works and one that fails to make the grade. Based on our extensive experience working with businesses and governments worldwide, we've learned a synchronous learning, web conferencing, and real-time collaboration solution should offer:

› A fully engaging virtual classroom experience

› An collaborative environment for everyone, every time

› Accessibility for all learners, no matter their learning style or need

› Streamlined integration with your learning management system (LMS) either directly or via an application programming interface (API)

› Capabilities that help meet your organization's goals—like knowledge transfer and employee retention—and improve your bottom line

Whether you're evaluating a synchronous learning, web conferencing, and collaboration solution for the first time; re-evaluating your current approach; or just curious about why a just-for-meeting tool may not be the right choice to deliver training and learning, this guide's for you.

*ATD tells us that 38 percent of corporate training is delivered using technology. And we know that a significant amount of that training is done via virtual classrooms. But online training with success is not about choosing any one particular platform or approach—instead, it's about taking a holistic view of an entire learner-centric experience.*

## Five questions to ask your web-conferencing vendor

**1. Is their platform built for meetings or with learning in mind?**

Many web conferencing platforms were built to conduct meetings with those who can't be physically present. These solutions have saved organizations millions of dollars in travel expenses over the years. But consider your department's goals. If a meeting platform isn't sufficient to engage employees, if it doesn't have features designed with learning and collaboration in mind, perhaps it's time to consider an alternative.

**2. What underlying technologies is your vendor using to deliver a real-time experience?**

Does your provider's platform use a responsive design that gives users a consistent experience across all devices? Is the provider using WeRTC technology, an enhanced protocol for delivering an interactive audio, video, and application sharing experience via the Internet? Can the provider's technology adapt to each user's connection and work in a variety of Internet environments (low bandwidth, latency, etc.)?

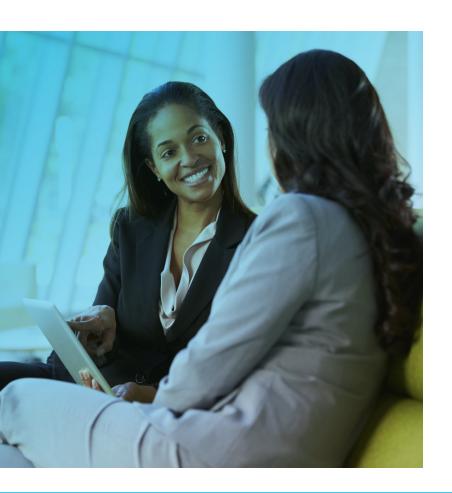**3. Can you create pre-built session plans with your vendor's web conferencing solution?**

Ask if your provider's platform allows you to create a repeatable session, saving you hours of prep time and offering a consistent experience for all your users.

**4. Will your web conferencing provider partner with you to improve your organization's goals and outcomes?**

A provider who offers peer-to-peer engagement, global collaboration, and efficient access to help will help you reach your goals more quickly and effectively.

**5. Can your web conferencing vendor help maximize your investment?**

Your web conference vendor should be flexible enough with their pricing model to help you expand the reach of your virtual programs through a customized plan that fits your needs.



*Customer Profile: Jiffy Lube*

*Jiffy Lube developed a virtual instructor-led training (VILT) version of an online course on specialty oil products using Blackboard's online collaboration technology, helping the company deliver more training while saving on travel and meeting costs. The course, "Empower the Customer – Oil Selection," was designed to educate Jiffy Lube customer service advisors on the benefits of specialty motor oils so they could better communicate with customers based on their vehicle manufacturer recommendations and driving habits.*

*Training programs like Jiffy Lube's are so successful because they are contributing to the organization's bottom line by driving down costs and even scaling across geographic boundaries by eliminating the need to fly in franchisees from all over the world to a central headquarters.*

## What factors are reshaping the way organizations approach training and learning?

In today's environment, organizations need a solution to help them meet the needs of their stakeholders: employees, customers, and partners. A web conferencing solution must enable real-time, online learning and collaboration in a manner that's engaging, convenient, personal, and scaled to the extended enterprise.

Here are a few factors to consider when evaluating a synchronous learning environment:

› Do you need to streamline the workforce and accelerate onboarding process?

› Is your global workforce functioning collaboratively and virtually?

› Do retention and success planning remain an important focus?

› Are there budgetary restrictions or policies on costly travel and time away from the office?

› How important is enabling access to training resources from mobile devices?

› Is your business environment more competitive, fast-paced and information-driven than in previous years?Keisha

## Learning new things should be fun. Even when work isn't.

Whether you're developing talent or disseminating best practices, you need training software to engage your employees and get results. At Blackboard, we know how to make real learning happen. That's why we built Blackboard Collaborate™ with the highest quality audio, video, and application sharing available. Now training your workforce is easier than ever.

## A fully engaging classroom experience

Many standard tools designed for virtual meetings are interactive. But they won't provide the same level of engagement as a virtual classroom built from the ground up. Blackboard Collaborate offers a sleek and modern interface, giving trainers the ability to deliver online sessions that are varied and engaging. They can flip the classroom, share resources, and provide pre-learning experiences, keeping the focus on dynamic in-session interaction.

## A collaborative environment for everyone, everywhere, every time

Collaboration across geographic boundaries is the new normal. Web conferencing promotes active learner engagement and adds a personal touch to interactions between individuals. The result is enhanced training and organizational development opportunities, improved knowledge transfer, and increased employee productivity and retention.
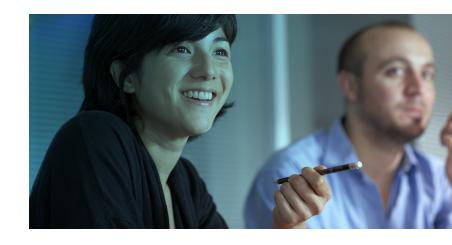
## Accessibility for all learners

What should an accessible solution provide? Here are a few capabilities to consider:

› Closed-captioning for those with hearing impairment

› Screen reader support, enabling text-to-speech output for those with vision-related disabilities

› Improved keyboard navigation and accelerator keys for those with limited mobility

› Recordings for those with cognitive disabilities

While much of the accessibility imperative is focused on those with physical or cognitive impairments, there are additional populations to consider. These include people who are geographically distributed or people who may be in areas with low bandwidth connections to the Internet. Virtual conferencing provides a tremendous option for these learners. Whether they have a disability or live in a remote area, all learners should have the same experience.

A synchronous learning platform provider should share your commitment to accessibility. Specific product features are important. So is engaging those with disabilities. A truly accessible synchronous solution incorporates the wisdom and experience of those who encounter accessibility issues on a daily basis.

## Streamlined integration with your learning management system (LMS) either directly or via an application programming interface (API)

Integration is essential for top training departments that are already using a comprehensive LMS, a content management system (CMS), or some type of virtual learning environment (VLE) to support tasks such as talent management, learning programs and paths, mentoring programs, and other performance initiatives.

It's critical that your synchronous learning and collaboration platform is tightly integrated with the most popular learning management systems and supports the learning tools interoperability (LTI) standards for integration with other applications.

The solution should also offer application programming interfaces (API) to make the connection to non-supported products, enabling you to leverage the technology you already have in place.

## Capabilities that help meet your organization's goals—like knowledge transfer and employee retention—and improve your bottom line

The versatility of web conferencing allows organizations to quickly achieve a strong return on their investment by reducing costs – eliminating travel expenses and enabling efficient meetings and professional development online.

Organizations can extend their web conferencing by using the platform to generate revenue from customer training programs and improving partner and channel sales enablement.

*"Blackboard has figured it out. We know our virtual training sessions are going to be successful every single time."*

*— **Becky Pluth,** President and CEO at The Bob Pike Group*

## Blackboard Collaborate™: The essential synchronous learning and collaboration solution

Blackboard Collaborate was built to meet the learning and collaboration needs of high performing training and development organizations. As the name Blackboard implies, we're all about learning, and we have been since we were founded over twenty years ago.

With Blackboard Collaborate, we're enabling businesses, associations, and governments to offer a collaborative, interactive, and mobile learning experience – the sort of experience that today's learners expect and training and development leaders are increasingly committed to deliver.

Blackboard Collaborate is an easy-to-use solution that provides the best synchronous learning and collaboration application in the realm of learning. It can stand on its own, or live fully integrated with your overall learning management system.

With Blackboard Collaborate, you're getting a solution that covers all the essentials:

› A fully engaging virtual classroom experience

› A collaborative environment for everyone, everywhere, every time

› Accessibility for all learners, no matter their learning style or need

› Streamlined integration with your learning management system (LMS) either directly or via an application programming interface (API)

› Capabilities that help meet your organization's goals – like knowledge transfer and employee retention – and improve your bottom line

*Blackboard Collaborate was designed for synchronous learning, conferencing, and collaboration in the academic environment. Key features include:*

*Simple user experience*

*Moderator tools*

*Interactive tools (like whiteboarding and polling)*

*Application sharing*

*Multipoint video*

*Integration with your LMS either directly or via an API*

*Support for LTI*

*Application Programming Interface*

*Universal accessibility*

**You can learn more about how Blackboard Collaborate works here.**

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