

# Superfast Business Wales



# Business Guide

# Collaboration Technologies

To most people collaboration means 'working together'. For anyone with Superfast Broadband, collaboration means 'working together, without actually having to be there.'

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## Collaboration Technologies

For thousands of years humans have been speaking to each other, and drawing on cave walls or pictures in the sand to communicate ideas so that knowledge and experience can be passed on, and built upon by future generations. The Egyptians were able to build complex structures like the pyramids by leveraging simple tools with the power of collaboration.

Spin forward to the present day and the advent of Superfast Broadband, and you don't even have to be in the same place, same country or same continent to collaborate and share ideas. With modern Fibre Optic broadband connections, voice conversations and text conversations can now become full screen video conversations between multiple participants. In addition you can share files and ideas with colleagues and business partners, whilst geographically dispersed members of a project team can see at a glance how the project is progressing from both an individual and team perspective.

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### Understand

#### What Does The Technology Do?

Collaboration comes in many forms and there are a wide range of technologies available. Here are just some examples of how you can use IT to collaborate more effectively with your employees, your trading partners and your customers:

- **Communication** - emails and voice conversations
- **Conferencing** - video chats, whiteboard and shared desktops
- **Co-ordination** - project management and resource management
- **Reference** - WIKIs and Intranet websites
- **Sharing** - shared files, contacts and calendars
- **Integration** - personalised content and custom dashboards



## Adopt

### How Do I Get Started?

The best way to get started is dip your toe in the water and begin using the different IT solutions to support 'real life' business activities. By doing so you'll quickly get a feel for what works for you and what doesn't. Listed below are a few examples of collaboration technologies together with some insights into how they can be used. Many of these are illustrative of particular categories of software and a quick online search will provide comparative lists of similar products.

#### **Google Apps ([www.google.com/work/apps/business](http://www.google.com/work/apps/business))**

Google Apps is an online productivity suite which provides web-based email, document creation/sharing, online storage, shared calendars, video meetings and a variety of other tools.

#### **Microsoft 365 ([www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com))**

Like Google Apps, this productivity suite provides a comprehensive range of tools to manage your work. For some users it provides an easier transition to online collaboration as many of the tools are very familiar (such as Word, Excel, Outlook and Powerpoint).

#### **Skype ([www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com))**

Skype can be used to make telephone calls over the Internet. Skype is part of a growing trend to communicate using VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol). More recent versions of Skype also include other collaboration features such as text chat, video messaging, shared screens and whiteboards, file sharing and conferencing with more than one person. Skype is now owned by Microsoft and is already being integrated into some of Microsoft's new products.

#### **Lync/Communicator ([www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com))**

Lync and Communicator were traditionally the 'corporate' versions of software such as Skype. Originally many businesses were reluctant to allow online chat in the workplace and Lync and Communicator were often used as an internal-only version.

However, as employees started to bring smartphones, tablets and iPads to work which could be used to circumvent the corporate rules around online chat and social networking, so business started to relax restrictions and view these types of collaboration tools as business tools

#### **GoToMeeting ([www.gotomeeting.com](http://www.gotomeeting.com))**

Services like GoToMeeting and WebEx allow organisations to provide professional, business class audio conferencing and video conferencing with added benefits such as screen sharing, and whiteboarding. These services provide an easy way to show customer presentations, product walk-throughs and even pass control of a computer between any of the attendees when someone wants to 'take over' temporarily to demonstrate something to the other attendees.

Usually a meeting is set-up via an email, and the participants click on the link in the email, and then enter a username and password, or a PIN number in order to join the conference.



## **ProjectPlace ([www.projectplace.com](http://www.projectplace.com))**

ProjectPlace is an online collaboration tool for managing projects centrally across dispersed groups of people. Online services like ProjectPlace offer many benefits over and above manual systems. For example, having a single top-down view of the entire project whilst still providing each member of the project team their own personal view or dashboard can be very useful. These services usually allow project members to log time spent against particular activities which can then be used to automatically generate management reports on progress, resources and budgets.

## **Replicon ([www.replicon.com](http://www.replicon.com))**

Replicon is just one of a new breed of HR systems that are completely hosted online. Such online HR systems usually contain everything needed to submit timesheets, expenses, sick leave and holidays. Most of these services can provide email alerts when timesheets are outstanding or when expenses and holidays have been approved, and can generate management reports for planning purposes. They also typically have mobile versions that can be used on phones or tablets by downloading them from an 'app store' such as iTunes or Google MarketPlace.

## **SharePoint ([www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com))**

SharePoint has become one of the most popular internal company website solutions. Usually an internal-only company website is known as an 'intranet', whilst one that can also be accessed by a few selected partners, suppliers or customers is usually called an "extranet". If you have a reasonably new server running Windows Server 2003, 2008 or 2012 you may already have SharePoint installed but not realise that it has actually been set-up for you.

## **DropBox ([www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com))**

DropBox is commonly used for synchronising and sharing documents, spreadsheets, presentations, photographs and music across multiple devices over a broadband or WiFi connection. When you have a file synchronisation service like DropBox, Box, SkyDrive or Google Drive you will always have access to the most up-to-date versions of your files, regardless of which device you have with you.

## **Exchange ([www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com))**

Microsoft Exchange is used by many organisations to provide email, calendars and contacts to each employee through Microsoft Outlook, Apple iMail or the email function on a smartphone, tablet or iPad. Historically, most organisations would each have their own in-house Exchange Server managed by an internal employee, but with Superfast Broadband many new businesses are opting to use an email service that is hosted on the internet, rather than doing it in-house.

## **Integration for a unified user experience**

Several of the technologies have areas of overlap or integration options that allow the user to have a 'unified experience'. For many organisations this will be from within Microsoft Outlook where the following information can all be pulled into what techies like to call 'a single pane of glass':

- Emails from Exchange and Gmail
- Contacts from Exchange
- Shared folders and documents from SharePoint
- Instant Messages and online chats from Communicator, Lync and Skype
- Meetings and appointments from Communicator, Lync, Skype and GoToMeeting



## Exploit

### What Business Benefits Can I Expect?

**Some of the key business benefits that effective collaboration can deliver include:**

- Reduced costs (less travel, hotels and meeting rooms)
- More efficient processes (quickly set - up virtual teams and ad hoc projects)
- Access to better, more timely information (constantly being updated)
- No need to compare diaries, simply contribute or respond when it's convenient for you

Collaboration can be used as a tool for producing better sales pitches, presentations and proposals. It can offer new ways of finding and engaging with business partners and customers.

It can help with innovation, as you can share ideas quickly and openly, and receive instant feedback from participants.

## Top Tips

### Start small and grow

Start small with enthusiastic 'champions' who share your desire to evaluate new ways to collaborate with each other.

### Try the free versions or evaluations first.

Most companies make it easy for you to try their software in the hope that you will like it, and keep it. So take full advantage of this and 'try before you buy'.

### Try working exclusively from a tablet or smartphone for a day

Figure out what is practical for you to use. If you normally 'consume' information, rather than 'create' information a tablet, iPad or smartphone might be all you need when on the move.

### Ask the experts what they use

Don't be afraid to ask for advice and guidance from people already using the collaboration technologies mentioned in this guide. In many cases this might be your children, as the chances are that they already use many of these tools with their friends and can show you the basics.

### Engage business partners

Look for areas that you can work together with business partners to share information (instead of duplicating it, or re-typing it into separate computer systems).

### Keep it simple

Begin with simple headphones, microphones and webcams-you can still buy the fancy conferencing equipment once you're comfortable with the basic features.



## NEXT STEPS

1. Register to attend a fully-funded Business Development Workshop.  
[www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/events](http://www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/events)
2. Make an appointment to see a Business Advisor who will help you create a personal action plan to grow your business.  
[www.business.wales.gov.uk/contact-us](http://www.business.wales.gov.uk/contact-us)

For further information on Collaboration take a look at:

See how other businesses in Wales have exploited Superfast Broadband  
[www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/superfast-success-stories](http://www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/superfast-success-stories)

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