



# Hold Your Investment Club Meeting Online

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As the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in early 2020, a huge number of investment clubs pivoted to use online meeting tools for their regular monthly meetings. I put together an overview of these tools for the benefit of investment clubs that were looking for options for their meeting needs which was published in BetterInvesting magazine and posted on the BetterInvesting and myICLUB.com websites.

Now, a year later, many clubs have become quite comfortable with the idea of conducting meetings online. Many of the features and pricing of these tools has changed, however, so here is an updated look at various solutions for online meetings.

While most of these tools were created for use by small or even large businesses, many offer free or low-cost options that can work quite well for holding a club meeting.

Explore the list below to find the meeting tools that work for your club's budget and size. Some options only allow for use with computer audio (that is, they provide no access for reaching the meeting by telephone). Others may limit video conferencing (the ability to see other attendees via their webcams), screen sharing (such as the ability to show the club's Valuation Statement on myICLUB.com or a member's Stock Selection Guide on the BetterInvesting website), recording (which can facilitate the preparation of meeting minutes), or file sharing.

The following are my top picks for online meeting tools, and are listed in order of preference. Many of these offer free trials. Features and pricing are always subject to change, so confirm the details before signing up with any provider.

## Webex ([www.webex.com](http://www.webex.com))

**Webex** from Cisco may be the most feature-rich free online meeting tool available. The Webex free personal plan supports meetings of 50 minutes or less and up to 100 attendees, with video conferencing, screen sharing, and call-in telephone audio. The Webex program or mobile app must be used to conduct and attend the meeting, and it supports chat, file sharing, and recording of meetings. For longer meetings, their Starter plan is \$13.50 per month.

## FreeConferenceCall.com

([www.freeconferencecall.com/online-meetings](http://www.freeconferencecall.com/online-meetings))

While best known for its telephone conference call service, **FreeConferenceCall.com** also offers a free video conferencing and screen sharing service. The downloadable program or mobile app supports meetings of up to 1,000 participants and with no pre-set time limitations, as well as the ability to switch presenters and record meetings. Integrated computer audio is supported as well as telephone audio.

If a simple phone meeting will suffice (with video or computer screen sharing), then FreeConferenceCall.com's telephone conference service may be an option to consider. The website has simple instructions for initiating a conference call, which only require creating a unique PIN. Calls do not have to be scheduled in advance on the website.

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

Internet telephony provider **Skype** offers free video meetings that require no signups or downloads. Visit the Skype.com website and click the link to create a free meeting, then share the meeting link with up to

100 attendees. Features include screen sharing and video conferencing, and the ability to record meetings.

## **Zoom** ([www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us))

**Zoom** is a popular tool for conducting online business meetings, with support for video conferencing and screen sharing. The Zoom Basic plan is free for personal use with a single host, and allows up to 100 participants in a single meeting. However, there is a 40 minute limit on group meetings and participants must use the audio on their personal computer or mobile device. Zoom does not allow the use of telephone audio for their Basic plan. Participants download an app from the Zoom website or mobile app store in order to attend a Zoom meeting. Their Pro plan allows for longer meetings and costs \$149.90/year.

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

Many BetterInvesting members and volunteers and ICLUBcentral customers are familiar with the GoToWebinar application used by both organizations to conduct regular educational and training webinars. The **GoToMeeting** program, while not free, costs just \$7.50 a month for an annual subscription and allows up to 150 participants (and 1 organizer) to meet in an online platform with no time limits. GoToMeeting supports video conferencing, screen sharing, and file sharing. To listen or speak, attendees and organizers can use computer or telephone audio. A small program or app must be downloaded in order to participate in a meeting.

## **BlueJeans by Verizon** ([www.bluejeans.com](http://www.bluejeans.com))

The Standard plan at BlueJeans Meetings is \$9.99 a month for meetings of up to 100 attendees and with unlimited lengths. All video meetings include dial-in telephone access, chat, whiteboarding, screen sharing, and can be reached by any web browser you a personal computer, or via their app for IOS or Android devices. Meetings can also be recorded.

## **Other Providers**

Here is a short list of candidates that didn't make the cut for me, but there may be a tool that will work for your club.

**Slack** ([www.slack.com](http://www.slack.com)). Slack's free offering doesn't allow group meetings, but its Standard plan does. Aimed at small- and medium-sized businesses, Slack Standard is probably prohibitively priced for most investment clubs at \$6.67 a month *per user*, but does offer video calling and screen sharing in real time with up to 15 others.

### **AnyMeeting** ([www.anymeeting.com](http://www.anymeeting.com)).

The AnyMeeting Video Conferencing Starter plan is free, but limits web participants to four.

**Google Hangouts** ([hangouts.google.com](http://hangouts.google.com)). Up to ten participants can join a free Google Hangout session where they can chat and talk by video conference.

**CallBridge** ([www.callbridge.com](http://www.callbridge.com)). Formerly known as Calliflower, CallBridge is a premium conference call service. Their Standard plan costs \$14.99 per month and supports up to 100 online participants with video conferencing, recording, screen sharing, and telephone access.

### **Dialpad UberConference** ([www.uberconference.com](http://www.uberconference.com))

has a Free plan that supports up to 10 participants and meetings up to 45 minutes in length, with screen sharing, call recording, and mobile apps. Their Business plan is \$15 month and supports 100 participants and five-hour meetings, and adds telephone access numbers.

## BEST PRACTICES FOR ONLINE MEETINGS

Online meetings often run most smoothly if everyone follows a few basic rules:

1. **Use an audio headset.** Your computer may have a built-in speaker and microphone, but these can generate audio feedback or echoes that other meeting attendees can find annoying. Using a headset with microphone can improve overall sound quality for everyone in the meeting.
2. **Mute thyself.** If you are not speaking, use the “mute” option in your meeting software or phone to turn off your microphone and thus reduce the level of background noise that can make a meeting inaudible for all attendees. Just remember to unmute yourself when you have something to say. It can be useful to put a Post-it note on your computer screen that says “MUTE/UNMUTE” to remind you.
3. **Practice.** Learning to navigate your chosen online meeting tools may take some time. Look for user guides for attendees and hosts on the provider’s website, and schedule a practice meeting or two for all members so they can get up to speed before the official meeting is held.
4. **Be on time.** Don’t sign in to your club’s online meeting two minutes before it starts, especially if you’re using new tools for the first time. Allow enough time to launch the meeting software, log in, and debug any technical problems well in advance of the meeting time.
5. **Be organized.** A well-organized meeting agenda will help keep the club meeting on track and on time.

## About Doug Gerlach



For more than 25 years, Doug Gerlach has been a member and leader within the BetterInvesting community. He is currently the President of ICLUBcentral Inc., the wholly-owned subsidiary of BetterInvesting, and is editor-in-chief of the award-winning, market-beating *Investor Advisory Service* newsletter as well as the *SmallCap Informer* newsletter.

Doug has written six books, including **Investment Clubs for Dummies** and **The Armchair Millionaire**, and is a frequent speaker at financial conferences and events nationwide.