

Electronic Communications Committee
Board Report-----July 12, 2003

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The committee has been busy over the past several months with demonstrations of two Web-based conferencing products: WebEx <http://webex.com> and Raindance <http://raindance.com>. These products allow end-users to conduct meetings and share software applications, documents, presentations and other content on the Internet using a standard web browser. Integrated telephone service and web-based audio and video services can be incorporated using telephones, computer web-cameras and microphones.

The committee divided itself up into two groups to test the two products. After the Raindance test, the committee decided to do a second demo and to put out a call on MPLAEX-L for additional volunteers so that a mix of officers, section and committee chairs and the executive director could have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with what these kinds of products offer.

Below are comparisons of the two products and some of the comments made by participants of the Raindance test.

	WebEX	Raindance
Ease of use	High learning curve	Low learning curve
Cost	see attached	
	.55 a min with voice	.27 a min with voice
Assistance	Self-guided	Person available during demo

Advantages

- Requires only a web browser and telephone if voice is desired.
- Ability to share visuals, such as Web pages, PowerPoint, spreadsheets, etc. Participants can also make changes online to documents.
- Meeting can be recorded for playback or future reference (concerns were raised here about privacy and what Raindance would have access to)

Concerns raised

Cost is a factor. (approximately \$60 for 6 people for 10 minutes) While most felt that both products worked well in doing what they are designed to do, questions were raised about whether such a product would be worth the expense.

- Another concern was raised about the time required for the learning curve. Because we had a live person with the Raindance demo, he was able to take participants through the steps which did help. Also a headset was recommended when using the phone so that one's hands are free to type on the computer.
- Much more preparation would have to go into meetings to use the connect time most efficiently. Need for all to be co-moderators?
- Seems more useful for small rather than large meetings
- More bells and whistles than needed
- Awkward for a large group of people –keeping track of both the verbal (voice) and chat (typed comments) is confusing
- Privacy issues—whose property are the recorded transcripts (Raindance's or MPLA's)
- Response time sluggish for some participants

Next steps

The committee will test the chat feature of one of the academic courseware programs, WebCT <http://webct.com> or Blackboard <http://www.blackboard.com> in the coming months.