

Real-Time Visuals for Better Meetings



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Through the power of real-time visual communication, SmartDraw makes planning and conducting meetings much more efficient and productive—saving both time and money.

- Reduce average meeting time by more than 25%.
- Achieve clarity and consensus faster.
- Eliminate the seemingly endless cycle of revisions and follow-up meetings.

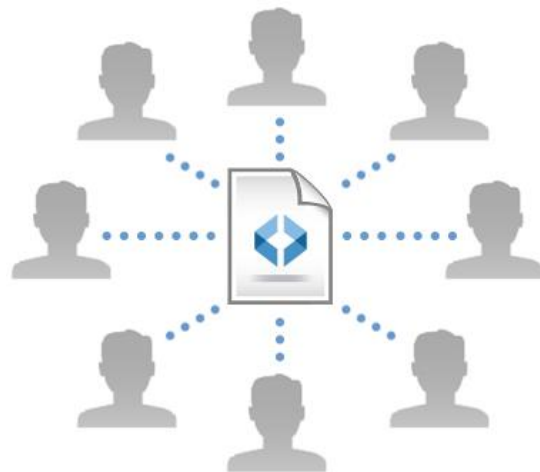
SmartDraw makes creating *real-time* visuals possible for everyone. Using SmartDraw’s meeting templates, tasks can be easily assigned and accounted for and project plans can be created and adjusted in real time. This allows more quantifiable work to be accomplished during the meeting, eliminating the seemingly endless cycle of revisions and follow-up.

Introduction

In the business world, time is a precious commodity. Businesspeople spend a lot of time in meetings. Not to mention time spent planning them and performing follow-up tasks. Successful meetings are collaborative, efficient, productive and empowering.

Unfortunately, most meetings are not effective. They don’t follow a well-prepared plan, tend to get off topic, and results are not easily verified. Time is wasted. Team members lose interest and feel unengaged. The benefit of collaboration is lost.

Real-time visuals are the key to successful meetings. They should be used for meeting preparation, presentation, information capture and follow-up. This provides tangible benefits to managers, allowing them to get the most from their team members’ valuable time. Using visuals provides a solution that can significantly shorten the length of the meeting cycle (planning and preparation, execution, and follow up).



It also allows participants to capture, in real time, the collaborative results of their meeting. This “live information capture” is made in an easy-to-use visual format. Decisions made, tasks assigned, and timelines for implementation are shared in a visual format for all to see. Everyone is on the same page.

Nothing falls through the cracks. Live information capture using visuals provides tangible results. Meetings now have a measurable return on investment for companies that adopt its use throughout their organization.

Isn't it much more productive to have team members actually working on project tasks to achieve their goals and objectives, rather than spending their time in meetings? Ask yourself this question: if you could make more time for your team, how much more could be accomplished?

Why Visuals?

Visuals are scientifically proven to be up to **six times**¹ more effective than words alone in communicating ideas, data, information, processes, plans, projects and more. This improved communication leads directly to increased sales, lower costs, productivity gains, and reduced errors. That adds up to significant business performance enhancement.



Traditional graphics software (like Microsoft Visio® and the Microsoft Office® drawing tools) are an impediment to the widespread business use of visuals, because their lack of automatic formatting means that it takes too much time, hassle and ultimately cost to make the return on creating them worth the effort. This is why so few business users have ever created a visual—in fact, less than 3% of all business communication uses visuals. They also cannot be created in real-time, causing extra cycles of transcribing, reviewing, and editing that waste time and generate poor results.

In fact, some organizations that are using SmartDraw in meetings have even replaced their whiteboards and ad hoc note-taking with real-time documentation using meeting-specific visuals. Their results have been higher engagement and agreement by team members, and significantly decreased follow-up time required to produce essential meeting documents and project action plans. Capturing information visually *and at the speed of thought* translates into immediate team action and increased productivity.

More Productive Meetings

In a survey of Microsoft® employees known as *Microsoft Office Personal Productivity Challenge (PPC)*, the results found that on average people spend 5.5 hours a week in meetings, and 71% feel that meetings are typically unproductive². The survey also found that the most common pitfalls are unclear objectives, lack of team communication, and unclear priorities³.



That is a staggering amount of lost time that could have been prevented by communicating visually. All of the above pitfalls can be addressed from the proper planning of the meeting and employing the proper use of visuals to turbocharge the overall effectiveness of the meeting. A recent study from the University of Minnesota found that the average length of meetings in which visuals were used were 26.8% shorter (26.7 minutes vs. 18.6 minutes) than meetings in which no visuals were used⁴. So, by changing how your meeting is planned and run via visuals, the productivity and communication to the participants improves exponentially. To paraphrase Ben Franklin, time saved is money earned.

How do you make meetings both shorter *and* more productive?

Let's look at the most commonly used tool – the meeting agenda. Meeting agendas are typically lists of topics and sub-topics for the group to discuss within the time scheduled. However, lists are limited in their ability to communicate. Using SmartDraw to brainstorm with mind maps and present an assignment view of a project, the meeting planner is now able to create better accountability. By brainstorming your meetings and projects visually, you can better understand and more powerfully communicate the topics and sub-topics and how each is interrelated within the overall discussion. With SmartDraw, you have the ability to change and revise any aspect of your project during the course of the meeting to properly and accurately record the discussions. Moreover, with the visual processor, accountability is created more quickly, clearly, and easily than ever before.

In essence, by using visuals instead of text-only lists and written documents, you save time in the preparation of the meeting and meeting agenda. The outcome is that you communicate effectively and thoroughly to the participants ensuring they understand the objectives of the meeting and the actions and priorities that result from it. This eliminates future meetings and discussions for the sake of clarity. Time saved *and* time well spent.

Communication and Collaboration

Communication is at the core of all business and is the life blood of organizations. In the past, before word processors were introduced, written reports and documents were created only by a small pool of professional document specialists (typists). This meant the process of creating one was fairly time consuming, error-prone, costly, and involved a back-and-forth process between the person trying to communicate and the person creating the written document. The result was that written communication was not nearly optimal. As soon as the first word processors, with their automatic

formatting and built-in know-how, began to show up on a large number of employee desktops a significant breakthrough occurred that changed business communication forever.



Improvements came in ways no one had ever imagined possible. For those who purchased word processors for all of their employees, the incredible return on investment became evident very quickly. But it still took time for some companies to see that they were quickly falling behind the times and losing their competitiveness. They resisted change, even though embracing and adapting to the change was clearly the right thing to do. In the end, word processors did end up on every business person's PC.

Today, there are so many different ways people communicate both internally and externally in their businesses that it becomes paramount to communicate in ways that everyone can understand and do it in an expeditious manner. Visual communication is the language, and by leveraging the power of SmartDraw, it is now possible to break down all global language barriers and communicate visually. How?

SmartDraw provides you the ability to create professional-quality visuals such as charts, mind maps, and flowcharts in a manner of minutes. You can then export those visuals to a myriad of file formats or directly into your email client for immediate sending and delivery to those with whom you are communicating. No other traditional graphic software program can compete with SmartDraw's quickness and efficiency. SmartDraw saves you time and energy in the creation of the visual, the sending of the visual, and the absorption of the information via the visual.

In a meeting, the real-time visuals created and edited in SmartDraw can also be instantly delivered to all team members via email or shared online either via your SmartDraw account or one of the third-party integrated Cloud storage solutions.

Project Management

Many projects are delivered late and over budget. More often than not, a project is doomed to be late from conception because of the flawed assumptions and estimates of the people managing it, and this is because the vast majority of people tasked with managing projects in their organizations don't have any successful method or process to rely upon. Many project managers simply "wing it" and the result is late projects. Time, money, and resources are wasted.

Typically, unsuccessful project managers plan projects something like this: identify a few broad, coarse tasks and arbitrarily produce an estimate based upon how long they think it will take. They do it this way because it's quick and easy, but the result is project timelines and estimates that aren't realistic.

The solution to all of these project planning and scheduling woes is to use a simple system that replaces off-the-cuff assumptions with facts and data, and to have it empower the project planning and team meetings. This keeps everyone on the same page. This is especially true if the project team is geographically distributed and interacts primarily over the internet.

SmartDraw simplifies project management through its innovative project charts that ultimately will keep the project on time and under budget. The meeting agenda can be even turned into a project chart with a single click of a button.



Project management requires breaking down large tasks into a number of smaller tasks, estimating the completion dates of those smaller tasks, and rolling them up into estimates for larger tasks until you have a set of estimates for the entire project. Additionally, you must determine the order in which these tasks are to be completed and which tasks maybe dependent upon the completion of others so the project moves forward fluidly.

SmartDraw does this for you, automatically. SmartDraw creates and manages your project charts, no matter the complexity and size, easily and quickly so that virtually any manager can begin immediately. The manager now has at his fingertips an easy-to-use system to manage and track the various tasks and sub-tasks within the project so that everything maintains its schedule towards completion. Project managers who employ project charts via SmartDraw save more time than other project managers because their projects are completed on time and under budget. They are able to estimate more accurately their completion dates saving time and resources that otherwise would be wasted.

In business, there are often repeated projects and sets of tasks. Usually project managers must build new project tasks from the ground up every time the project re-occurs. This is more wasted time. Instead of requiring you to rebuild these projects, SmartDraw allows you to create your own custom library of common tasks to reuse again and again. The libraries preserve the order in which the tasks must be completed as well as any dependencies among the tasks.

Conclusion

Businesses can never have too much time – which is why time, in all aspects of business, is so vitally important. And meetings can be one of the biggest time wasters in any organization. Businesses that think, plan, manage, and communicate visually are the ones that demonstrate how to recoup more time than those that don't. That's because visual communication should be easy, fast, flexible, and universally understood – this is especially true when it comes to meetings.

SmartDraw makes real-time capture of information possible in a collaborative meeting environment. Only by leveraging the power of SmartDraw are organizations able to improve efficiency, optimize operations, improve communication and manage projects to meet deadlines, leading to real world time savings and measurable return on investment.



Endnotes

¹*"Presenting Effective Presentations with Visual Aids," U.S. Department of Labor, OSHA Office of Training and Education, Published May 1996*

^{2,3}*Microsoft Office Personal Productivity Challenge (PPC), Published 2005*

⁴*"[Documents and Writing Reports](#)," University of Waterloo, Department of Systems Design Engineering, Published by John S. Zelek, P.Eng, Ph.D. 2004*

⁵*"A Time to Market Online Survey," A Time to Market (www.timetomarket.co.uk), Published 2010*