
WebEx Review

Cisco's browser based WebEx has been around for a long time. They have managed to cram almost everything into this application that you could possibly need for a boardroom meeting. Installation is as simple as clicking on an invitation URL, visiting the WebEx site and entering a meeting number or as part of the signup for the product as a host. After the initial applet install, participants need only click on an emailed invitation URL or input the meeting number into WebEx Meeting Centre webpage and the applet will instantly open.

Some of the main WebEx features include:

- Up to 6 participants (smaller windows) + Speaker (main window) are viewable at one time.
- Screen application sharing and file sharing (being able to send files within WebEx applet).
- Automatic NAT and firewall traversal.
- Whiteboard, highlighting, drawing and annotation.
- Change presenter option (hand control to the participants to allow them to share their content and control the meeting).
- Schedule and host meetings.
- Chatting.
- Bandwidth optimisation.
- Productivity Tools, allowing meetings directly from your desktop, Microsoft Outlook, Lotus Notes, Microsoft Office, Web browser, or instant messenger.

Testing

I signed up for the free 14 day trial via the WebEx website. This was a breeze and when finished the applet was installed within 1 minute. With that said, I had trouble loading the applet from Google Chrome (on my Mac), as the applet was blocked and the troubleshooting offered was unsuccessful. I changed browsers to Firefox and had no issues installing from there on. This could also be an issue with novice invitees as any URL's will open in their default browser. Copying the emailed URL into an alternative browser may be necessary if their default browser is incompatible. Once installed the applet seemed a little busy at first, with all the features and menu options that are available within WebEx. Although many of the features available are probably unnecessary for the majority of telehealth consultations, they were well placed and easy to understand.

Meetings are scheduled by the host (the account holder) and emailed to the participants or by inputting the meeting number via the *Attend Meeting* icon on the WebEx website. I found in practice, clicking on the emailed link worked more constantly. Although Point to Point calling is not available (direct dialling a participant), One-Click Meeting works just as well. The host starts a meeting and then invites the participant via email to join.

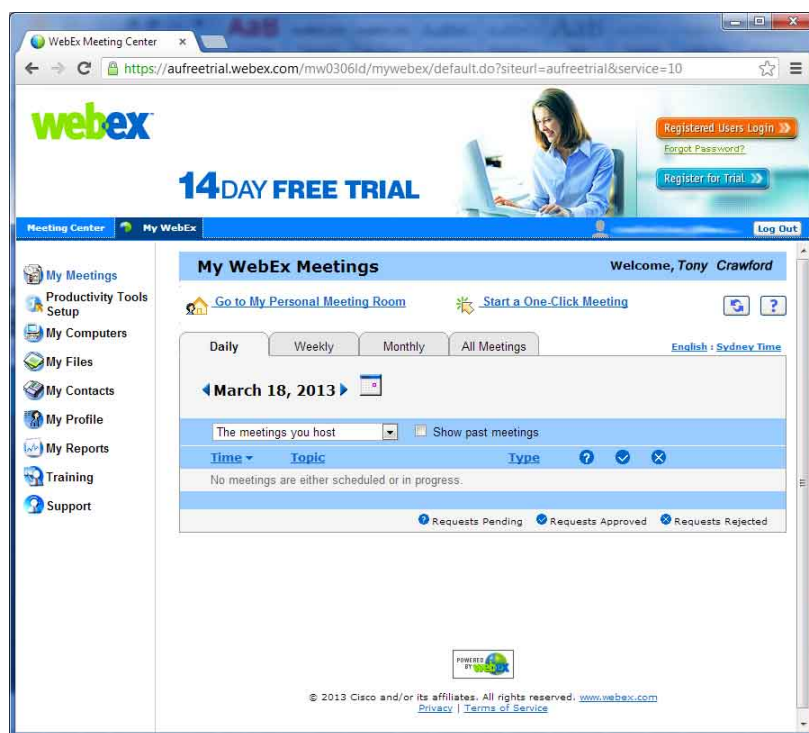
WebEx utilises its web based *Meeting Centre* to organise and schedule meetings. When logged in as a host, *My WebEx* is accessible. From this page the host has access to their meeting appointments, Profile Configuration, Training and Support. Another option, among others, is to install Productivity

Tools. This little package further integrates WebEx into inbuilt programs within the host computer, allowing meetings directly from your desktop, Microsoft Outlook, Lotus Notes, Microsoft Office, Web browser, or instant messengers. This option simplifies WebEx meeting scheduling, minimising the need to use the web based meeting centre. I found these tools very useful, streamlining my meeting scheduling.

I also tested WebEx mobile on an iPad 2 and found the quality to be reasonable. Interestingly, video and audio was smoother and at higher resolution when being sent from the iPad even though the web camera was much higher quality than the iPad. This was due to the iPad being optimised its own hardware and WebEx mobile being a 3rd party install.

WebEx has established a plethora of onsite training titled *WebEx University* that allow you to register for live, instructor-led online classes or self-paced, web-based training. I found this site had every imaginable course needed to run WebEx and conduct meetings but for the basic VC element it was easier to work out using trial and error than navigating the *WebEx University* site.

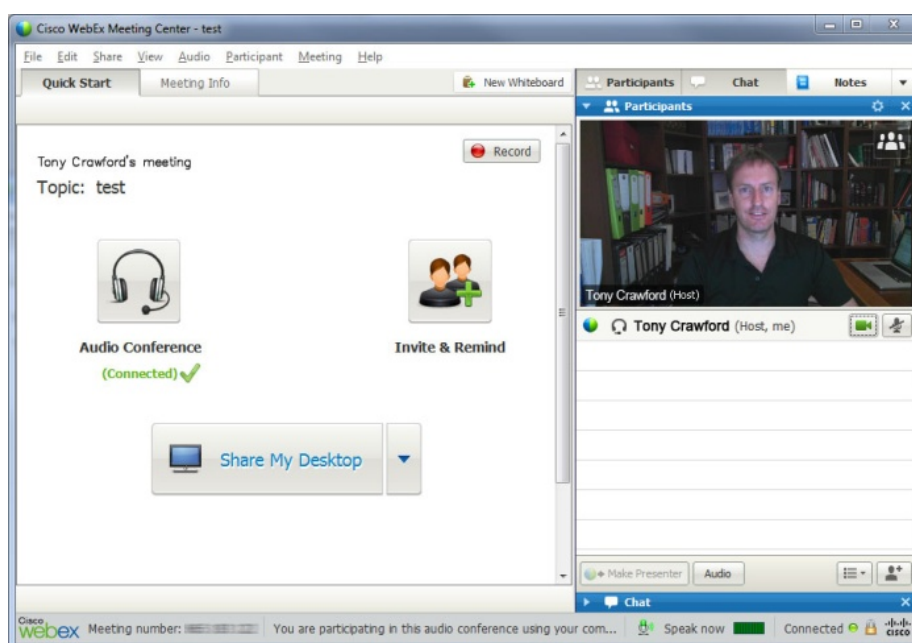
The WebEx Meeting Centre



WebEx Meeting Centre is reasonably easy to navigate and is where meetings (Videoconferences) are scheduled and deployed from. Once logged in, the *My WebEx* tab is accessible (see above). From here you can schedule meetings, access your contacts, change your profile settings and details, install productivity tools (e.g. for Office application WebEx Toolbars) and access the WebEx University training website, among others. Although meetings can be scheduled from here, start a One-Click Meeting enables instant meetings, and is the easiest way to kick off a videoconference session. Starting a One-Click Meeting instantly starts the WebEx applet.

WebEx Applet

WebEx Applet loads when a meeting has been initialised. From here if invitees have not received an invite, you can easily click on the *Invite & Remind* button to quickly send them an email with the link to your meeting. When participants have joined the meeting, they will be displayed in the Participants window. Ensure that both you and the participant are not muted and that both your camera icon are green to display both parties in the videoconference. By clicking on the white people icon at the top right hand corner of your video feed, you can enlarge the video and then further full screen your videoconference consultation. Once full screened, you lose many of the additional meeting controls like whiteboard and chat, although this is probably desirable to minimise distraction. Exiting the full screen mode brings back the default applet layout (see below) and additional options.



It's worth having a look at some of the other features WebEx has on offer as they can be easily mastered and perhaps be of some benefit. Some options worth looking at are:

- *Share My Desktop* (for sharing applications and desktop)
- *New Whiteboard* (draw simple illustrations to share)
- *Record* (to record the session) Note this should only be used when all parties consent!
- *Chat* (instant chat to all participants or select participants)
- File sharing (send files directly to participants)

Most of the consultations will probably be conducted in full screen. I found the quality of the video and audio to be high. Although the maximum resolution is only 720p, this is more than enough for desktop videoconferencing. WebEx requires fairly high bandwidth (1.5 kbps minimum recommended), but WebEx will optimise the quality when bandwidth is limited. Unfortunately WebEx has no ability to change audio and video priority except before the meeting. Video can be limited to 320p if bandwidth is a concern.

Pricing

WebEx pricing is a flat \$65 per month with unlimited meetings and up to 25 participants at one time; auto renew available by default. This is at the higher end of desktop videoconference applications but will only cost the host and is free to invited participants.

Summery

WebEx is a reliable and easy to use service with all the features needed to conduct online meetings with minimal fuss. Overall testing worked well although the default browser issue could cause problems on certain computer configurations. If budget and reasonably fast bandwidth is available, and 1080p video is not a concern, WebEx is a great product for videoconference consultations.