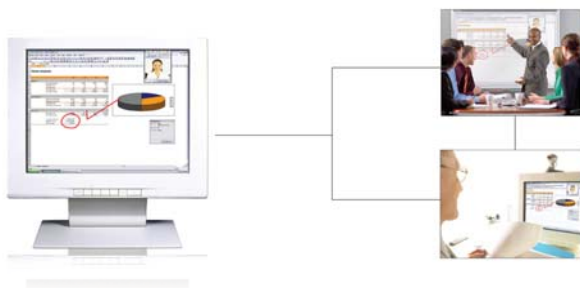


# Connect with Bridgit Conferencing Software

by Nancy Knowlton

Back in the late part of 1989 and in early 1990, SMART started work on what would become the first Windows conferencing application. There were DOS-based teleconferencing applications around at the time. We offered our application with a SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard at each end. Although the market was small then, we had the sense of an emerging need for people to connect to share materials of all descriptions.



Fast forward to today and the drivers for alternative approaches to face-to-face meetings and instruction are all around us. Travel is expensive, and full of hassles and aggravation. Feelings of remoteness can exist in more than just sparsely populated areas. In large cities the problem is congestion and time. Taking a field trip to a major metropolitan museum or science center is an impossibility for all but local school children. Add on a teacher shortage in many parts of the world, and you have a perfect storm demanding a conferencing solution.

Conferencing can add value in several ways.

## Connecting Classrooms and Students

When inexperienced or less than fully trained teachers take control of classes, having experienced teachers connect in to lead the whole-class portion of a lesson can be an effective transitional and developmental strategy.

For those students who wish to access courses and programs not available in their local schools, distance education provides a real option to enhance their opportunities without undue hardship.

## Teacher Professional Development

The need for ongoing professional development is going to accelerate, not abate. Teachers need to learn not just the features and functions of new technology – it's the integration of these promising tools into everyday teaching that requires the greatest amount of ongoing training and development.

In a face-to-face professional development model, teachers are typically assigned to all-day training sessions.

While these sessions can be effective, in many cases there are more appropriate options. Intense learning sessions lasting seven or eight hours often overload the senses and may not be as efficient as shorter, as-needed training.

Using a conferencing application means training can take place in short bursts after school or at other convenient times. While not a substitute for all face-to-face training, conferencing can be a great alternative and a practical, low-cost addition to the range of training delivery options.

## Administrative Meetings

Principals/head teachers attend many district-level meetings. Moving a number of those meetings to a virtual level can save time and money. With the ability to supplement discussions with shared, high quality data, attendees find the information exchange as rich and productive as face-to-face meetings – and they have not had to spend time away from their schools in order to participate.

## Further Considerations

In deciding to use conferencing as an alternate to face-to-face interactions, you should consider some key factors.

## Easy to Use

Let's face it – when teachers are teaching, only a limited portion of their consciousness is available to focus on operating hardware and software. Instead, they must apply virtually all of their attention to the complex array of student needs, learning goals and classroom (real or virtual) management that comprises the teaching day. This means that the conferencing tool must be intuitive and easy to use.

## Fully Loaded is Best? Not!

Just like an arms race, loading an application with myriad features and functions is a tempting route to supremacy. But what about an application that has just enough key features to make it usable and all the intuitiveness to make it a quiet enabler instead of the star of the show?

It is this latter path that SMART has chosen for its Bridgit conferencing software. It has just enough muscle to give it the power that educators need, but all of the finesse to let teachers concentrate on what they know best – teaching and learning.

Nancy Knowlton is the co-founder and CEO of SMART Technologies, the world's leading supplier of interactive whiteboards. Nancy's husband and SMART co-founder, David Martin, is the inventor of the interactive whiteboard category. Together they have built a company that is focused on delivering easy-to-use, yet feature-rich collaboration tools, including the SMART Board interactive whiteboard. Nancy can be reached at [CEO@smarttech.com](mailto:CEO@smarttech.com).