

## Synchronous Communication Tools

Synchronous communication is used to facilitate collaboration between individuals and among groups in real-time. Synchronous communication tools allow users to connect at the same time in different places. There are many tools available today for asynchronous communication. This paper will provide an overview of Fuze Meeting from Fuzebox, a synchronous communication tool.

Fuze is a web conferencing service for business but can be used in many different settings such as education, healthcare, or government. There are multiple devices that can be used to join a Fuze Meeting, these include: desktop computer, iPhone, iPad, Android, Blackberry, Tablet. There are several ways to join the conference: dial-in, call me (i.e. Fuze will call your phone number), internet audio or Skype (Skype must be installed to use this feature). It is easy to use and setup. Figure 1 lists the features which Fuze Meeting offers for online meetings (Fuzebox, 2013):

### Fuze Meeting Features

- Audio and video conferencing
- Anytime, anywhere, anyplace collaboration (i.e. real-time) and meeting scheduler
- Collaborative Whiteboard
- Synchronous document and desktop sharing
- Content Library which allows you to add content before, during and after the meeting
- Share the link of a recorded meeting/discussion/training for playback later (i.e. asynchronously)
- Password protect and/or set expiration date for recorded link
- Text Chat
- Works on multiple platforms including mobile
- Import contacts from a text file or address book (e.g. Outlook, Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, Outlook Express)

Figure 1: Fuze Meeting Features

Fuze meeting promotes conversational, face-to-face interactions and a sense of community in an online learning environment. Just being able to interact with other students and the instructor keeps students engaged in the learning process. It contributes to the building of interactive relationships between students, the instructor and their peers. Collectively, it makes the learning experience more personal for the student, and facilitates real-time, classroom discussion and/or training for students. In addition, students can be creative or self-expressive when given control

of the interactive Whiteboard. I believe that sharing experiences and collaborating in a group setting will give students the opportunity to demonstrate their higher order thinking skills such as critical analysis, problem solving and evaluation, and therefore encourage the creation of new knowledge.

In terms of Advantages and Disadvantages, Table 1 below provides a list of these (Fuzebox, 2013; Getting started on the Fuze PC APP, n.d.).

Advantages	Disadvantages
Easy to use	Cost (Pro plan is \$8/month annually, and Enterprise plan is \$20/month annually)
Email invitations for meetings and to share links for content and video recordings	To get all the capabilities users must download the desktop plug-in.
Skype and Outlook integration	The support team at Fuze has access to participants' video meeting recordings. Therefore, if you have a meeting that is highly sensitive or confidential that needs to be recorded, Fuze may not be the appropriate platform for it.
Ability to attend or host a meeting on multiple platforms, including mobile platforms	Adobe Flash Player is required to view/playback a recorded meeting video. On iPad, the Flash Player is not currently supported by Apple.
Great audio and video reception	Audio and video reception dependant on participant's bandwidth. Audio and video may have a lag time or be choppy if participant bandwidth is low.
Facilitates meetings for geographically dispersed individuals	An iPad user will not able to access documents that are located on a file hosting service such as Dropbox or Google drive from the Fuze content library.
Text chat allows users to chat with everyone in the group or individual group members	
This tool can display a variety of file types such as different video, image and audio formats, pdf files, PowerPoint, Word, and Excel, to name a few.	
The tool works with all browser types	

**Table 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Fuze Meeting**

From a technical perspective, Fuze fits three very important criteria:

- **Usability** – ease of use. Students/instructors/users can learn to use the tool in a short period of time and therefore will be more inclined to use it for training or classroom discussion
- **Accessibility** – accessible to all users. Students/instructors/users are able to access the tool using various devices, with all browser types, and from anywhere, anytime, and anyplace.

- **Compatibility** – compatible with multiple devices and equipment. Since users will not all have the same devices or equipment, it is important that the tool is flexible enough to be used with a variety of devices or equipment.

I believe that Fuze Meeting can be used in many different situations such as for distance education, blended learning, group collaboration, training (e.g. webinars, medical training), and much more. The possibilities are endless. I think it would be a great tool to use in my Introduction to Statistics class for students who are having problems with the class and need a much slower pace to be able to understand the course materials. I also would have preferred using Fuze Meeting over Skype for student peer review sessions with the instructor last summer for my Instructional Design online class. Fuze Meeting would definitely be a great tool to use for peer review sessions in the future. I think that middle school students would need to be monitored in this type of environment because the potential exists for them to misuse the tool (e.g. to cyberbully other students or look at unsuitable content). In this respect, middle school students would need to be made aware of their schools “Acceptable Internet Use Policy” so that they are aware of the consequences of violating these rules. There was nothing that I disliked about the tool. I liked all the features and hope that I get to use it in the future. Ideally, I believe that communication tools for distance education should have both asynchronous and synchronous features to cater to different learner needs.

Unfortunately, I did not have the pleasure of working with my assigned partner. After sending multiple emails and an instant message via Lync, my assigned partner never responded. With approval from the Instructor, I worked with a family member on this module. My sister does not live in the United States (US), so this was an added bonus because I was able to collaborate with my sister who lives in Trinidad and Tobago – more specifically the island of Tobago. I downloaded the desktop application to my computer, and the mobile app to my iPad and iPhone. My sister downloaded the mobile app to her iPad mini. We did not encounter any issues with the download and connected easily. In our first Fuze meeting, I was able to see and hear her using my laptop computer. The quality of the audio and video was crystal clear. She, on the other hand, could see me but could not hear me. I switched over to my iPad and she was able to hear me. In our second meeting, I solved the audio problem. The microphone on my laptop was not connected and once I connected it she could hear me loud and clear. We used all of the features that were available with the free plan including, the whiteboard, text chat, sharing desktop and documents (such as a picture, pdf document, spreadsheet and short mp4 video). In addition, we were able to add content at any time – before, during and after the meeting. I was the host for the meeting and had the capability to give her control of the meeting so that she would upload documents and write or draw on the whiteboard. There were no issues using these features. I also recorded our session and sent her an email with a link to view the recorded session. Neither I, nor my sister was able to view the recorded session on iPad because it uses Flash player, and Apple does not support the Flash player. However, we both were able to playback the recorded session on our laptop computers. Again, the quality was good. The following screenshots display some of Fuze Meeting’s online features:



Image 1: Fuze online meeting between two participants

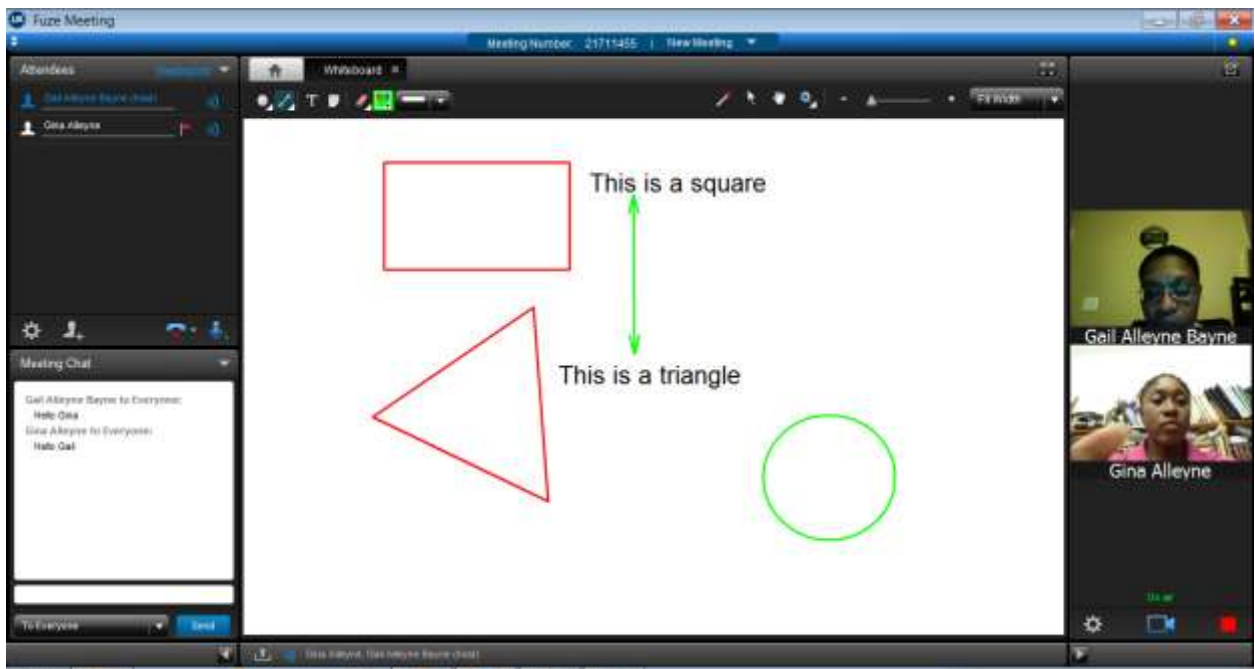


Image 2: Whiteboard collaboration and meeting chat



Image 3: Screen share of a jpg image

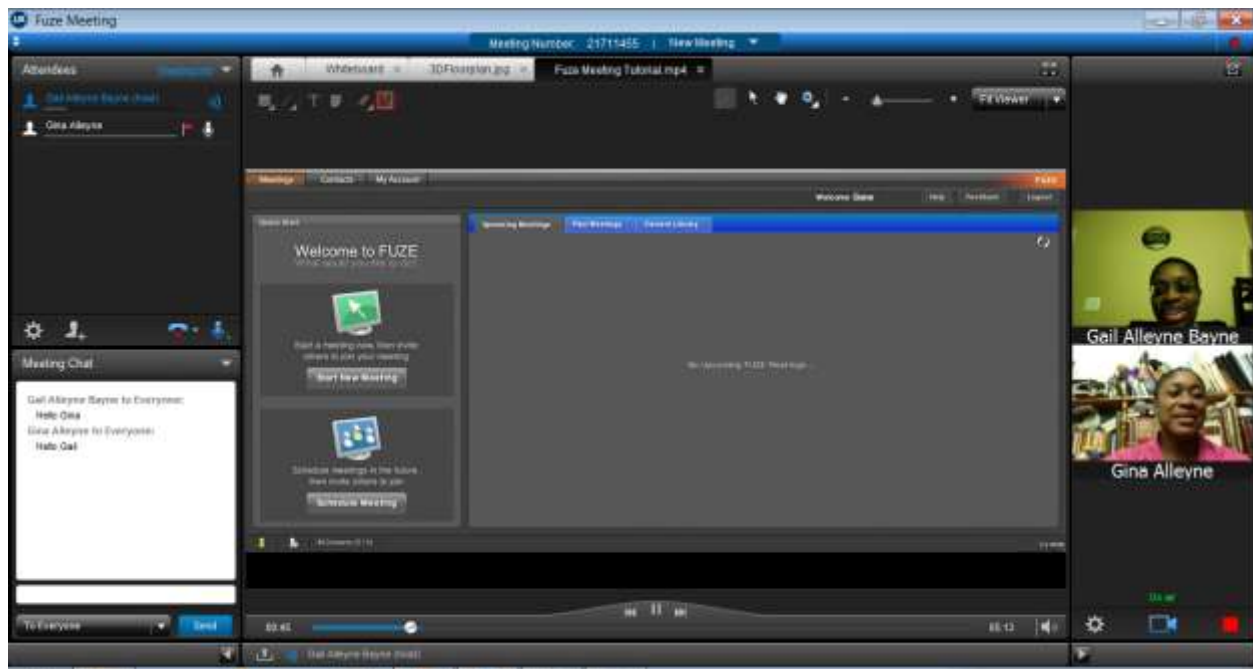


Image 4: Screen share of a Fuze video tutorial

With regard to suggestions for online group work, I think that it is imperative for students to understand the importance of collaboration in online environments. I believe the perception is mainly that students work on their own and at their own pace in distance education classes. Group work is generally not included in most online courses, and therefore students do not

understand the mechanics of working collaboratively online. I suggest creating an outline that will guide students in working on group projects with their online peers.

## References

Fuzebox (2013). Fuze Meeting (Version 1.10.47015) [Computer Software]. Retrieved October 3, 2013 from <https://www.fuzebox.com/>

Getting started on the Fuze PC APP. (n.d.) Retrieved October 3, 2013 from <https://www.fuzebox.com/support/fuze-ed/on-demand-tutorials/courses/pc-attend/Navigate/>