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[edit June 5, 2021]

Thoughts and Suggestions for implementing Hybrid "Zoom and in the Room" meetings of AA

My name is Walt D. and yes I am an alcoholic. What follows are thoughts, observations and suggestions if your 12 step group is looking into Hybrid meetings. There are many ways to create a Hybrid meeting and my experience below comes from making this happen in two of the meetings I regularly attend. It is possible for you to "drop in" to either of these meetings via Zoom or in person as they are listed. On Monday nights there is the Fruitvale Meeting in Lincoln and on Tuesday nights there is the Rocklin Racetrack Meeting in Loomis. While I have a passion for technology it is not a business for me. My suggestions come for "fun and for free" like the rest of the best stuff. There are many ways to do this successfully and my approach does not negate you doing it differently.

First some basics:

- The purpose of a Hybrid Zoom/Physical meeting is to maintain the community that existed before this Covid issue occurred. Some people are anxious to get back to the halls and others will never come back to to health concerns but it doesn't mean they don't need a meeting or miss the people they know there. Hybrid means they don't have to forfeit the relationships they made in meetings pre-Covid. My goal in creating this is to keep an existing community thriving and available for newcomers and definitely NOT to create an online mega-meeting.

- "Hybrid" means a meaningful discussion between multiple persons on a Zoom call and multiple persons in a meeting room one person at a time. It is necessary for the meeting room to have a podium or speaker spot so that the Zoom participants can see and hear what is being shared in the room. At Fruitvale we use a bar stool (appropriate) with the camera facing the room. At Racetrack, we use a "podium view" rather than having the whole meeting in the background. The room has a projector and screen as well as a PA system. A USB audio interface allows the Zoom audio into the PA system and the PA mic into the Zoom meeting. At Racetrack we also have a camera on about half the room so that the Zoom participants can experience the gathering of the group. An area of the room is always off-camera for those whose mask is not anonymous enough. On that same note, the podium camera video can be shut off for camera shy participants who still want to share.

- There is a prerequisite that a reasonable Internet connection is available. Minimum requirements for good performance are about 10 megabits down and at least 10 megabits up. More is better. Cellular Internet access can work but is not recommended as performance is not consistent. Cellular data is also fairly expensive. The church's we meet at both have Internet service that they allow us to use. We helped the Racetrack meeting church upgrade an access point so we would have better coverage. There are also sometimes opportunities for meetings to share bandwidth and cost with a neighboring business.

You will need hardware:

- For video a large screen TV or projector capable of video and audio that can be seen by the entire room potentially with separate audio capability such as a PA. If you are going to "patch into" an existing PA system you will need a USB Audio Interface for your computer.

- A laptop or tablet that connect to the above mentioned Internet.
* Must be able to run Zoom smoothly
* Must have connectivity to a large screen TV or projector for video and audio usually via HDMI
* Must have access to the keyboard, mouse and screen controls to allow the moderator to control the display.
* I don't personally believe a meeting should own a laptop, probably best owned by the moderator, although I don't have a problem with them owning PA related stuff like microphones, cables and even webcams. Obviously group conscience makes the final decision.

- To capture the in room speaker a webcam/microphone mounted on a stand covering the podium/share spot, a 720p webcam or better with at least average or better microphone is recommended. I highly recommend the Logitech C922 and use it with an "active" 20' USB extension cable. [edit] Currently Sams Club carries the Logitech ProStream, approximately the same thing, for about $65

- Cables
* Between Zoom device (suggested Laptop PC or Mac) and TV/projector and/or Audio
* A repeater USB cable is recommended to be able to extend the webcam distance beyond 10ft.
* Power strip and extension cords for power

- Storage Container for any cables/equipment left onsite.

Human talent is also required.

- A moderator/operator in Zoom terms "host" is required to manage the account settings, open the meeting, do muting when needed and to handle any out of control visitors/participants. The host is also required to create and manage the breakout rooms. I also always make one of the more tech people the "co host" so that if there is a technical glitch, the meeting goes on. The moderator also is the producer switching between group tiles and speaker view on the room big screen.

- The moderator is probably the person who maintains the Zoom account. I paid about $100 for a one year special for Zoom. I use it for both meetings and I schedule out a year at time so the Zoom meeting number and password as well as the link will remain consistent. I also send out weekly "invites" to the meeting to people on the mailing list. I established racetrackemailupdate@gmail.com so people could request being included on the mailing list. As I sent more invites Google tagged me as a spammer so I was required to set up a google group to facilitate the mailing list

- Format will need to be changed to accommodate people muting themselves when not speaking and with how the next person will be chosen in a discussion meeting. [edit] For the Zoom participants to hear clearly the room speaker needs to be reasonably close to the webcam/microphone. This may mean that a podium format may be needed as moving the camera is awkward to the flow of the meeting. To keep both groups engaged it it suggested to alternate between in room and Zoom participants.

- New York AA GO have recommendations for proper Zoom settings to achieve reasonable privacy. Online Intergoup of AA also have helpful suggestions for setting up your Zoom client to afford the best privacy to the group.

- Breakout Rooms (a Zoom feature)

Most facilities and common sense for that matter prohibit mingling after the meeting typically referred to as "the meeting after the meeting" At Racetrack on Zoom, we are doing 15 minutes of "breakout rooms" after the Lords prayer. It puts 5-6 random people into a breakout room for a post meeting discussion, saying hi to newcomers and birthday people and just catching up. It's a lot like when a normal meeting ends. A moderator is required to initiate and keep the rooms in the 3-5 person range. For the people in the room the discussion usually happens in the parking lot. Not all meetings will use this feature

- Zoom Moderator service position

I believe that doing this right requires a service position much like the Treasurer. A relatively long one or two year commitment for continuity, and technically savvy. This person needs to recruit and train both an onsite co-host and an online co-host which will likely become their successor. I am already looking for people who can fill in. Once the routine is established it is not that difficult. A written moderator checklist is helpful for on-boarding new people. Sample copy available on request.

COST

Costs depend on what you are trying to do and what equipment is readily available and what can be procured through donation.

- Obviously a Zoom account is needed. $8.33 - $15.00 per month depending on plan. Look for and take advantage of specials. A yearly plan allows you to have a consistent meeting ID and link.

- Internet connection. Does the building you meet at have Internet access you can use. Does it have adequate bandwidth? Is there something your group is willing to do to help them get there? At Racetrack we covered the cost for an outdoor access point which brought strong WiFi to our meeting spot. A one time cost for the meeting and the church provides the Internet service long term. If you must buy service from an ISP, a reasonably minimal plan will do depending on availability. ($39 - $70 / month) You will need a wireless router (< $100) and potentially a modem (<$75) as renting them is just a waste of money. Any neighbors in the building you could share with?

- If you are patching into a PA system you need an USB Audio Interface and the appropriate cables. ($100-$150) to connect the Zoom meeting audio to the room and the room audio to the Zoom meeting

- Computer PC or Mac or tablet to run Zoom. No cost factored as we need a volunteer to loan us one. Probably should belong to the moderator.

- Webcam with microphone. These are USB and about $115 for a good one. Something like Logitech 920 or 922. Be careful in selecting a webcam as the Covid pandemic has created very short supply and overpricing for crummy ones. When they come back into stock look for the Logitech or check the reviews.

- Webcam/microphone stand. You can make these out of PVC and they run about $25 in parts or you can just buy a real mic stand with a universal clip from Monoprice or Amazon for about $30.

- Video display. Either a big screen TV or projector visible by all physical attendees. If one screen is enough, usually the TV audio can be cranked up enough for all physical participants to hear well. If

your meeting uses a PA things get a little more complex. Racetrack has a mixing board and powered speakers so I purchased an USB audio interface ($100) and it works well to blend the room with Zoom.

- Cables
* Power strips and extension cords. The laptop should run on AC not battery
* A 5 meter USB 3.0 repeater cable about $20 at Monoprice. Performance is flaky if you run too long a USB cable without a repeater built in.
* A 20' HDMI cable also about $20 from Monoprice. Could be a plain cord (male to male) or an extension (male to female)
* Optionally I also always carry a > 100ft. Ethernet cable in case the wireless is flaky. There is nothing like a wired connection.
* If you connect an Audio Interface a couple of additional 20' 1/4" TRS cables are required

- Storage container. I use a plastic stacked rolling tool box that I already had. A simple tub would probably work fine.

[Edit]
A Final Thought – Running a hybrid meeting is not inconsequential in requirements for time, effort and money. There will come a time when the Covid crisis is less threatening and the majority of members will return to the halls. At some point, when the number of people being helped versus the amount of effort required is out of balance, the group conscience will need to determine whether to continue or have the remaining Zoomers join a Zoom only meeting.

This is by all means not the only way to do this. It is the way I did it and I believe it is pretty cost effective.

I am happy to come help if needed in a trusted servant kind of way although my free time is not unlimited.

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