My Video Chat for Seniors

COVERS

FaceTime, Facebook Messenger, Google Duo, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype, WhatsApp, and Zoom

AARP®

Michael Miller

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About the Author

Michael Miller, a popular and prolific writer of more than 200 nonfiction books, is known for his ability to explain complex topics to everyday readers. He writes about a variety of topics, including technology, business, and music. His best-selling books for Que include *My iPad for Seniors*, *My TV for Seniors*, *My Windows 10 Computer for Seniors*, *My Facebook for Seniors*, *My Social Media for Seniors*, *My Internet for Seniors*, and *Computer Basics: Absolute Beginner's Guide*. Worldwide, his books have sold more than 1.5 million copies.

Find out more at the author's website: www.millerwriter.com

Follow the author on Twitter: molehillgroup

Dedication

To all the schoolkids who had to adapt to Zoom and distance learning during the COVID-19 crisis, including my grandchildren Alethia, Collin, Hayley, Jackson, Judah, and Lael.

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About AARP

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, with a membership of nearly 38 million, that helps people turn their goals and dreams into *real possibilities*™, strengthens communities, and fights for the issues that matter most to families such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities, and protection from financial abuse. Learn more at aarp.org.

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In this chapter, you discover the major video chat platforms—Zoom, FaceTime, Facebook Messenger, Skype, WhatsApp, Google Duo, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams.

- ➔ Introducing the Major Video Chat Platforms
- ➔ Evaluating the Major Video Chat Platforms
- ➔ Which Video Chat Platform(s) Should You Use?
- ➔ Which Device(s) Should You Use for Video Chat?

2

Comparing Video Chat Platforms

All the video chat platforms discussed in this book do pretty much the same thing in pretty much the same fashion—although there are some differences between them. The question, then, is which video chat platform should you use—under which circumstances.

Read on to learn about the major video chat platforms: their main features, what devices they work on, their pros, and their cons. It'll help you choose which video chat platforms to use—and when.

Introducing the Major Video Chat Platforms

Which video chat platform you use when depends on the device you use, the number of people you want to chat with, how long you want to talk, and more. This section covers eight video chat platforms, all free and popular with individual users.

Zoom

Zoom is the most popular video chat platform today, used by about two-thirds of all people doing video chatting. Zoom started out targeting large businesses but gained popularity among individuals, schools, houses of worship, and other organizations with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Today people use Zoom to connect with friends and family, hold small group meetings, do distance learning, celebrate milestones such as birthdays and anniversaries, conduct business meetings, and much more.

A Zoom meeting on an iPad

One reason Zoom became so popular is because it's fully cross-platform. That means anyone on any device—Android or iOS (Apple) phone or tablet, or Chromebook, Mac, or Windows computer—can use Zoom, as long as the device is connected to the Internet.

Another factor is that Zoom is extremely easy to use. You simply set up an account and download the app. Then the organizer, or host, enters the phone number or email addresses of the invited participants, each of whom receives a text message or email with a link. To join the meeting, just click the link. The first time you use Zoom, you're prompted to install the Zoom app (Zoom calls it the "Zoom client," and it's free), but on subsequent uses, the app should launch

automatically. The meeting opens with all participants appearing in their own little box in the onscreen grid.

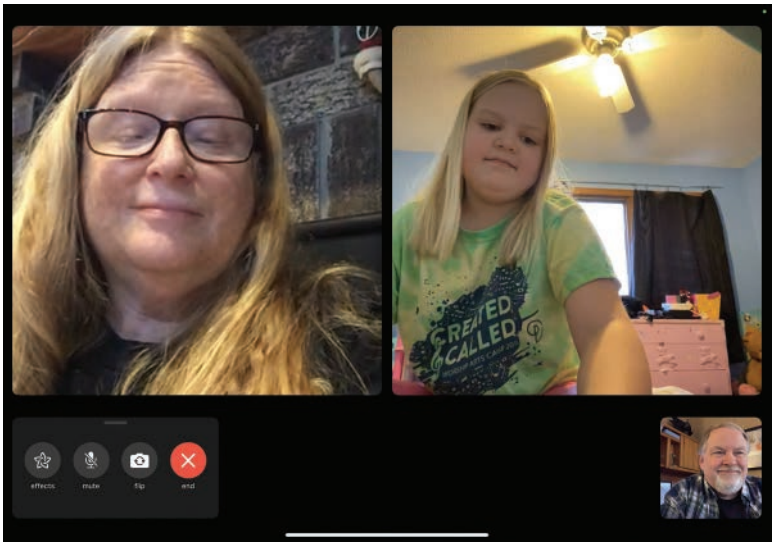
Zoom is also popular because you can share files or content so everyone can view and collaborate in real time. With the free version of Zoom, a meeting can hold up to 100 participants for 40 minutes. Learn more at www.zoom.us.

Zoom

Learn more about Zoom in Chapter 3, "Using Zoom," and Chapter 4, "Getting More Out of Zoom."

Apple FaceTime

If you have an iPhone or iPad, you've probably used FaceTime video chat. Chatting with FaceTime is as easy as making a phone call. FaceTime also works on Mac computers, although it's not available for Android phones or tablets or for Windows computers.



Group FaceTime on an iPad

Apple, iOS, and iPadOS

Apple's iPhones run an operating system known as iOS. Apple's iPads run a similar operating system called iPadOS. In this book and elsewhere, both iPhones and iPads are often referred to as iOS devices.

If you have an Apple device, FaceTime shows up as a calling feature and taps directly into your device's contacts. With the tap of an onscreen button, you can initiate or answer a video call.

If you want to hold a group video chat, you use a feature that Apple calls Group FaceTime. This lets you hold chats with up to 32 participants with no time limits.

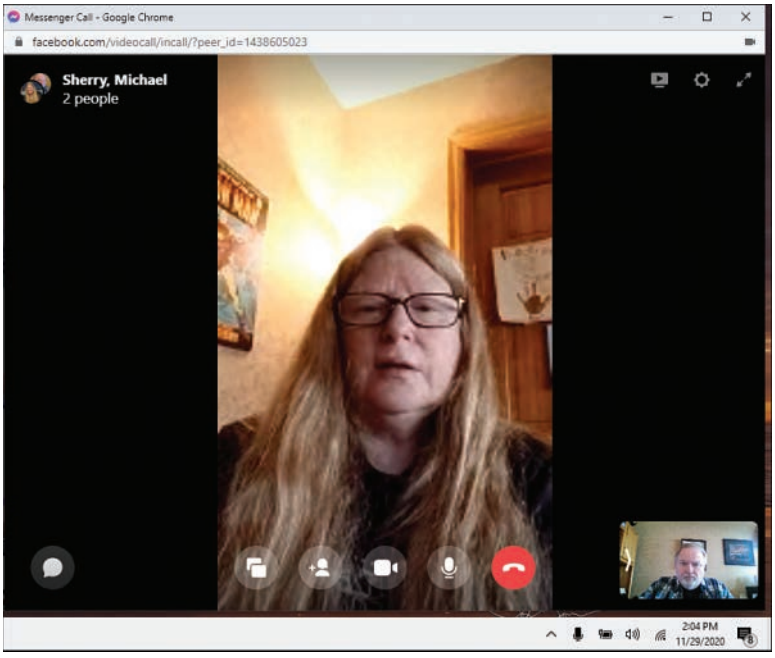
FaceTime is included for free with all Apple computers and devices, no additional installation necessary.

FaceTime

Learn more about FaceTime in Chapter 5, "Using FaceTime."

Facebook Messenger

Facebook Messenger is a messaging and video chat app from the Facebook social network. It's available to all Facebook members on all devices (Android and iOS phones and tablets, as well as Chromebook, Mac, and Windows computers). It is only available to people who are Facebook members.



Facebook Messenger on a computer

On a computer, you use Facebook Messenger from the Facebook website, in any web browser. On phones and tablets, you download the Messenger app separately from the Facebook app or use your phone's web browser. (Facebook also makes separate Facebook Portal devices that enable Messenger voice and video calls through a smart display or, in the case of the Portal TV device, your TV.)

Messenger lets Facebook users participate in audio and video calls with their Facebook friends. By default, all calls are person to person, although Facebook offers Messenger Rooms for group chat. A Room can have up to 50 participants; you can even invite people who don't have Facebook accounts to a Room. There is no time limit on Messenger video chats.

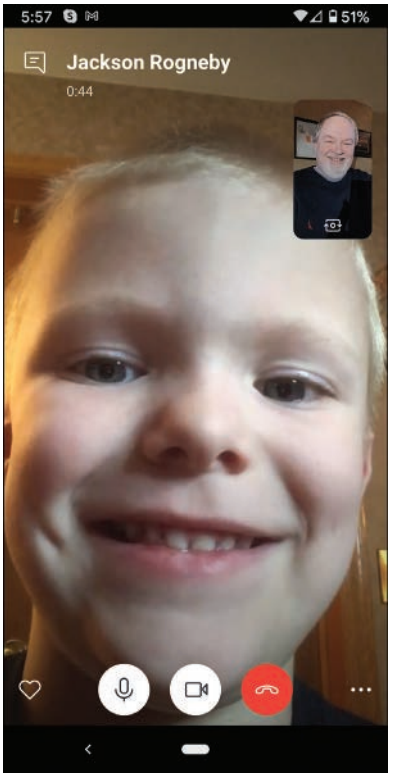
Because of how easy it is to use—and how many people use Facebook every day—Facebook Messenger is increasing in popularity, especially among older users. Learn more at www.messenger.com.

Facebook Messenger

Learn more about Facebook Messenger in Chapter 6, "Using Facebook Messenger."

Skype

Skype was one of the first video chat platforms. Like Zoom, it's available across most major platforms—Android and iOS phones and tablets, as well as Mac and Windows computers (but not Chromebooks). I have an Android phone, and I use Skype almost daily to chat with one of my granddaughters who has an Apple iPhone.



Skype on an Android phone

Microsoft, Skype, and Teams

Skype is owned by Microsoft, which also offers the newer Microsoft Teams chat platform discussed later in this chapter. Microsoft has transitioned all Skype business users to the Teams platform but maintains the Skype platform for consumer users.

Like all the other services discussed here, Skype video chats are completely free. Learn more at www.skype.com.

Skype

Learn more about Skype in Chapter 7, "Using Skype."

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a mobile-based messaging and video chat platform that is extremely popular among school-aged kids but is also gaining popularity among more mature users. It's actually more popular outside the United States, with a huge following in Latin America, India, and parts of Asia and Europe. The app is available for both Android and iOS devices.

The WhatsApp app on an Android phone

WhatsApp started out as a messaging platform for younger users and still is used by many to send text messages and photos to friends. (It includes lots of stickers and emoji that the kids seem to like.) The platform has added voice and video chat, as well, which makes it a popular choice, especially for those already using it for texting.

Know, however, that when it comes to voice and video chatting, WhatsApp is strictly for mobile phone users. You can voice and video chat on Android and iOS devices but not on the web-based version of the service, which is limited solely to text messages.

By default, WhatsApp video chats are one to one. You can, however, add up to eight total participants to a group video call with no time restrictions. If you want to include even more participants, you can shift from WhatsApp to Messenger Rooms in the Facebook Messenger app. (WhatsApp is owned by Facebook and shares the Messenger Rooms technology.)

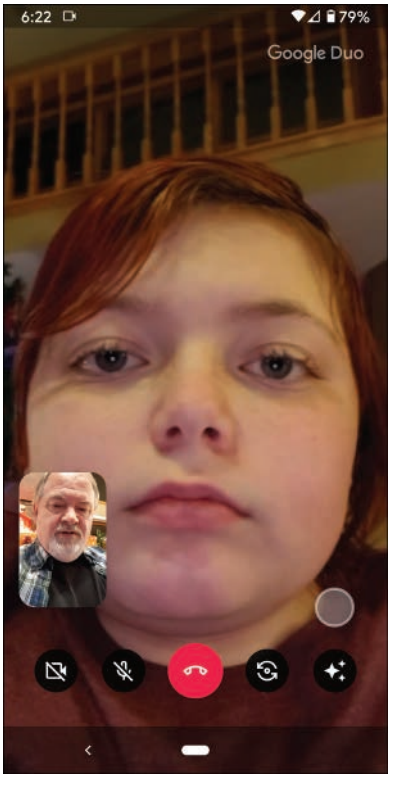
WhatsApp is a free service, like all the other video chat platforms discussed here. Learn more at www.whatsapp.com.

WhatsApp

Learn more about WhatsApp in Chapter 8, "Using WhatsApp."

Google Duo

Google Duo is a newer video chat platform from Google, designed to compete with Apple FaceTime for both iPhone and Android smartphone use. You'll find Google Duo preinstalled on many Android phones (including Google's line of Pixel phones). You can also download the Duo app for free from the Google Play Store for Android devices or Apple's App Store for iPhones and iPads. There's also a web version available, so you can use it on your Chromebook, Mac, or Windows computer.



Google Duo on an Android phone

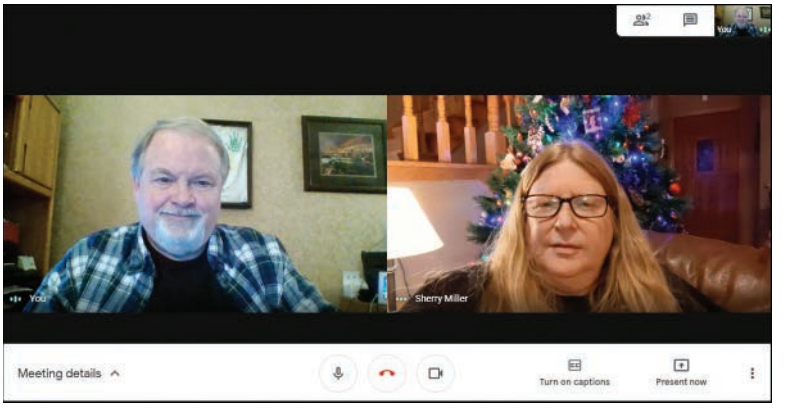
Duo is primarily designed for one-on-one video calls (and in the Android and iOS apps is integrated with your phone's calling app). You can, however, set up group video chats with up to 32 participants with no time limits. Google Duo is free, although you need a Google account to use it. Learn more at duo.google.com.

Google Duo and Google Meet

Learn more about Google Duo and Google Meet in Chapter 9, "Using Google Duo and Meet."

Google Meet

Also from Google is Google Meet. Unlike Duo, Google Meet is designed for larger video meetings of up to 100 participants for up to 60 minutes.



Google Meet on a Windows computer

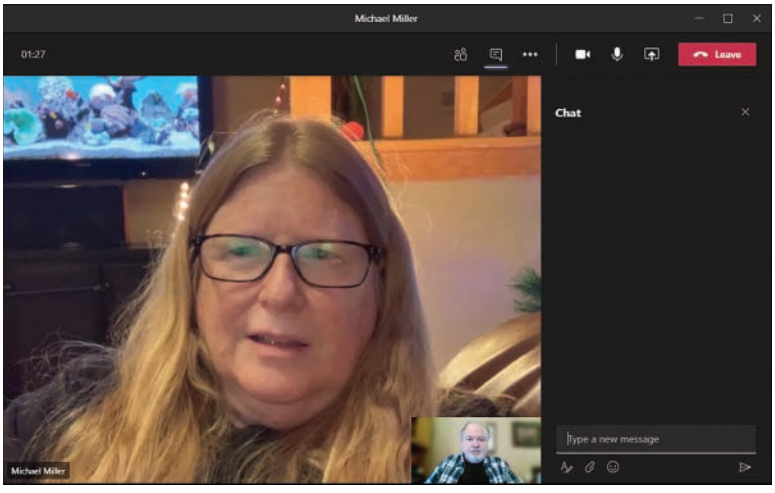
Google Meet was originally designed for secure business meetings. During the early weeks of the COVID-19 crisis, however, Google reengineered it to be more consumer friendly (and to compete more directly with Zoom). Today, Google Meet is free for consumers to use; all you need is a Google account.

Google Meet is available for all devices and platforms, including Android, iOS, Mac, Windows, and Chrome OS. Google also offers paid accounts with additional features, including no 60-minute time limit on chats.

Learn more at meet.google.com.

Microsoft Teams

The final video chat platform in our sights is Microsoft Teams. Teams is actually a collaboration platform targeted at businesses as part of the Microsoft 365 offering.



Microsoft Teams on a Windows computer

The business version of Microsoft Teams includes text messaging, voice and video calling, video conferencing, and file sharing between Microsoft's Office apps; the cost is a minimum of $5 per user per month. There is also a free version of Microsoft Teams designed for consumers that focuses on messaging and audio and video chat.

This free version of Microsoft Teams includes one-on-one and group voice and video chats. It's available on all platforms, including Android and iOS as well as via web browser on Windows, Mac, and Chromebook computers. Group video chats can have up to 250 participants and last up to 24 hours, making Teams a good choice for all-day meetings or chats. Learn more at www.microsoft.com/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software.

Microsoft Teams

Learn more about Microsoft Teams in Chapter 10, "Using Microsoft Teams."

>>>Go Further

OTHER VIDEO CHAT PLATFORMS

The eight video chat platforms discussed in this chapter are the most popular among home users, but they're not the only platforms vying for eyeballs. There are a number of video chat platforms targeted at the business or enterprise market that have millions of individual users. These platforms typically offer more functionality than mere video conferencing, including enhanced security, real-time collaboration and file sharing, and integration with Microsoft Office and other apps.

Among the most popular of these enterprise-level video communications platforms are

- BlueJeans (www.bluejeans.com)
- Cisco Webex (www.webex.com)
- GoToMeeting (www.gotomeeting.com)
- Wickr (www.wickr.com)

As noted, these platforms are not designed for casual consumer use and have few home users.

Evaluating the Major Video Chat Platforms

What are the differences between all these video chat platforms and how do they compare? Refer to Table 2.1 for a breakdown of the details of each of the major video chat platforms.

Table 2.1 Features of Major Video Chat Platforms

Chat Platform	Consumer Plans	Operating Systems/ Devices	Max Number of Users	Time Limits	Pros	Cons
Apple FaceTime	Free	iOS, Mac	32	Unlimited	Easy to use, integrated into Apple devices.	Only for users of Apple devices.
Facebook Messenger	Free	All (Android, ChromeOS, iOS, Mac, Windows)	8 (50 in Messenger Rooms)	Unlimited	Easy to call Facebook "friends," works with Facebook Portal devices.	Only for Facebook users, clunky interface, difficult to create and share "rooms," some privacy issues.
Google Duo	Free	All (Android, ChromeOS, iOS, Mac, Windows)	32	Unlimited	Easy to use, especially for Android phone users.	Users must have Google accounts.
Google Meet	Free	All (Android, ChromeOS, iOS, Mac, Windows)	100	60 minutes	Cross-platform.	Users must have Google accounts, limit on meeting length.
Microsoft Teams	Free	All (Android, ChromeOS, iOS, Mac, Windows)	250	24 hours	Largest number of participants, all-day meeting length.	Business-focused design may not be as user-friendly as other platforms.

Chat Platform	Consumer Plans	Operating Systems/ Devices	Max Number of Users	Time Limits	Pros	Cons
Skype	Free	Android, iOS, Mac, Windows	100	4 hours per call, 10 hours per day, 100 hours per month.	Cross-platform across most devices, good for group meetings.	Not available for Chromebook. Looks less modern than newer platforms.
WhatsApp	Free	Android, iOS	8	Unlimited	Primarily for smartphone users, integrates with Facebook Messenger Rooms for large group chats.	For smartphones only.
Zoom	Free	All (Android, ChromeOS, iOS, Mac, Windows)	100	40 minutes	Cross-platform across any device, easy to use, easy to share your screen.	Chats limited to 40 minutes, not able to directly call someone (must send a link).

>>>Go Further

WHICH PLATFORM IS THE MOST POPULAR?

When it comes to video chat platforms, which are the most popular? It depends on who's chatting.

Among users of all ages, Zoom is the number one platform, with 66% of the total. FaceTime is number two with 48%, followed by Facebook Messenger (31%), Skype (27%), Google Hangouts/Duo/Meet (22%), WhatsApp (19%), Microsoft Teams (17%), and other (7%), according to a survey from research firm Ipsos.

For users aged 55+, it breaks down this way:

- Zoom, 66%
- FaceTime, 43%
- Skype, 26%
- Facebook Messenger, 20%
- WhatsApp, 17%
- Microsoft Teams, 16%
- Google Hangouts/Duo/Meet, 13%
- Other, 10%

The numbers total more than 100% because many people use more than one platform.

The survey also asked why people use video chat. People aged 55+ said they use video chat for:

- Visiting with family and/or friends (72%)
- Work (33%)
- Telehealth (8%)
- Education (7%)
- Exercise (7%)

Only 1% of people in this age group said they used video chat for dating.

Which Video Chat Platform(s) Should You Use?

With all the video chat platforms available, which should you choose for yourself? Well, there's no simple answer to that because each platform has strengths and weaknesses.

You'll probably end up using more than one video chat platform, depending on your needs and who you're communicating with. Each platform has its strengths and weaknesses. Table 2.2 shows my take on which platform is best suited for what.

Table 2.2 Best Video Chat Platforms for Specific Uses

Best For	Facebook Messenger	FaceTime	Google Duo	Google Meet	Microsoft Teams	Skype	WhatsApp	Zoom
One-on-One Chats	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Group Chats	✓ (Messenger Rooms)			✓		✓		✓
Business Meetings				✓	✓			✓
Live Streaming Large Meetings and Webinars				✓	✓			✓
Apple Users		✓						
Facebook Users	✓							
Video Chatting on Your Phone	✓	✓	✓				✓	

Best for One-on-One Chats

- Facebook Messenger (Facebook users only)
- FaceTime (Apple devices only)
- Google Duo
- Skype
- WhatsApp

When it comes to one-on-one video chats, you want a simple solution—and fancy group chat features don't matter much. For this scenario, if you and the person you're chatting with have Apple devices, consider FaceTime; if you're both on Facebook, go with Facebook Messenger; and for cross-platform use, go with Google Duo or Skype. WhatsApp is another option, if you and the other person you're chatting with both use it.

Best for Group Chats

- Facebook Messenger Rooms
- Google Meet
- Skype
- Zoom

For group chats, you need a solution that is cross-platform because it's likely that people in the group will be using all manner of devices—some iPhones, some Android phones, some iPads, some Windows computers, and some Mac computers. You also need a platform that's easy for everybody to use.

For all these reasons, the number one choice for small or large group chats is Zoom. It's fully cross-platform, so nobody is excluded. You can set up a chat with the press of a button, and any participant can join just by clicking a link in an email or text message. Zoom is also very versatile in operation, with multiple display options, virtual backgrounds, screensharing, and other advanced options—if you need them. You can have up to 100 participants per meeting, and the 40-minute meeting limit is not that restricting.

There are three good alternatives to Zoom for small and medium-sized group chats: Facebook Messenger Rooms, Google Meet, and Skype. All three are just about as easy to use and make it easy to create meetings and invite participants. They are also all cross-platform.

Best for Business Meetings

- Google Meet
- Microsoft Teams
- Zoom

Zoom is also the number-one choice for most business meetings. The cross-platform compatibility is a necessity, and the screen sharing and display options help make meetings more functional. Zoom also lets meeting participants engage in side text chats and makes it easy to switch Zoom from interactive to presentation mode, which is good for larger meetings.

Google Meet and Microsoft Teams are two other viable platforms for business use. Google Meet is just about as easy to use as Zoom, although all participants need Google accounts. (Most people have Google or Gmail accounts already, and it's easy enough to open a new one.) Microsoft Teams isn't quite as user-friendly as Meet or Zoom but may hold appeal for some people. Like Zoom, both offer robust screen- and file-sharing functionality; Teams also is fully integrated with all Microsoft Office apps, which most businesses use.

Best for Live Large Meetings and Seminars

- Google Meet
- Microsoft Teams
- Zoom

If you're hosting a meeting or seminar with a large number of passive participants—that is, you're not looking for interactivity—then Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams all do the job. Zoom is probably the platform of choice, just because more people are familiar with it, but any of these three platforms offer similar functionality. It's really more about putting on a live presentation than

hosting a meeting where every participant gets a voice in real time, which all three of these platforms offer the tools to do.

Best for Apple Users

- FaceTime

If you and the people you want to chat with all have Apple devices—iPhones, iPads, and Macs—then for day-to-day video chatting, FaceTime can't be beat. FaceTime works super smoothly within the Apple ecosystem, to the point where anything else seems clunky. If you're in the Apple family and are just chatting (without needing to share something on your screen), use FaceTime.

Best for Android Users

- Google Duo

If you're an Android user—with a Google Pixel, Samsung Galaxy, or similar phone or tablet—you can't use FaceTime. Instead, the best video chat platform for you is Google Duo. (In fact, Duo may already be installed on your device, especially if you have a Google Pixel phone.) Google Duo integrates well with your device's built-in phone app and, as an added benefit, is cross-platform. That means that your friends and family can install and use Google Duo on their devices, even if they're not running the Android operating system.

Best for Facebook Users

- Facebook Messenger

Here's another platform-specific recommendation. If you and your friends are all on Facebook—and are currently using Facebook Messenger to send individual and group text messages back and forth—then you might as well use Facebook Messenger for your video chats, too. Many people keep Facebook open practically 24/7 on their phones and computers, so using Facebook for video chatting feels like it's just another app in the operating system. Granted, Messenger might not have all the bells and whistles found on other chat platforms, but if all you need is the basics—and you're tied into the Facebook network—then Messenger may be the way to go.

Best for Video Chatting on Your Phone

- Facebook Messenger (Facebook users only)
- FaceTime (iPhones only)
- Google Duo
- WhatsApp

Some people video chat from their computers. Some people video chat from their tablets. But many, many people video chat from their ever-present smartphones. If this describes you, then Facebook Messenger (if you're talking to other Facebook users), Apple FaceTime (if you're talking only to fellow iPhone users), Google Duo, or WhatsApp is probably all you need. All these platforms offer simple and intuitive phone-based operation, which makes video chatting just about as easy as making a traditional phone call.

Which Device(s) Should You Use for Video Chat?

In addition to deciding on what video chat platform to use, you probably also have a choice of what device to use for your video chatting. Depending on your situation, you may be able to chat on your phone, your tablet, or your laptop or desktop computer. You may even have other options, such as a smart speaker with a screen or a dedicated video chat device, such as Facebook Portal. Which device should you chat with?

Best for One-on-One Chats

When it comes to one-on-one chats, convenience is key. This probably means using whatever device you're closest to at the moment. If you're working at your desk and want to chat, use your computer. If you're sitting in your car or your living room, just pull out your phone. You don't need a big screen to chat one-on-one with a family member or friend.

Best for Group Chats

Group chats, on the other hand, benefit from a device with a larger screen. If you have a half-dozen or more people displayed in little boxes, it's nice to have

a bigger screen to see everyone clearly. This pretty much rules out using your phone. If it's a smaller group meeting, a tablet might suffice, but for meetings with large numbers of people, nothing beats the bigger screen of a laptop or (even better) desktop computer.

Best for Business Meetings

If you're participating in a business meeting, you may need access to documents and files on your computer during the meeting. This means using the same device for the video chat as you do for your regular work—either a laptop or desktop computer. This way you can open the video meeting in one window and the other documents you need in other windows—and even keep your email app going in the background, too.

Best for Mobility

When you're moving around, you need a device that's more mobile, which probably means your phone. A tablet might do in a pinch, but the good old smartphone is the ultimate mobile device.

Best for Picture Quality

So far, the focus has been on your end of the video chat. What about what other people see—the quality of the picture captured by the camera in the device you're using? Although there are significant variations in camera quality from device to device, here's some general advice.

It's likely that your phone or tablet will have a better camera than the one built into or connected to your laptop or desktop computer. You use your phone or tablet to take high-quality photographs and videos; you don't use your computer in the same fashion. For this reason, most newer and more expensive phones and even some tablets have very good cameras and lenses that take very good pictures, even in low light.

On the other hand, your computer's camera, whether built in to the device or an external webcam, is likely not optimized for picture quality and in many cases delivers much lower resolution than the cameras in many phones and tablets.

Put simply, you'll likely look better if you use the camera in your phone or tablet than if you use your computer's camera or a webcam.

If picture quality is important to a particular video chat or meeting, use the device with the best front-facing camera—which is probably your phone or tablet.

Best for Non-Technical Users

Many people use video chat to keep in touch with relatives who are less than comfortable with today's technology. Clicking into a Zoom meeting or answering a Skype call may seem easy to you but could be frustratingly beyond the capabilities of some less tech-savvy people.

If you want to chat with someone less technical who might not have a computer or tablet or even current smartphone, consider purchasing that person a device specifically for video chatting. There are several available.

First, there are smart displays, which are like smart speakers (like the Amazon Echo Dot) but with a screen. If you're in the Amazon ecosystem, that means the Echo Show (www.amazon.com); in the Google ecosystem, that's a Nest Hub Max (store.google.com/product/google_nest_hub_max). If you have a similar device in your home, it's extremely easy to make a video call from your device to the other one, or vice versa.

Video chatting on an Amazon Echo Show device

Video Chat Devices

Learn more about chatting with dedicated video chat devices in Chapter 11, "Video Chatting with Facebook Portal, Amazon Echo Show, and Google Nest Hub Max."

Then there's the Facebook Portal (portal.facebook.com), which is a family of devices designed specifically for video chatting over the Facebook Messenger service. Facebook offers several portals with their displays of various sizes, as well as a Portal TV unit which has a built-in camera and connects to your TV to view the video chat. The Portal TV gained popularity during the COVID-19 crisis and is especially popular among older users.

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