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1 The Video-Chatting Revolution

This chapter introduces the concept of video chatting and some of the issues involved.

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Video Chatting Comes of Age

Change happens all around us all of the time, particularly in the digital world, where technology seems to change and develop at a breakneck speed. Sometimes changes in the digital world can appear to be suddenly with us as if they were always there, while at other times there is a watershed moment that embeds the technology into our daily lives. For video chatting, that watershed moment was the Covid-19 pandemic, which has dramatically transformed the way that people communicate with each other. The change has been so significant that it will undoubtedly ensure that video chatting is now a constant part of millions of people's lives.

The main video-chatting apps looked at in this book are Zoom, Skype, FaceTime and Messenger.

Although video chatting has been around for a number of years, it was the global lockdowns as a result of Covid-19 that made it an indispensable tool for family and friends to keep in touch. Being able to talk to people – and see them – has been a vital link for millions of people and has increased the profile of video-chatting apps significantly.

Benefits of video chatting

It is not hard to see why video chatting has become so popular, due to the number of benefits it brings:

- **Cost**. Video chatting can be done on devices that a lot of people already have: tablets, smartphones, laptops and desktop computers. The apps for conducting video chats all have free versions, so you can get up and running without any additional costs.
- **Versatility**. Most video-chatting apps are multi-platform, which means they can be used on a range of devices, using different operating systems.
- **Mobility**. Since video chatting can be used on smartphones, this means that you can conduct a video chat wherever you are, with a smartphone. It is common to see people using smartphones to have video chats rather than for making voice calls.
- **Effectiveness**. Video chatting apps are excellent at what they do, making the experience both effective and fun.

Making video calls to other people using the same video-chatting app is free over Wi-Fi, and it can also be done with a data connection on a smartphone, although data charges may apply for this, depending on your smartphone contract provider.

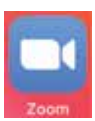
About Video Chatting

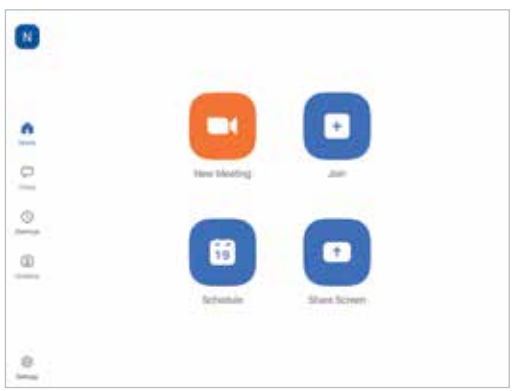
Video chatting can be thought of in the same way as making a voice call: an appropriate app is used to connect two – or more – people who want to take part in the chat, and they can do this on their favored computing device. A Wi-Fi connection is also needed for video chatting (or a mobile data connection for a smartphone), since the connection between the participants is done over the internet. So, to get started with video chatting:

1. Use your favored computing device and download a video-chatting app, such as Zoom, Skype or Messenger

2. Connect your device to your home Wi-Fi

3. Open a video-chatting app





See Chapter 2 for more details about the equipment, connections and apps that can be used for video chatting.

Apple devices, such as the iPhone and the iPad, contain the FaceTime app for video chatting. However, this can only be used with other FaceTime users on an Apple device. Multi-platform apps such as Zoom, Skype and Messenger can also be used on Apple devices for video chatting.

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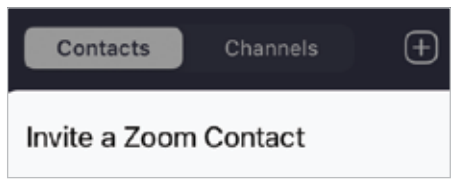
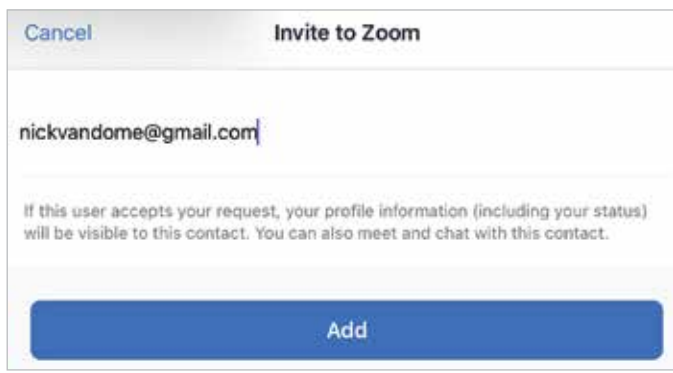
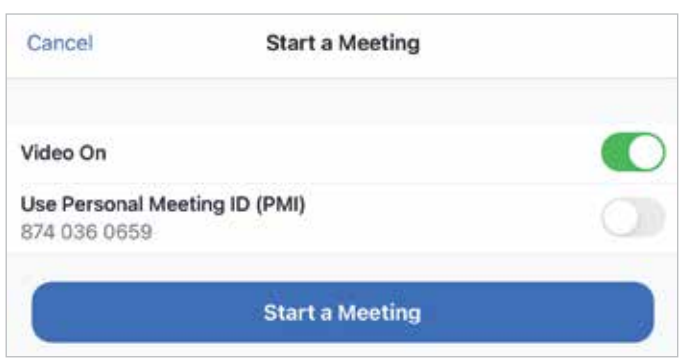
4 Use the **Contacts** section on your video-chatting app to view people who are available for video chats, and invite more as required



5 Add more people to the **Contacts** section of your video-chatting app so that you can select them from here when you want to chat



6 Start a video chat (or meeting) with one of your contacts in the video-chatting app



In most video-chatting apps, contacts can be imported from the address book (usually the **Contacts** app) on the device on which the video-chatting app is being used. Video chats may also be arranged via text messages.

Video chats are often referred to as meetings in video-chatting apps.

7 Once a one-to-one video chat has been connected, your own video feed is displayed as a thumbnail in a corner of the screen, and the other person's video feed is displayed in the main window

8 Add more people to the chat to create a group chat

The greater the number of people in a group call, the harder it can be to control it effectively.

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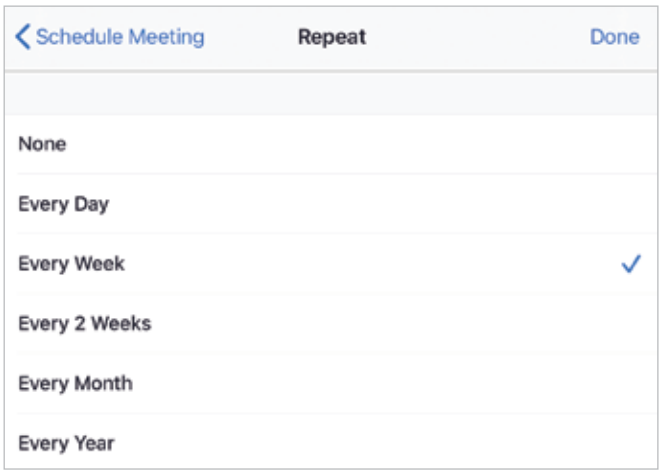
9 Customize your video feed with creative backgrounds (depending on the video-chatting app being used)

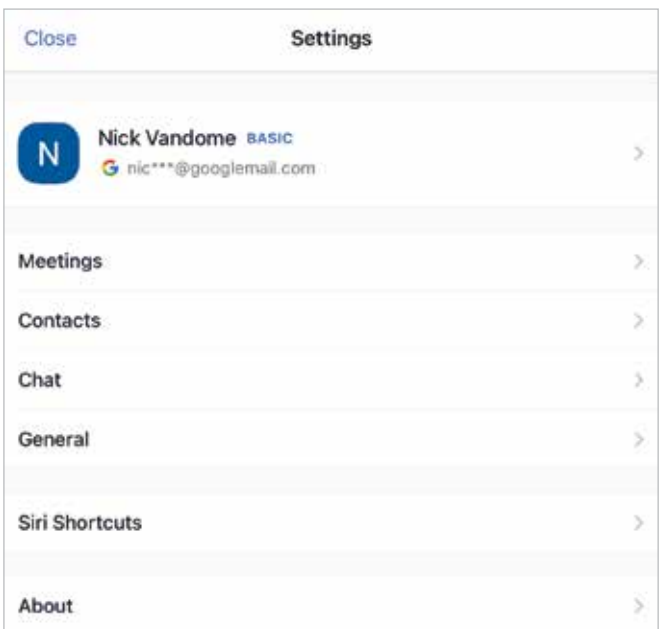
Not all video-chatting apps and devices have the functionality for adding special effects.

10 Customize your video feed with special effects (depending on the video-chatting app being used)

11 Schedule recurring video chats at a specific time – e.g. once every week for a family chat or a group quiz



12 Use the Settings options for the video-chatting app to customize it to your own requirements



Investigating the Settings options of a video-chatting app is a good way to discover its features and functionality and to also become more confident when using the app.

Cross-Platform Performance

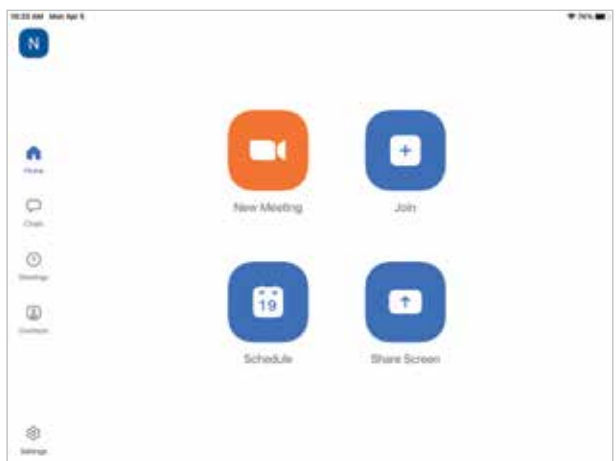
Since there are multiple types of devices and different types of operating systems that can use video-chatting apps, it is important that they can be used on as many devices as possible so that you can switch between devices if required, and still use the same app. Using apps in this way is known as operating cross-platform.

The types of devices that can use video-chatting apps, and their respective operating systems, are:

- Desktop and laptop computers using the Windows 10 operating system.
- Desktop and laptop computers using Apple's macOS operating system.
- Smartphones and tablets (iPhone and iPad) using Apple's iOS and iPadOS operating system respectively.
- Smartphones and tablets using the Android operating system.

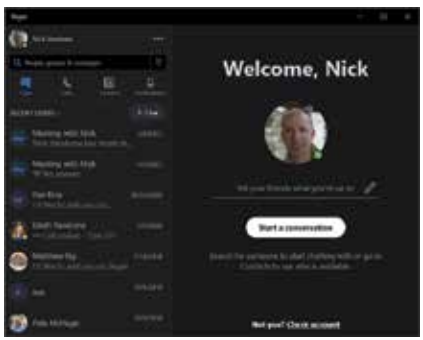
In terms of their cross-platform performance, the main apps in this book can be used as follows:

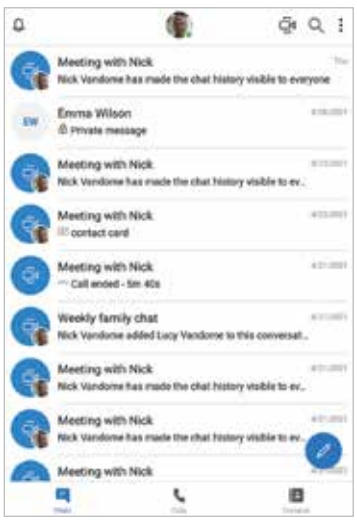
- **Zoom**. This is highly versatile and can be used with all major operating systems and devices. The interface is generally similar between all versions.



It is necessary to create a user account to use a video-chatting app. Once this has been done, you can download the app onto any device and use it with your account login details (apart from FaceTime, which can only be used on Apple devices).

- **Skype**. This can also be used with all major operating systems and devices, although the desktop and laptop versions (below, left) have a slightly different interface from the mobile versions (smartphone and tablet – below, right). All versions have the same functionality, though.





- **FaceTime**. This is Apple's own video-chatting app and it can only be used on Apple's own devices. The main difference between devices is that the iPhone version has a button for adding special effects.

- **Messenger**. This is another video-chatting app that is highly versatile and works equally well with different operating systems and devices.

In general, you do not have to worry about cross-platform issues with video-chatting apps.

One obvious difference between desktop/laptop versions of video-chatting apps and their mobile versions is the available screen size. Because of this, the mobile versions are more compact, with toolbars at the top and bottom of the screen to access the same functionality as the desktop/laptop versions of the apps.

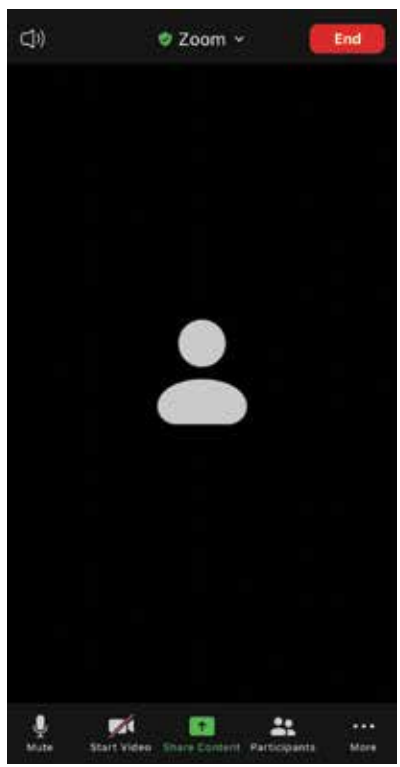
More Than One-to-One Video

Video-chatting apps are excellent at performing one of their main tasks – i.e. providing video communication between two people. However, most video-chatting apps are much more versatile than this and offer a much wider range of communication options. These include: making audio calls (that can also quickly be converted into video calls); making group calls; text chatting; and sharing content in a call.

If the video button has a line through it, the video feed is off. Tap or click on the video button to remove the line, which will then display the video feed.

Audio calls

Video-chatting apps are just as proficient at making audio calls as they are at making video ones. The main difference is that the device's camera is not activated when a voice call is made. When making an audio call, ensure that the microphone button in your video-chatting app is not muted and the video button is disabled – e.g. by selecting the **Stop Video** button.



Group calls

Video-chatting apps are very sociable in that they enable large numbers of people to take part in a video chat at the same time. The maximum number varies between apps, but they can all accommodate calls for all but the largest families, or groups of friends.

Group calls can be customized to include all participants' video feeds at the same size (depending on the app).

Alternatively, one video feed can be highlighted in the group chat.

The maximum number of people for a Zoom group video call is 100; for Skype it is also 100; for FaceTime it is 32; and for Messenger it is 50.

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Text chatting

A common feature with video-chatting apps is being able to conduct text chats, in a similar way to sending a text message on a smartphone or a tablet computer. Text chats can be done as a stand-alone feature – i.e. you just have a text conversation with someone and they can also be incorporated into a video or an audio call (i.e. while you are having a video chat, you can also send a text message).

Text chats are contained within their own window, whether they are conducted during a call or on their own.

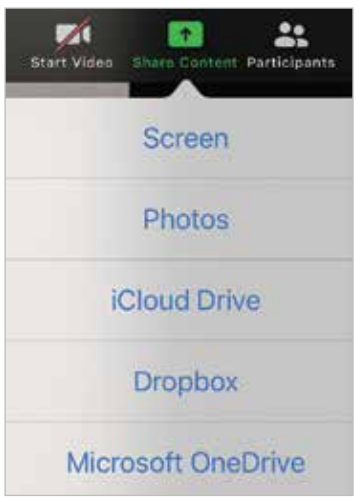
Some video-chatting apps have a menu that can be used to add a selection of items to a text chat.

Additional content can be added to a text chat, including emoji icons and animated images.

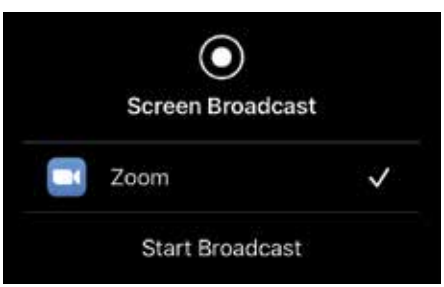
Sharing

Some video-chatting apps have a function for sharing content from your device with other people in the call. This involves sharing what is on the screen of your device – e.g. if you have a photo or document that you want to share with the other people in the call, this can be done by activating the **Share** option and then opening the required item on your device. The other people in the call will then be able to see exactly what you have open on your device.

Content can be shared in a variety of ways, including screen sharing, sharing photos, and sharing any items that you have in an online storage service, such as iCloud or Dropbox.



For screen sharing, a broadcast is created, displaying what you view on your own screen to the other participants.



Online storage services are ones that store your photos and documents in their own online computers (servers). This means that if something happens to your computer, you will still be able to access – and restore – your content from the online storage service. This is also known as cloud storage. Microsoft devices have access to the OneDrive online storage service; Apple devices have access to the iCloud online storage service; and Android devices have access to the Google Drive online storage service. Dropbox is another online storage service, and this is independent of the major technology companies.

Security Issues

Video chatting should be a fun and enjoyable activity. To ensure that this is the case as much as possible, follow these points to stay as safe and secure as you can:

- **Download updates to your video-chatting apps whenever they are available**. On some devices they may be installed automatically (depending on how they are set up), and in other cases you may need to look in the app store from where the app was downloaded, to see if there are any updates.
- **Never accept a video or audio call from someone you do not know**. Scammers and cyber criminals are increasingly sophisticated and are turning to new ways of contacting potential victims. If you do not recognize a number that has called you, don't answer it.
- **Don't store too much personal information within a video-chatting app**. Most video-chatting apps allow you to store a range of personal information, such as email address, home address, and phone numbers. In general, if the information is not mandatory, it is best not to include it, just in case the app is compromised and the information becomes available to cyber criminals.
- **Check how the app uses your personal information**. Video-chatting apps should have a Privacy section (usually within the app's Settings options) that will tell you how the app and its parent company are using your personal information. It is worth taking some time to look through these details. In some cases, there are options for specifying how your information is used.
- **Check what is in the background of a video call when you are at home**. Even if video chats are just conducted with family and friends, it is important to check that your video feed does not have any sensitive items in the background, such as bank or credit cards. Also, any items that could cause any embarrassment should also be removed, if possible.

Some versions of video-chatting apps have to be downloaded from the app's own website, rather than from the device's linked app store. If this is the case, check on the website to see if there are any updates.

When you are in a video chat, someone could take a photo during the chat and post this to an online site, such as a social media site. This would then make the photo available to a wider audience, some of whom could look for any sensitive items in the background.