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Acrobat Connects Users in a Flash

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While Adobe's recent Creative Suite release has been making headlines, intranet professionals should instead take note of the commercial rollout of two versions of Adobe Acrobat Connect, a new Web conferencing tool that uses the power of Flash to provide instant connections.

Actually, Connect isn't a completely new product. The higher-end version, Acrobat Connect Pro, is a continuation of Macromedia Breeze, which Adobe acquired along with the rest of the company. The less expensive Acrobat Connect is a simplified version for smaller staffs.

The Connect Platform

Connect's goal is to be completely versatile in both installation and implementation. The software is available in both installed and hosted configurations, and the conferencing software runs on Windows, Macintosh, Linux, and Solaris computers. It even runs on Flash-based phones found in Japan and Europe.

The software contains four areas -- training, presenting, meeting, and events -- that should cover all of an organization's conferencing needs. The application can run presentations created with Presenter, Captivate, or any third-party program that can output a presentation to Flash.

Users will appreciate how easy it is to get into a Connect meeting room. Meeting rooms have static URLs, so there's not a different address to send around each time you have a meeting, and conferences begin instantly for most people, since Flash is already loaded onto the vast majority of computers. There's nothing more to load. In our testing, there was no waiting time when entering a room. Users can add Connect buttons to commonly used applications, such as Adobe Acrobat and Microsoft Word, to quickly begin an impromptu meeting. Just click the button and select attendees from a pop-up list.

People who have experience with Breeze will notice that Connect Pro feels awfully familiar. While there have been improvements to this version, they're

mostly at the admin level. Connect Pro is more reliable and more scalable, and can integrate with ERP and other management systems. It can also cluster out servers, useful when large groups of attendees are spread across several countries.

Both versions of Connect were available as beta downloads in October, and became commercially available in January of this year.

Connect comes in two flavors, basic and Connect Pro. The basic version is for smaller organizations and includes one meeting room with a limit of 15 people at a meeting. It allows for screen sharing, a white board, teleconferencing, and integrated video.

This basic version is only available as a hosted application, and sells for \$39 per month or \$395 per year.

The more advanced version, Connect Pro, is targeted at large departments or organizations. With it, you can hold huge online conferences with people from around the globe. This version includes unlimited meeting rooms (which can be set per user with a limit of 15, 50, or 200 attendees) and even large group capabilities for groups up to 1,500 people.

Besides offering the features of Connect, Connect Pro also offers VOIP conferencing, automatic meeting recording, customizable screen layouts, multiple rooms per user, and a central content library. The pricing varies according to the organization's needs, but implementations typically start at \$15,000.

If you're looking for conferencing software and you want to spare people the bother of installing software for waiting on startup, consider Connect. It'll connect all your participants in no time.