
Tools for Remote Work

By Jill Schoff

The following is a summary of the tools my company uses for remote work. Most are free or low-cost and are available for both Mac and Windows computers. Most of them have smartphone apps as well. No special equipment is required, other than a decent Internet connection and (for video calls) a web camera and microphone.

Zoom <https://zoom.us/>

Used for: Meetings

This is the app we use for meetings. It allows everyone to see one another via video, allows screen-sharing so everyone can look at a document or presentation together, and allows meetings to be recorded and saved.

Cost: There is a free version that works great -- the only drawback is that your meetings are cut off after 40 minutes. You can immediately restart the meeting, so it's only a minor inconvenience, but if you want to remove the 40-minute limit, you can sign up for a pro plan for \$14.99/user/month. Only the host of the meeting needs to have a pro plan—the rest of the attendees can still have free plans. So you may find only a couple people in your company need pro plans.

Equipment: You need audio/video for this app, so you can either log in from a smartphone/tablet, use a laptop (which usually has a camera/microphone built in), or buy a web camera for your desktop computer.

Slack <https://slack.com/>

Used for: Daily Communication

Slack is a chat/direct messaging app that we use for most “real-time” communication. You can direct message one person, or a group of people, and there are also “channels” for discussions on specific topics. We have channels for customer service, technical issues, specific products, and company departments. You can also set your status in Slack, so you can alert coworkers when you are away from your desk. Slack, along with Asana, has taken the place of almost all internal email communication.



Slack also has audio and video calling features. You can switch from a text to a phone call with a click of a button. We use the audio calling feature a lot, but we find the video calls to be a little unstable (which is why we use Zoom for those). And you can only do group video calls with Slack's paid plans.

Cost: Slack is free for small groups. Their paid plans start at \$6.67/user/month. You can also invite free "guests" (such as clients or freelancers) that have limited access.

Google G-Suite <https://gsuite.google.com/>

Used For: Documents, Spreadsheets, Presentations, Calendar, and Cloud Storage

So, this takes the place of the Microsoft Office suite. Google Docs is similar to Microsoft Word, Google Sheets is similar to Excel, and Google Slides is similar to PowerPoint. Google Drive offers cloud file storage (similar to Dropbox). What's the advantage to G-Suite? Documents can be worked on simultaneously by multiple people. All changes are stored in the cloud and there is an extensive version/history control. This means you never have to download/upload files and you never have to worry about who has the most recent version. You can also control who can view or comment on a document and who has full edit capability. All company documents are indexed and searchable in one spot. *Note: Microsoft 365 has introduced similar features, but I haven't used them so I can't say if they are better or worse.*

We use Google Calendar for our company calendar, to schedule team meetings, webinars, and to track who is out of office.

Cost: Individual Google apps are free to use, but if you want the "G-Suite" business option (where the company has admin control and "owns" all files created/stored by company employees) it starts at \$6/user/month.

Asana <https://asana.com/>

Used for: Task and Project Management

We use Asana for managing all company tasks and projects. Project- and task-related discussions take place here as well. It's a cloud-based application, so you just need a browser to use it and everyone can see changes in real time. There are plenty of project management apps out there, but we've found this one is a good balance of ease of use, robust features, and cost.



Cost: The Basic plan is free for teams of up to 15 people. Paid plans start at \$10.99/user/month. Asana also allows free “guest” users (such as clients or freelancers) who have limited access.

Additional Tools

- [Google Hangouts](#)
- [Skype](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)
- [Microsoft Teams](#)
- [Glance](#)
- [Adobe Connect](#)

Notes on Maintaining Connectedness

While work is important, human connection is too. You have to work a little harder at connection with a remote team. We do the following things to try and replicate “water cooler” types of interactions in a virtual work environment:

- We start all meetings with a check-in. Each person gets to speak for a minute about what has their attention, what’s bothering them, what they are excited about, etc. Whatever they want to share. This generally should be personal, not work-related, but it’s not a hard and fast rule. The check-ins help us to get to know one another and support each other. Another term for this is “psychological safety” and there’s a lot of information out there about why this is important for teams.
- All our meetings are video calls. There was resistance to this at first. Why work from home if you can’t be in your pajamas? But a) we’re a casual company so really no one cares what you wear and b) seeing facial expressions/body language is so critical for understanding and connection. Added bonus: we occasionally get to see our coworkers’ pets and babies on our calls! :)
- We have several non-work channels on Slack, including lunchbreak (full of jokes, family photos, pet photos, random facts, movie recommendations...) recipes (where, you guessed it, we share recipes), and motivation (where we share exercise and other personal goals and progress). We also celebrate all birthdays and work anniversaries in Slack.