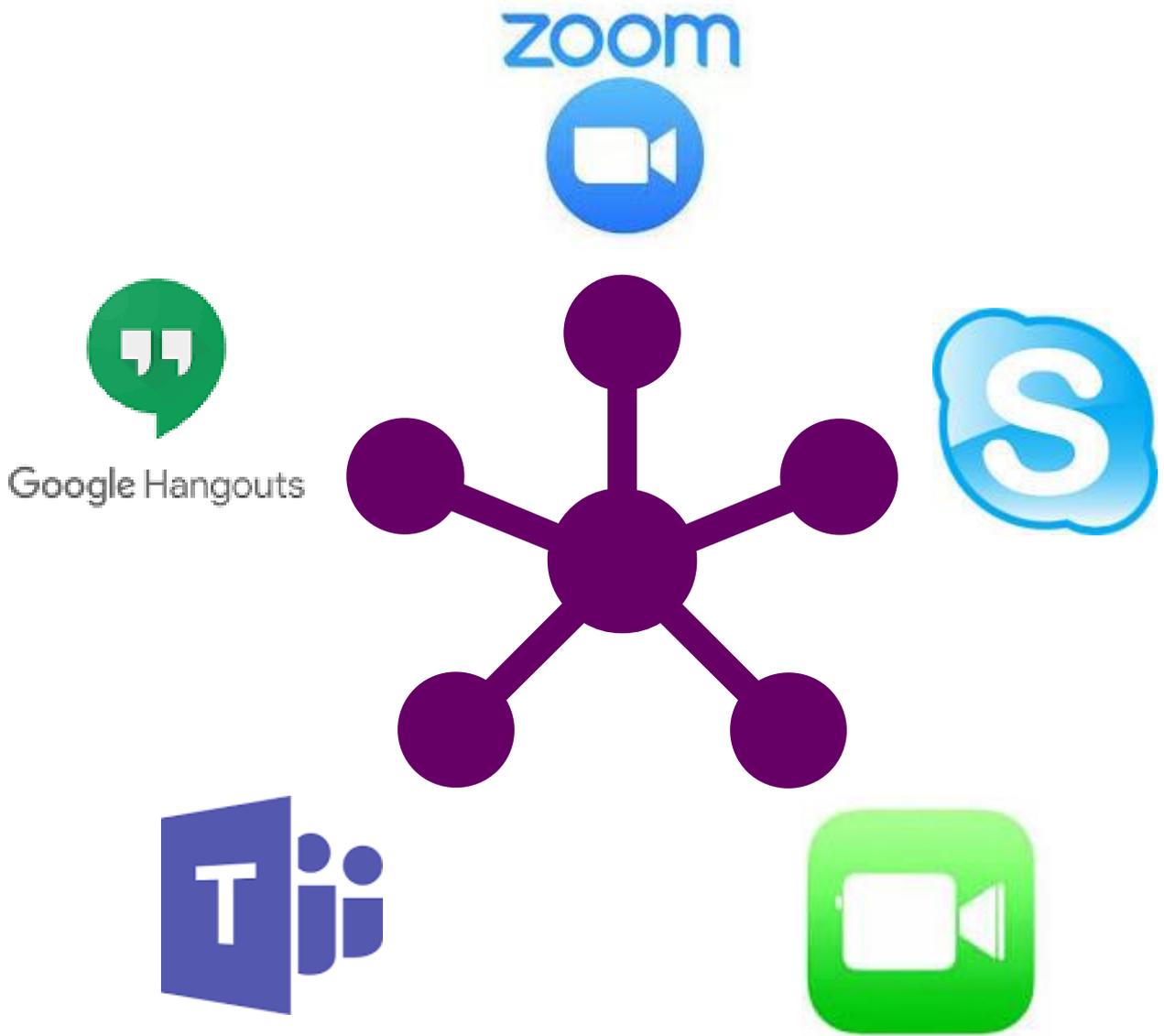
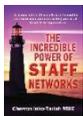


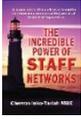
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# GUIDE TO ONLINE PLATFORMS FOR EMPLOYEE NETWORKS



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## STAYING IN TOUCH DURING COVID-19

### Our guide to online communication platforms

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Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on the whole world and has forced us all to think about how we interact with one another. With a growing number of national and international events being either postponed or cancelled and governments announcing self-isolation proclamations in a bid to slow the spread of the virus, the methods we use to stay in contact with each other have been brought into sharp focus; for many of us for the very first time.

Despite working from home increasingly becoming the “new normal”, the Power of Staff Networks recognises how important contact and communication is to network members’ mental health and wellbeing. Luckily, we live in an age technology which means that we have tools to help us come together despite being apart.

Here’s a short guide to five communication platforms to help you stay in touch. Although this is by no means a definitive list and while no one service listed is endorsed by the Power of Staff Networks Group, these are services that we have found useful and we hope you do too.

#### **Zoom**

Zoom is a cloud-based video conferencing service that allows people to virtually meet and conduct live chats with other either by video, audio only or both. Several news articles have reported **zoom** on the massive increase in usage in the Zoom service since the spread of the Covid-19 and it's easy to see why. Users can sign up to the free version of Zoom which is able to host up to 100 participants, allows for access to free 1-2-1 meetings and the creation of group meetings for up to 40 minutes.

In terms of accessibility, Zoom provides several features to help ensure that its services are available to its users. There is a full list of the [accessibility features](#) (including screen reader support, closed captioning and automatic transcripts) available for the platform on the Zoom website for you to review.

The Zoom desktop app is available for [Windows](#) and [macOS](#) and helpfully there are also mobile apps available for both [Android](#) and [iOS](#).

Watch out for Zoom Bombers (yes there is such a thing). Internet trolls are crashing Zoom video conferences and flooding them with inappropriate content. Here are easy ways to protect your meetings from Zoom bombers courtesy of [Tech Republic](#).

## Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams is another cloud-based application that allows for real time collaboration between its users. Teams is available in a free version worldwide in 40 languages. The free version allows for unlimited text chat and search,



group video conferences, one-on-one video calls, 10 GB of team file storage plus additional 2 GB per person for personal storage and access to web-based versions of Word, Excel, PowerPoint and OneNote free of charge.

Accessibility support is also available for Microsoft Teams with a full list of the supported features provided on the Microsoft Office 365 website.

## Google Hangouts

Google Hangouts is another free messaging and video chat service, this time for Google users. It allows users to message friend, start free video or voice calls and join in a conversation with one person or a group. Up to 150 people can be included in group chats and any conversation can be turned into a free video call with up to 10 people with just one tap. Users can post their Hangouts publicly allowing anyone with the link to join.



Google Hangouts

Google Hangouts is free to download and install on the device you want to use it with. It can be used with a Google account such as Gmail or Google Drive.

Google Hangouts has several accessibility features including:

- Keyboard shortcuts for video calls and in Chat
- Caption support for real-time transcription, either through a service or by typing yourself, via an app that can be added from the left margin of the video call interface.
- Sign Language Interpreter app: This can be added from the left margin of the video call interface. You can request a Signer or offer to interpret for someone else.

The Google Chat help page provides the full range of accessible features and how to access them on computers and via Android and iPhone and iPad devices.

## FaceTime

FaceTime is an app that supports video and audio calling between Apple devices via Apple's FaceTime app. The app works on Wi-Fi which means that users can make free internet-based calls anywhere they can access a Wi-Fi connection. Because FaceTime is an Apple technology, it will only run on Apple devices. You can't run FaceTime on Android devices and there isn't a Windows FaceTime download. However, as this guide has shown, there are plenty of alternative video and audio calling apps available for you to use on those devices.



You can learn more about Learn how to use FaceTime to make video and audio calls from your iPhone, iPad or iPod touch via the [helpful guide](#) provided by Apple.

For those who use sign language to communicate, Facetime is a great way for people who use sign language to communicate easily. Apple has done much in general to ensure that its devices are accessible. Feel free to visit the Apple website to find an [overview of Apple's approach to accessibility](#) and its [Accessibility Support page](#) to learn more about how to use accessible features on iOS devices.

## Skype

Skype is a Microsoft owned communications application service that allows people to make and receive free voice and video calls over the internet using a computer, web browser, or mobile phone. The application [is available on several different platforms](#). It doesn't cost any money to download and install the program, create an account, or use most Skype's features. It's also free to use Skype to send messages and have audio and video calls with groups of up to 50 people. However, some additional features do cost money to use so please do check before what you can do for free.



To further help Skype provides [a range of assistive features](#) to in the navigation and control their devices. Please note Skype is different to Skype for Business!

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So there you have it; even more ways for us to stay in contact and network during the lockdown. Before you do sign up to use any of the services in this guide or any other communication service, we suggest that you familiarise and yourself with the privacy policies for each and make sure that you are happy with them beforehand. For those that need them we suggest that you choose strong passwords when creating online accounts on any platform and check whether your organisation's server supports them.

Do you have any other services not listed that you've found helpful? Do drop us a [line](#) and let us know.