

Is Zoom a Safe Video Conference for Court Hearings, Attorney Conferences, and Others?

I recently came from a town hall with Immigration Judges where a judge stated that DOJ (Department of Justice) will NOT approve Zoom hearing or conferences due to security issues.

What is the security issue and why are so many lawyers and other business professionals still using zoom instead of other video conferencing such as Skype, Microsoft Team,, Duo, etc?

Search for something "zoom bombing". Apparently Zoom is prone to being hacked. There was a hearing yesterday in Florida for the suspect who supposedly hacked Twitter a few weeks back and took over the accounts of high-profile people like Obama. That hearing yesterday was hacked (<https://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Porn-rap-interrupt-Zoom-hearing-of-Twitter-15461410.php>).

Apparently, it's a point of pride to insert porn as part of the hack.

I'm not sure if Zoom's underlying technology is prone to hacking somehow (i.e. it was designed sloppily) and the problem is just worse now given that Zoom has become so popular. I've had several clients ask explicitly for Zoom calls, apparently unaware that other options (e.g. MS Teams, etc.) exist. I'm surprised that Teams hasn't taken off given that Windows users have it already. The alternative explanation, of course, is that Zoom is being hacked because it is so popular. If any other service were similar popular, it would be hacked to the same degree also.

Andy Chen, California

Our Chief Justice released a memo from the court's IT department advising judges and clerks not to use Zoom.

Deborah Matthews, Virginia

While no expert on the technology, Zoom had initial default settings which impacted privacy, but I understand that the default settings are now more privacy and security robust. Full disclosure: I own some Zoom shares.

Craig McLaughlin, California

We've been using zoom successfully for months now for bond hearings. Any idea if the court that was hacked yesterday was using a waiting room or password protected login? I wonder how much is truly hacking and how much is user error.

Andrew Mays

Dallas County Courts are using Zoom pretty regularly. I had two Zoom hearings today

Sharon K. Campbell, Texas

I guess if Zoom offers a password and Judge decides to not use one, sh*t may happen.

"The court had publicly revealed last week it'd hold hearings over Zoom, *no password required*, "we are having a hearing in the park across the street and no security will be present

Nicholas I. Fuerst, Arizona

Zoom was susceptible to security breaches and "zoom bombing", but it issued and required that everyone install an upgrade in May. People/institutions using it also should learn how to, and should institute security precautions such as registration, passwords and waiting rooms and hosts who admit registered participants. Not following any protocols and lazy hosting could cause security issues. It's ease of use is a plus.

Miriam N. Jacobson, Pennsylvania

Yeah, I guess porn and court hearings don't exactly mix! Lol!!!

John Kang, Nevada

FWIW the courts in Utah are all using Webex.

Randy Birch, Urah

If that is the DOJ position, I hope it will be explained. I recall Zoom had some issues in the beginning, before it was as popular, but then made some upgrades and I have not heard about issues. The opinions may be based on bad, outdated information.

Using a waiting room and password are needed to enhance security. Generally, court hearings are public to there should be very little privacy concerns and more concerns over people interfering with the proceedings.

I think the platform choice is more preference. The more popular a platform becomes the more attractive to hackers.

Phil A. Taylor, Massachusetts

Skype for Business is more secure. It's what all the judges in NY are using.

Jeena R. Belil, New York

Isn't this like all other technology: if used right, it is safe. If used wrong, it is not safe. I am sure Zoom or Bluejeans or Skype or Webex are all hackable. All can be rendered unsafe through unsafe usage. If you want the perfect solution, call me when you create it.

Jonathan Stein, California

Zoom started with a tremendous number of security issues when it exploded on the scene in March. The identified problems I am aware of have been addressed. The office of court administration in Texas foisted it off on lawyers when they decided to use it for court hearings here.

Skype, Webex and some other platforms have a proven track record. Both the federal government and some large companies have refused to put Zoom on their approved list. Some of them have established services with other providers, which may be a disincentive to approval.

Zoom is still used for all state court proceedings here in Texas. Personally, I don't have a huge issue with that now. I thought it foolhardy when it was foisted on us in March.

Darrell G. Stewart, Texas

I have been using Zoom videoconferences with a password for client conferences for about 2 years, and never had any issues. We selected it after test driving several video conference platforms, actually. It isn't a brand-new technology, but seems to be easier for a novice to use than many others, and of course has a free version, which led to its explosion in popularity once everyone and his brother started needing or wanting videoconferences on a daily basis.

That ease-of-use with many novices, combined with their initial default settings, seems to me what led to most Zoom bombings.

I do not own any Zoom shares.

Cynthia V. Hall, Florida

Massachusetts courts all use Zoom.

For my virtual writing group, we've used skype, google hangouts, GoToMeeting, and zoom. Zoom is certainly the easiest, but it also seems to be the most reliable. (members of the writing group are in 5 different states, using it on a variety of different platforms, and have a variety of levels of tech ability.) Axinn Family Game Night has used GoToMeeting, Teams, and Zoom... and again, over a variety of different states and platforms, and skill levels, this seems to be the easiest and most reliable.

From what I could tell, most of the security issues occurred when someone would post a notice of an upcoming meeting on social media, and either include the password, or set up a session that did not require either a password or a 'waiting room'. For the writing group, we use a password option, and the app sets up a password (unique, for each meeting). For Family Game Night we require the host to let you in from the waiting room

Laurie Axinn Gienapp, Massachusetts

Are all of you using the paid or free Zoom version? I heard that paid version is stronger due to the mandatory password.

AnnMichelle G. Hart

I use paid version. I don't want time limits. Don't know about relative stability of paid versus free, but password is not required. Either password or a waiting room will be required, but requirement for one or the other was delayed to mid-September, I think, from originally announced July date. So, if paid version is more stable, that is not the reason.

Henry R. Reckler, Colorado

There is no universal non-use of Zoom by the federal government. Check Zoomgov.com.

Phil Taylor

I also use the paid version, though I started out initially with the free version and upgraded at the beginning of the year. I had also observed better stability/video quality on Zoom when I initially tested several platforms 2 years ago, but I do not know whether that is still true or was even universally true at the time.

Cynthia V. Hall

Thus far, I've used the freebie version with no problems. I understand that there may be a security issue, so may depend upon what you are doing. I had a judge and a former judge acting as mediator use zoom and it seemed to go well, though no idea which version they had as it seemed to work the same.

Vicki Levy Eskin, Florida

Alabama courts use with breakout rooms for dependency cases, which are confidential. We have had no issues, unless you count courtroom staff who can't figure it out.

Also used a national high school civics competition involving 600 kids across 15 states with 26 judges and more high school teachers and administrators. Worked seamlessly, including breakout rooms for judging and discussions.

Reta McKannan, Alabama