Scheduling Group Meetings for Simultaneous Viewing of Online Multimedia Content

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Scheduling Group Meetings for Simultaneous Viewing of Online Multimedia Content

ABSTRACT

Viewing webcasts as part of a group, such as a work team, can often enhance the experience by fostering local discussions pertaining to the content. Such discussions can generate questions, foster collaboration, improve social bonds among the group members, and raise matters pertaining to applying the content for the specific goals and purposes of the group. However, the scheduling and interactive mechanisms related to webcasts are designed for a user viewing the webcast alone, without the presence of others. This disclosure describes techniques to support synchronous webcast viewing by a group of people and corresponding calendaring mechanisms to support organizing and scheduling such small group get-togethers.

KEYWORDS

- Webcast
- Video conferencing
- Watch party
- Live stream
- Co-worker interaction
- Employee training
- Audience interaction
- Linked calendar events
- Side-channel interaction
- Telecommuting
BACKGROUND

Many large-group training courses are often delivered as a live stream or recorded webcast. Webcasts are also used for broadcast-type events, such as announcements or updates from upper management of an organization, intended for a large number of the organization’s workers. Such webcasts are typically restricted to a one-way transmission that affords the viewers little to no capabilities of interacting with the speaker(s) in the webcast. In some cases, limited interaction is possible, typically in the form of viewers sending text questions via a separate channel, such as chat, email, etc. The channel can be provided within the live webcast or an independent mechanism may be used in parallel or in advance to the webcast.

People sometimes form small groups to watch webcasts together, either co-located in the same physical space or connected virtually via synchronous conferencing. Viewing webcasts as part of a group, such as a work team, can enhance the experience by fostering local discussions pertaining to the content. Such discussions can generate questions, foster collaboration, improve social bonds among the group members, and raise matters pertaining to applying the content for the specific goals and purposes of the group. However, the scheduling and interactive mechanisms related to webcasts are designed for a user viewing the webcast alone, without the presence of others.

DESCRIPTION

This disclosure describes techniques to support synchronous viewing of live video streams or recorded webcasts by a group of people, such as a team of employees in an organization. Group members can be co-present virtually in a separate online meeting and watch the webcast together while discussing the content among themselves without disrupting the flow of the content stream. Two or more of the group members can also be physically together. For
instance, a group of co-workers can get together in an online meeting separate from a broadcast of an address by the top management of their organization and watch the broadcast together. The functionality for virtual co-presence of the group is independent of the webcast and the interaction mechanisms provided in the webcast for the general audience.

Calendar programs and applications can be provided that include features to support organizing and scheduling such small-group get-togethers connected to a webcast. To that end, the calendar event for a webcast can provide mechanisms, such as a button, to generate meeting invites for a small-group gathering that is linked to the main webcast calendar event. A user viewing the calendar is provided a calendar with two co-occurring and linked events - the webcast and the small-group meeting, as being connected to each other, thus signifying the blended event experience.

![Fig. 1: Linking calendar events for viewing online content as a group gathering](image-url)
Fig. 1 shows an operational implementation of the techniques described in this disclosure. A calendar application (104) on a device (102) depicts a main event (106) for a company webcast. A team of employees in the company that wishes to get together via online conferencing to watch the webcast creates an event for a team meeting to view the company webcast (108). The calendar maintains and shows the two events are linked to each other. For example, if the webcast is rescheduled, the team meeting is automatically rescheduled accordingly.

In an organizational context and depending on the webcast event, the small groups can be formed in a variety of ways such as: a number of new employees with an experienced employee who can answer their questions, a team working on specific aspects of a project, an organizational unit managed by an individual, etc.

The techniques can also augment the linked meeting invitation with additional functionality implemented via artificial intelligence (AI), with user permission. For instance, when initiating a calendar event invitation for a small-group meeting connected to a webcast, AI can be utilized to infer those who should be invited to be in the gathering. The inferences can be used to offer suggestions and/or implement mechanisms for quickly selecting individuals for the invitee list for the small-group meeting. Alternatively, or in addition, AI can be employed to help include overlooked or forgotten invitees with appropriate suggestions, such as “Based on the currently selected invitee list, you may want to invite Alice as well.”

The techniques described in this disclosure can be implemented within any application with standalone or integrated calendaring capabilities. Further, the linked meetings feature can be included within application bundles, such as office productivity suites. The techniques can support meetings linked with any suitable online stream of multimedia content, such as live
broadcasts, recorded webcasts, conference calls, etc. Implementation of the techniques can enhance the user experience (UX) of calendar applications and synchronous small-group viewing of training or other broadcast content. Moreover, linked team meetings can enable enhanced team dynamics even if some or all of the team members are telecommuting.

Further to the descriptions above, a user may be provided with controls allowing the user to make an election as to both if and when systems, programs or features described herein may enable collection of user information (e.g., information about a user’s social network, social actions or activities, profession, a user’s preferences, or a user’s current location), and if the user is sent content or communications from a server. In addition, certain data may be treated in one or more ways before it is stored or used, so that personally identifiable information is removed. For example, a user’s identity may be treated so that no personally identifiable information can be determined for the user, or a user’s geographic location may be generalized where location information is obtained (such as to a city, ZIP code, or state level), so that a particular location of a user cannot be determined. Thus, the user may have control over what information is collected about the user, how that information is used, and what information is provided to the user.

CONCLUSION

This disclosure describes techniques to support synchronous webcast viewing by a group of people and corresponding calendaring mechanisms to support organizing and scheduling such small group get-togethers. Calendar events for a webcast are enhanced to include mechanisms to generate meeting invites for a small-group gathering linked to a main webcast calendar event. A user viewing the calendar is provided with two co-occurring and linked events - the webcast and the small-group meeting.