

Advice for Clubs Wishing to Meet Online and Use Remote Judging

Whilst the Coronavirus (Covid19) makes physical meetings unwise.

Much club activity has stopped since the COVID-19 outbreak made physical meetings unwise. Whilst there's no substitute for gathering around a print stand sharing a beautiful image, there is much that clubs can do without face to face meetings. Clearly this is only going to work for members who have an internet connection and, ideally, a laptop or computer rather than just a phone, so they can see the images in good quality. The following notes suggest some of the ways you can "keep the club going" until normality is restored. The document covers three topics:

- Use of social media to keep in touch, share images and run informal competitions.
- Online Meetings
- Sending image files to judges

Social Media

Facebook is the obvious choice for keeping in touch with members and is popular with the slightly older demographic of most clubs. SnapChat, WhatsApp etc can also be used, though many of the same disadvantages apply.

Advantages:

- Many people have Facebook and know how to use it
- You can create a group for your club members

Disadvantages

- Facebook and other social media platforms are not concerned with image quality, they reduce the size and quality of images quite significantly
- By posting images on platforms such as Facebook, you grant them the right to use the images. Whilst they acknowledge you retain copyright, their terms and conditions say *"when you share, post or upload content that is covered by intellectual property rights on or in connection with our Products, you grant us a non-exclusive, transferable, sub-licensable, royalty-free and worldwide licence to host, use, distribute, modify, run, copy, publicly perform or display, translate and create derivative works of your content"* Some members may not be comfortable with this.

Photo-specific Media Sites

Sites such as [Flickr](#) are a better bet for image sharing and free accounts are available.

Advantages

- You retain complete control over who can see and download your images and by uploading your images you do not grant anyone the right to use them, unless you choose to.
- Quality is preserved, with professional accounts displaying at up to 6k resolution, way beyond anything used for club DPI competitions.

- You can set up a group for your club members and make it private if you wish, so only members can see the images.
- You can use the discussion function to hold competitions.

Disadvantages

- You need to sign up for an account if you don't have one and whilst free accounts are available, pro accounts which remove the adverts and provide the best experience on Flickr are now expensive at \$50/year. For that you get unlimited storage and given that you can mark uploaded files private so only you can see them, that's actually a cheap way of getting cloud storage but it's a lot of money for a casual user.
- There are a lot of controls for users to determine who can see their images, read their EXIF data etc so there is a learning curve if you want to use all the features.

Online Meetings

There are many ways clubs can continue to meet online rather than face-to-face. Whatever platform you use, encourage people to use headphones rather than loudspeakers, to avoid unpleasant echo. Most platforms include echo cancellation but it can make the audio unclear and if lots of people in a meeting use loudspeakers it can be quite unpleasant. If you only do one thing, encourage your members to use headphones or ear buds! Unfortunately inexpensive USB and Bluetooth (wireless) headsets for computers are currently in short supply, but any pair of ear buds with an appropriate jack plug on them can be used with most computers.

Most laptops have a microphone, speakers and web cam built in but if you use a tower or desktop PC you will need to add a microphone, headphones and if you want people to see you, a web cam. There will be jack sockets (often at the back of the computer) to allow you to connect these. Headphones go in the green socket, a microphone in the pink socket and a web cam needs a USB socket. Webcams often include a microphone, which can simplify things.

Here are some of the platforms you might use for meetings, there are many others.

Skype

One of the oldest internet based communication systems.

Advantages

- Free and easy to use for small meetings with a maximum of 50 participants
- It's been around a long time so many people already have an account
- Participants can share video with a web cam or share their screen.

Disadvantages

- You need to install software on your computer or an app on your phone to get the best experience, although you can use it in a web browser.
- You can't set up a meeting in advance and send people a "one click link" to join the meeting.
- Everybody joining the meeting needs a Skype account.

Zoom

A meeting system which makes it easy for people to join a meeting.

Advantages

- You can use a free account to hold a meeting of up to 100 people for up to 40 minutes. If you want longer, have a 10 minute “comfort break” for people followed by another 40 minute meeting. This should be sufficient for most club needs.
- Only the person setting up the meeting needs a Zoom account. Other people can be invited by email and just have to click on a link in the email to join the meeting.
- The person holding the meeting can show video from a web cam or share their screen, ideal for judging.
- The person holding the meeting can let others share their screen, good for “show and tell” if members want to share their work.
- You don’t need any software, just a web browser on your computer or in your phone.
- Everyone on the meeting, even if they don’t have a Zoom account, can speak, share their desktop or show video. The person holding the meeting can control this.

Disadvantages

- Although you can do a lot with a free account, if you want meetings longer than 40 minutes or more than 100 people you need to pay a subscription, these start at £12/month for each person who wants to host a meeting. Only the largest clubs or those who want a single uninterrupted meeting longer than 40 minutes will need to do this.
- There are a few settings to think about before hosting your first meeting, for example do you want everyone who joins to start with their microphone muted? If you are judging, this is probably a very good idea but it does mean there’s a bit of a learning curve before you start.

Sharing Files

If you are going to try remote judging you will of course need to get your pictures to the judge. Physical prints could be left on their doorstep at a pre-arranged time, the judge can pick up the box using tissue or kitchen roll then throw it away. The virus will only live for about 24 hours on [cardboard](#) so if the judge leaves the prints for a couple of days before handling them, they should be completely safe. For DPI images at the normal competition resolutions of around 1400 x 1200 pixels, a typical image will be between 0.5 and 1.5 megabytes. More than about half a dozen images will exceed the size which is guaranteed to be delivered by email. Rather than sending the poor judge many emails each with a few files, consider the following options.

File Sharing

Everyone who has a Google (gmail) account has 15GB of free storage. You can find it by logging into Google on your web browser, clicking on the Google Apps square of dots in the top right corner and clicking on “drive”. You can upload your pictures to a folder on your Google Drive then get a “shareable link” to email to the judge. They can then download all the images to their computer. They don’t need a Google account to do this.

Other services you might use for file sharing include [Dropbox](#) which offers free accounts of 2GB storage which are sufficient for club competitions provided you delete the files from the system once the judge has downloaded them. It works like Google Drive, you upload the files then get a link

to share the files. There's no great advantage over Google Drive but if you don't have a Google account this might be an option for you.

[File Transfer](#)

To use a file transfer service you upload the files to a web site and type in the email addresses you want to send them to. Each recipient gets an email with a link to allow them to receive the files. Be kind to your judge and zip all the entries into a single file which they can then unzip into a folder on their computer. Modern computers include the ability to zip and unzip files, you don't need to pay for WinZip to do it.

[WeSendIt](#) allows you to send up to 5GB to up to 15 people, plenty for a club to send files to a judge. [WeTransfer](#) is similar but with a limit of 2GB, still plenty for the average club competition.

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