Feedback pertaining to the use of Big Blue Button during the Australian VLab CoE RFG meeting of the 30th April 2020 and comparison with the GoToWebinar web conferencing software

Report by Bodo Zeschke 25th May 2020

<u>Introduction</u>

The Australian VLab Centre of Excellence Regional Focus Group (RFG) meeting of the 30th April 2010 (see http://www.virtuallab.bom.gov.au/archive/regional-focus-group-recordings/) was conducted using the Big Blue Button (BBB) web conferencing software. This was the first RFG meeting to use this web conferencing software, previous meetings utilising GoToWebinar. The attendees accessed BBB within the Bureau of Meteorology Training Centre (BMTC) Moodle open source learning platform. Attendees could do this either through a detailed registration or through a guest login.

Within the BBB Users window 52 attendees were noted. For the purposes of the statistics of the meeting and for receiving feedback 29 attendees could be identified within the Moodle registration window and from additional information obtained from attendees within the Chat box during the session.

After the conclusion of the meeting Bodo Zeschke forwarded an email asking for evaluation of the performance of the BBB web conferencing software, and comparison to GoToWebinar to the 29 attendees on the 1st May. A reminder email was sent on the 6th May. Responses were received from 16 of the attendees, including those from Australia (2), China (1), Fiji (1), Indonesia (3), Japan (1), Kiribati (1), New Zealand (4), Solomon Islands (1), USA (2). A summary of feedback from these attendees is given below. Feedback from the presenter of the Regional Focus Group meeting, Mr Joe Courtney and the author as organiser of the session is also presented below.

<u>Part A: Feedback from the presenter / organiser</u>

- The instructions for registration or guest access for Big Blue Button (BBB) embedded within MOODLE are much more detailed compared to the provision of a single web link as required by GoToWebinar.
- GoToWebinar registration appears to be more user friendly from a presenter / organiser point of view. The requirement of the attendee's country of origin can be added to the login requirements and the email address of all attendees are automatically recorded. Conversely it was found difficult to obtain the identity and country of origin of many of the attendees to the BBB session, particularly the guest logins. This is an issue for follow up correspondence and when compiling the statistics of these international sessions for reports.
- It is straightforward for the presenter / organiser to start a session in BBB and in GoToWebinar. Both web conferencing software were found to be reliable.

- In the past the VLab presenters have used the drawing tool functionality of GoToWebinar for enhanced audience interaction when using the shared screen option. This drawing tool option is not available when using the shared screen option within BBB. Uploading the file into BBB will permit this audience participation, however there are file size limitations associated with this. Embedded animations may not play within files uploaded into BBB.
- The Chatbox within BBB permits the presenter to monitor the attendees as these are writing a message and before this appears on the screen. This is very useful when interacting with the audience in a question and answer scenario. This functionality was not observed when using GoToWebinar
- BBB does not appear to have the "audience view window" functionality that GoToWebinar has. This is an issue as attendees with limited internet bandwidth may experience a substantial delay when the presenter changes his / her slides. There appears to be no way for the presenter to monitor this within BBB. Therefore, the presenter should introduce a pause in the flow of the conversation as he / she passes on from one slide to the next when presenting within BBB.

Part B: Feedback from the 16 attendees

This is given in detail below, with a summary at the end.

Preparation for the session by the attendees

14 respondents registered for the session. Of these 11 replied that it was easy to register or that there were no problems. Problems experienced by the respondents included:
- Forgetting the password (2 attendees)
- For the BOM attendee the okta sign in worked but did not give access to content. An email was required to Moodle support to fix this.
- One of the Japanese attendees commented that a colleague (not included in this survey) could not log in on the day, even though he had registered previously. Therefore, this colleague logged on as a guest.

2 respondents used the guest option. Reasons for this included:
- One attendee was unable to dial in directly, and even after upgrading Chrome she had to revert to phone.
- The other respondent simply chose the easier option to join the session.

13 respondents mentioned that it was easy to log into BBB and presented no problems. The advantage of not requiring a "helper" application to log into Big Blue Button was mentioned. GoToWebinar requires the GoToOpener application and this can be blocked by the local security setup of the attendee.
One respondent had to wait 5 minutes in order to see the meeting room. Two respondents did not provide information about logging into BBB.

<u>The performance of Big Blue Button; audio and video performance</u>

14 respondents mentioned that audio transmission within Big Blue Button was good, with Joe's voice clearly heard throughout his presentation. Additional feedback included:

1. One attendee mentioned that the audio degraded when one of the attendees activated their webcam during the session.
2. One attendee replied that at times the connection was not good as they were using a smartphone.
3. One attendee used the Google Chrome browser initially and was unable to engage audio. They were able to remedy this issue by using the Modzilla Firefox browser.
4. Additional comments included; sound dropouts, delays in transmission of audio, distortion of audio.

13 respondents mentioned that video transmission within Big Blue button was clear. Additional feedback included:

1. One attendee mentioned that the images rendered in low resolution and were not so clear. This is a similar result to what was observed during the tests comparing BBB to GoToWebinar conducted from the RMIT Training Room and transmitted to BOM attendees prior to the AOMSUC-10 Training Event during November 2019.
2. Another attendee replied, "the presentation always stuck" (sic) i.e. there was a delay in transitioning from one slide to the next. The attendee who reported this was using Wi-Fi from their office.
3. One respondent mentioned that the use of webcam by one of the attendees degraded the video quality and is distracting as the webcam window appears above the presentation.
4. One respondent mentioned that the video cut out towards the end of the presentation.

<u>How the attendees liked Big Blue Button as a platform for hosting the RFG meeting</u>

9 attendees specifically commented favourably upon BBB. Comments included:

1. Chat box in BBB not too different from other chat boxes.
2. Great to be able to have a private chat to another participant. This was not available in GoToWebinar (5 attendees)
3. Big Blue button bring about a very similar user interface to Skype which made me comfortable almost immediately use (sic)
4. Interactivity within BBB was good.

<u>Comparison between Big Blue Button and GoToWebinar</u>
7 attendees preferred BBB over GoToWebinar. Reasons included:

1. BBB better to adapt to Moodle, Because the "Chat" system also seems more interactive (2 attendees)
2. No extra installing of software required with BBB. This is required for GoToWebinar

3. The interface was comfortable
4. Operation window in GoToWebinar sometimes obstructs the presentation window (for single monitor viewing)

6 attendees preferred both BBB and GoToWebinar
On attendee mentioned that they missed being able to annotate on the shared screen. This is possible with GoToWebinar but does not appear to be a BBB functionality.

2 attendees did not answer this question. One attendee mentioned that they had not used GoToWebinar previously.

<u>Suggestions for further improvement in the use of Big Blue Button during the Australian VLab Centre of Excellence Regional Focus Group meetings</u>

4 attendees specifically mentioned that they were happy with the presentation. 6 attendees did not comment.

The following suggestions for improvement were received:
1. "Instruction slide for Big Blue Button operations (chat, maximizing screen and so on) would be helpful for unfamiliar participants".
2. "It would have been nice to know the identity of all the guests in the audience".
3. "If available, an app for the Big Blue button would prove useful for those that are not at the convenience of a room or workplace while the conference is taking place".

Additional comments presented by the attendees included:
1. One attendee was interested in BigBlueButton since it also integrates into Moodle with a plug-in and seemed to have a nice user interface
2. "I think (it) is very good to have awareness of participant numbers and/or identities. I have attended webinars where you cannot tell if anyone else is there and it degrades the experience".

<u>Summary of the attendee feedback</u>

Overall, the 16 attendees from across the Australasia / Pacific region and the USA provided positive feedback regarding the use of Big Blue Button (BBB) during the Regional Focus Group meeting. It was straightforward to log into BBB; the audio and video transmission was generally good. Participants also offered useful feedback comparing BBB to GoToWebinar web conferencing software. Important additional feedback pertaining to the session included:
• Instruction for the use of Big Blue Button for first time users would be useful.
• An App for Big Blue Button would be useful.
• The advantage of not requiring a "helper" application to log into Big Blue Button. GoToWebinar requires the GoToOpener application and this can be blocked by the local security setup of the attendee.

- The greater "familiarity" and therefore "user friendliness" in the BBB user interface compared to that of GoToWebinar. Attendees mentioned the similarity of the BBB interface to Skype and to chat boxes in other communication software.
- Attendees enjoyed the ability to see the register of attendees and to interact with these during the BBB presentation. This was not possible when using GoToWebinar. On the other hand, it would have been good to know the identity of the guest attendees.
- The interactive control window in GoToWebinar obstructs the presentation window for single monitor viewing. This is not an issue with BBB.
- Limitation in attendees not being able to draw on the shared screen within BBB. GoToWebinar permitted the attendees to do this.
- The integration of Big Blue Button into Moodle was an attraction. Indeed, some attendees were keen to receive feedback on the use of Big Blue Button as they are contemplating using this for their remote conferencing.