



## Evaluating Breeze 5 Meeting

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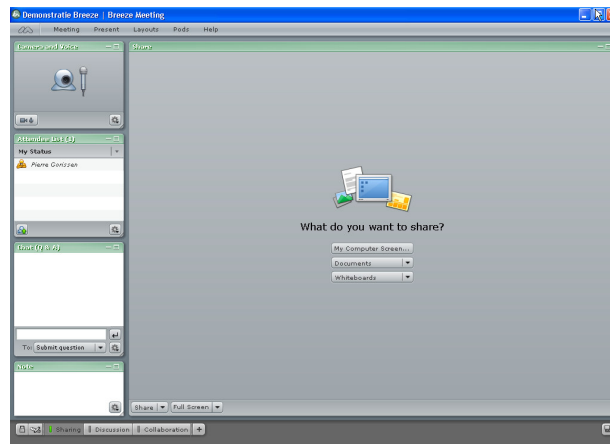
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During the last two weeks I have been evaluating Breeze 5 Meeting for use as a supporting tool for videoconferencing and remote meetings. The results have been quite impressive. This short report describes some of the use cases I tried out during that period and contains some preliminary conclusions. These are based on my personal experience and opinion only and don't necessarily express an official position of Fontys University of Professional Education.

The test environment was kindly provided by SURFnet, who are currently evaluating the Breeze system for use in the Dutch Higher Education sector.

### **About Breeze 5**

The Breeze 5 Meeting application (<http://www.macromedia.com/software/breeze/>) is a product of Macromedia, which is currently being acquired by Adobe. It is part of a suite of applications, also comprising of Breeze Presenter and Breeze Educational. I had only access to the Breeze 5 Meeting application during this trial period.



**Figure 1 basic view**

Being a product of Macromedia, also the creators of Flash, it is not a surprise that the Breeze system is completely based on Flash. Where others use either stand-alone client applications or Java clients, this is a major advantage because of the high percentage of systems that have Macromedia Flash already installed as part of the default browser installation.

The Breeze system is very cross-platform, running on these system/browser combinations with Macromedia Flash Player 6.0.79 or higher:

- Windows (98se, 2000, XP)
  - Internet Explorer 5.0, 5.5, 6.0
  - Netscape Navigator 7.1
  - Mozilla Firefox 1.0.3
- Macintosh (OS X 10.2, 10.3)
  - Safari 1.1, 1.2
  - Mozilla Firefox 1.0.3

For the presenter-part of the system and an even broader range of systems for the viewer/participant functionality:

- Windows (98se, 2000, XP)
  - Internet Explorer 5.0, 5.5, 6.0
  - Netscape Navigator 7.1
  - AOL 9
  - Mozilla Firefox 1.0.3
- Macintosh (OS X 10.2, 10.3)
  - Safari 1.1, 1.2
  - Mozilla Firefox 1.0.3
- Linux
  - Mozilla 1.2
- Solaris
  - Mozilla 1.4

Again in combination with the presence of Macromedia Flash Player 6.0.79 or higher for Windows and Macintosh and Macromedia Flash Player 7 or higher for Linux and Solaris.

The use of Flash also handles other problems often occurring during initial setup of conference applications: it takes care of the video and the desktop sharing. This means there is no need to install additional applications, the Breeze system can handle things like audio levels, noise reduction, and there are no firewall problems. The firewall problems is something that in particular VNC, used by VRVS (<http://www.vrvs.org/>) and Marratech (<http://www.marratech.com/>) is notorious for.

### ***Creating a meeting***

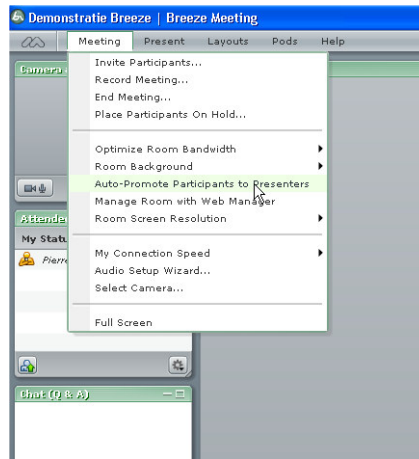
To create a meeting a user logs-on to the Breeze website. Creation of a meeting takes just a couple of steps and all information except for the title of the meeting is optional.

That in particular is the case for the meeting start and end times because the meeting room is instantly available and also stays available after the set end time has passed.

The meeting is assigned a unique ID so that a URL can be created for that meeting. You can have the system generate one for you or select a nice short URL which you can easily dictate to a user through the phone or copy/paste into a mail message.

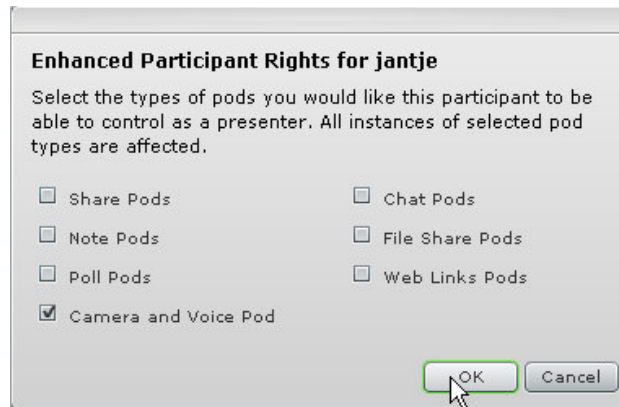
If you allow access to everyone, all a user needs to do is go to the provided URL and logon as guest. She then chooses a user name and enters the room. If during setup of the meeting access is set to “Only registered users and accepted guests may enter the room” the host sees a small popup when the users wants to enter the room and has the choice of accepting or declining access.

When a user enters this way, she is assigned the participant role. This means she can watch, listen, but not transmit audio or video. This extra right can be granted by the host on a user-by-user basis. In a meeting where the host knows in advance that all members should be allowed to present, she can set this as a generic setting for all users.



**Figure 2 auto promote participants**

A presenter is allowed to share his screen, send audio and video and switch over to the presenter only view. In a meeting where you know that only few members need the right to present, setting the extended rights on a per-user basis is probably safer.



**Figure 3 enhanced participant rights**

## Events

Creating an event instead of a meeting takes a bit more preparation but enables you to automate the process of inviting participants, allowing them to register for an account and controlling access to the meeting more precisely.

Because the sign-up screen for the event can be customized, it is possible to ask the participants a number of questions before the meeting that might enable the presenter to be prepared for specific questions and to have an idea of the pre-knowledge of participants.

## *During the meeting*

Once a meeting room is created, it is available and can be entered. Depending on the rule a user has been assigned more or less control of the meeting room is granted.

## Transmit audio/video

If a participant enters a meeting as a guest, she is not allowed to transmit audio and/or video. The host can allow that on a per-user basis.

If a user has the role of presenter or host, she automatically inherits the right to send audio/video. It is possible for a host to automatically upgrade anonymous participants to the presenter status so that they too receive the right to transmit audio/video without manual intervention of the host.

Quality of the audio and video is sufficient, though it shouldn't be compared with the audio/video produced by standalone video systems. It is comparable or better than the sound quality during long distance international calls. The latency of the audio sometimes is a bit high, but that usually only is noticeable if you can here both the original audio and the result on the other end.

## Screen layout

One thing that is probably very different from other systems is that in Breeze, everyone during the meeting has exactly the same screen setup<sup>1</sup>. It is not possible for example that one member decides to have a large video window while others choose to have the window set to a smaller size.

For expert users this might be perceived as a huge limitation, but the advantage is that you can be sure that all users see the same as the host, and especially novice users will very much appreciate the fact that all the windows are placed at the "correct" spot and that they don't have to worry about moving them.

## Presenters and host functionality

Presenters can switch over to Preparing mode. This enables her to switch between the layouts present in a meeting room without influencing the display of the other participants of the meeting.

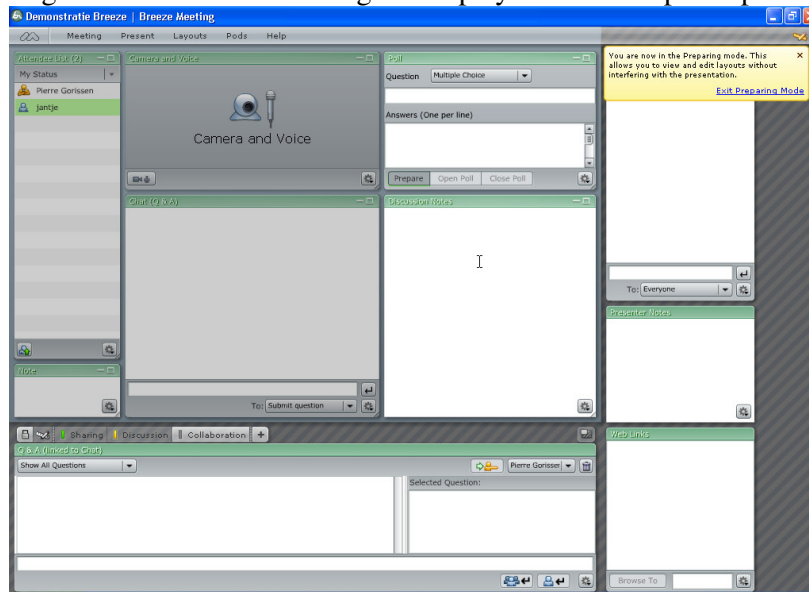


Figure 4 presenter view

During the meeting, Presenters can enable the "presenter only" part of the room in which they can chat, take quick notes etc. again without disturbing the display for the other participants.

<sup>1</sup> An exception to this is the presenter who can switch over to a presenter only view with additional chat options and who can switch to other layouts to prepare the presentation in advance without influencing the settings for the other members.

The Breeze system has integrated support for PowerPoint. Presenters can upload their presentation file and they get converted to the Flash-format. Once uploaded the files are stored on the Breeze-server as part of the meeting and can be re-used when needed without re-uploading them.

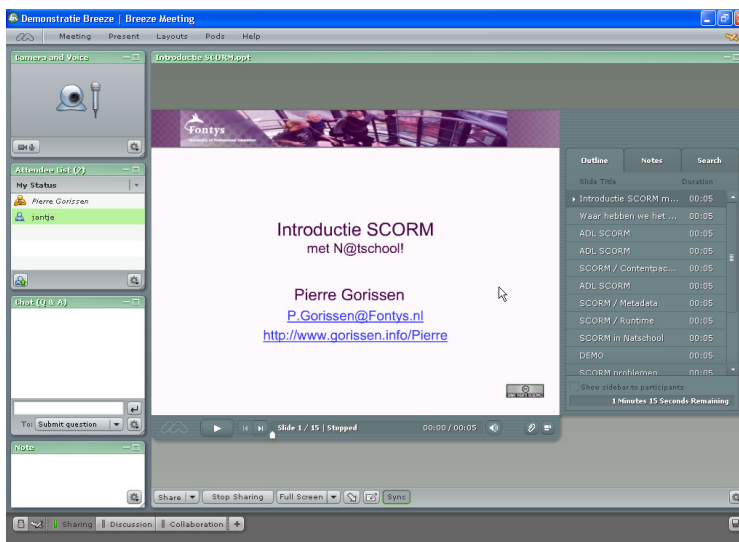


Figure 5 presenter view

During the presentation, the presenter can review her notes, skip over slides while the participants see just the presentation.

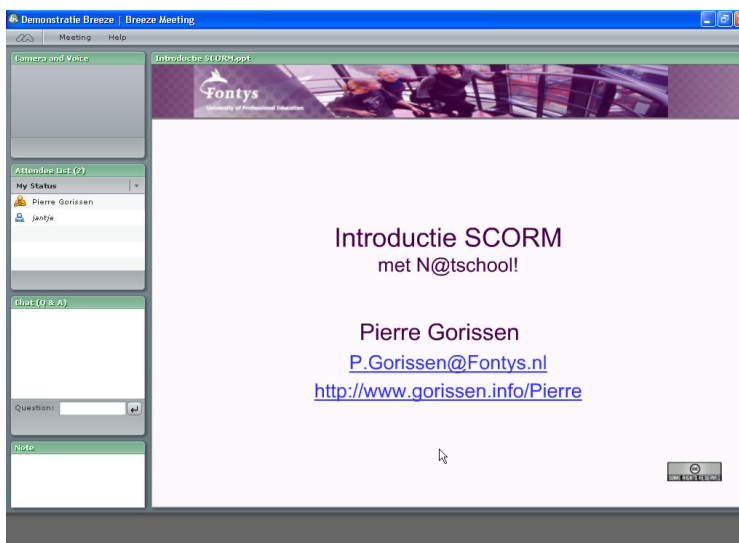


Figure 6 participant view

### Share applications / desktop

Besides support for PowerPoint files, Breeze doesn't have much support for other formats. Of course Macromedias own Flash format is supported, both the regular SWF format and the SVF for video. But that means that if you want to show a video you'll have to convert it first and cannot upload a WMV, MOV or even MP4 file to the server. Same goes for often used formats as Word or Excel files

The way around that for almost anything but video is to share the application that you use to display the document.

You will need a second monitor for that though if you're participating in the meeting and want to be able to see the Breeze window and the shared application at the same time because the shared window has to be unobstructed from view to share.

It works very well, screen resolution is good, mouse movement is direct and give participants about the same impression as being next to the presenters/hosts own screen.

## **Recording meeting**

A meeting can be recorded by the host, the participant will see a notification that the meeting is being recorded. Everything on the screen is recorded: audio, video, chat windows, shared applications. The recording is stored on the server. It isn't a static video and some of the windows in the recording, like the chat windows are scrollable during playback.

The recording is available through a URL which can be shared on a website, send to users by mail etc. Recording quality is very good. Since the recording is being done on the Breeze server, it doesn't slow down the hosts pc during the process of recording.

## **Use Cases**

The Breeze system has been used in a number of different situations during the trial period. Based on that a number of use cases for possible use of the system have been formulated.

## **Online meeting**

Breeze works best when used in working sessions and project team meetings where the participants focus on (the development of) documents. In those cases, video isn't the most important thing, the documents discussed are.

The system was used to support a number of meetings which otherwise would have been supported by telephone conference only. There the difference was enormous. The fact that not all participants during those meetings had a webcam and thus had no video was not perceived as a problem.

## **Recording a presentation/demonstration for later use**

Screencasts are a very efficient way to explain the use of applications or to record a presentation so that it can be viewed by people that weren't able to be present during the live presentation.

Because Breeze can record meetings, it is also possible to simply start a meeting with just one participant, the presenter, and then record a presentation without audience. The URL of the recording can then be posted online and viewed by anyone that has the Flash-player installed.

## **Online support of users**

Support departments for VLE-systems at universities often get calls from staff of students about how to use specific features of the software. Because it is easy to enter a Breeze meeting, it is very simple to setup a meeting room for the support person and then redirect the person on the phone to that room. In that room the support person can then demonstrate the use of the feature and even record the demonstration so that the user can review the steps afterwards if needed.

## **Summary**

Working with Breeze was simply great. It was great because it actually simplified my tasks in a way that wasn't only convenient for me but also for the other participants. It did the things it had to

do, is cross-platform and easy to use even for very novice users. A 10MB Java-download or a Windows XP-only client limits the ease of use and availability of the other systems.

Of course there is also room for improvement. Linking the system to a PBX that enables the combination of audio over IP and participants using a regular phone is one thing. The quality of the audio was usually good enough especially when compared to the long distance alternative we used. Other videoconferencing systems achieve better quality video/audio though. For meetings where it is important to be able to have a very good view of the participants, Breeze Meeting isn't the best system to do the job. But for meetings centered around documents and/or applications this is the best I've seen so far.