

# Riger

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## Groupware Improves Teamwork

Every business person spends a large chunk out of each day in meetings. Unfortunately, much of that time is wasted. According to the authors of *We've Got to Stop Meeting Like This!: A Guide to Successful Meeting Management*, up to 50% of all meeting time is squandered as participants go off on tangents, engage in idle banter, or pay more attention to organization politics than to progress. All told, wasted time in meetings costs American businesses as much as \$60 billion dollars in lost productivity every year.

In contrast, imagine a meeting where everyone "talks" at once and is heard. A meeting where no one dominates the conversation, and where multiple perspectives encourage consensus, more ideas, greater depth, at greater speed.

The combined promise of more concise, productive meetings and improved teamwork is here thanks to new software from Ventana East Corporation of Johnson City, NY. Called GroupSystems<sup>®</sup>, the software offers group problem-solving tools that run on interconnected personal computers. Linked as a team, participants can share information rapidly through electronic dialogues within one meeting room, office to office, building to building, or city to city.

Electronic meetings can decrease the number of meetings needed and reduce the length of each meeting by as much as 80%. Instead of waiting for each person to have a say, every participant can express ideas simultaneously. In addition, everyone has a chance to fully contribute without anyone dominating the floor. Meetings progress more rapidly, with more comprehensive input and ideas.



### How GroupSystems works

In the same room or on the Web, a facilitator poses a series of questions to participants. Almost instantaneously, responses begin appearing on screen. Participants have the opportunity to continue to make new suggestions or reply to one another's responses. After a period of time, the facilitator works with the group to rank the importance of information generated and to develop suggestions for solving particular problems.

The best part of the whole process is that responses can be totally anonymous. People who may feel intimidated in conventional meetings or hesitate to speak up for fear of criticism or that their ideas may seem "off the wall" will usually participate in this format. In addition, an idea can be evaluated based on merit rather than on who might have proposed it.

Following an electronic meeting, participants are usually given a "hard copy" report on the accomplishments of the meeting. This approach is particularly useful for brainstorming, strategic planning sessions, decision making, business plan development and other needs where generating numerous ideas or big-picture solutions are required.

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## **Advantages of Electronic Meetings**

- Simultaneous input (team brainstorming)—Everyone "talks" at once and is "heard." This promotes parallel discussions and generates more ideas in greater depth and speed.
- Controlled setting—The process promotes a greater focus on the meeting. Everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute and no one can dominate.
- Team approach—Multiple perspectives can be explored and consensus is encouraged.
- Automatic documentation—With a complete and accurate record of the entire discussion, there's no need for distracting note taking.
- Anonymity—Ideas can be evaluated on merit, not source. In addition, it encourages greater creative idea generation.

For more information or a demonstration of software applications, contact Ventana East Corporation at Oakdale 700 Building, 700 Harry L. Drive, Johnson City, NY 13790; phone: 607-729-8925; fax: 607-729-8181; e-mail: [pstrozyk@aol.com](mailto:pstrozyk@aol.com); or on the Internet at [www.ventana.com](http://www.ventana.com).

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