



Case Study

How CNIB Continued Critical Programs, Peer Support, & Education during COVID-19

Established in 1918 to assist soldiers who had been blinded in World War I, the CNIB Foundation (Canadian National Institute for the Blind) has served as an invaluable resource for Canadians with sight loss for more than 100 years. The non-profit's programs are focused on supporting their participants in all aspects of life, including programs dedicated to using technology, navigating safely with a guide dog, returning to school and the workforce, and connecting with other people with sight loss for social and emotional support.

With a central mission to "change what it is to be blind today" and help those within the blind or partially sighted community "live the lives they choose", the CNIB Foundation plays a vital role in giving Canadians impacted by sight loss the tools and information they need to live life to the fullest.

Video communication for all

CNIB needs to leverage the most effective and accessible technology to deliver their services effectively to as many people as possible. However, its legacy systems lacked a simplicity required for its core audiences.

"We were three years into a five-year modernization strategy for our systems, which was centered around delivery of services," said Frank Lombardo, vice president of property and technology at CNIB. "Our challenge is that we're delivering services to the blind or partially sighted, so we need our technology to be as accessible as possible. Internally, we are a Microsoft Office 365 shop, and we're very adept at using that technology, but externally, it would be too complicated for us to have a rapid session on that platform with someone who is in need or wants to learn something."

"The interface had to be very simple and easy to use," Lombardo added. "Every command within the application also had to be accessible via keyboard, and it needed to work with the various screen readers out



Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Founded: 1918

Location: Toronto, Ontario

Industry: Nonprofit

Challenges: Implementing intuitive, accessible video solution for people who are blind and partially sighted, continuing to deliver services during COVID-19

Solutions: Zoom Meetings, Zoom Video Webinars

Benefits: Frictionless user experience for people who are blind and partially sighted, ability to continue delivering services virtually during COVID-19, expanded reach

"Organizations like ours have been forced to look at modernizing the way we deliver programs and to consider alternate ways of delivering those programs, and organizations like Zoom make that possible. Our transition to Zoom is proof that these organizations can push forward and find success in these difficult times."

- Frank Lombardo
Vice President of Property & Technology, CNIB

there to ensure everyone could use it effectively.”

As COVID-19 disrupted the entire world, the CNIB Foundation needed to find a way to continue providing its critically important services to people with sight loss, despite social distancing mandates and travel restrictions.

“When COVID hit, we had to make an existential decision to either wait the pandemic out and stop delivering our services, or to push forward and find our way through this mess,” Lombardo said. “We quickly realized that the people who rely on us would need us more than ever due to things like isolation, so we decided to push through and started looking at how we could digitalize our program offerings and continue to provide these services.”

Continuing services during COVID-19

The organization evaluated a number of video solutions with the accessibility of the platform being the determining factor.

“As a technologist and someone who has been in tech for most of my life, I know about all the other video conferencing solutions,” Lombardo said. “And for someone like me, it was complicated to get them on my phone, and they were difficult to set up. Zoom doesn’t have those hang-ups, and we identified the platform as being the most accessible and intuitive platform on the market.”

CNIB was empowered to continue delivering its services virtually during COVID-19 with Zoom, ensuring its clients could access what can be life-changing programs.

“We do a lot of education around how to use assistive technology when you’re blind or partially sighted, and that was very doable through Zoom with the screen sharing feature and the ability to initiate desktop control,” Lombardo said. “We also started hosting our

peer support groups virtually, and it worked out great.

The ability for our clients to have a sense of continuity by meeting virtually was critical. And with Zoom’s extensive online resources, all I have to do is tell people what words to plug in on Google when they need support.”

“We’ve also been able to have an impact on our guide dog program through Zoom,” Lombardo added. “Although we can’t visit our clients, trainers and puppy raisers in person to review their dogs’ behavior and offer corrections, we can go ‘on a walk’ with them via Zoom and our guide dog volunteers can observe the dog’s behavior and offer solutions to correct it.”

Leveraging Zoom Video Webinars for online events and programs also significantly expanded the CNIB Foundation’s reach, allowing them to connect with more clients from across the country. With the ability to reach so many members of Canada’s sight loss community in a virtual space, CNIB has helped form a stronger community bond for the people who need it most.

“People with sight loss often have difficulty travelling, and with Zoom, they are no longer limited by geography; they can attend our events no matter where they are,” Lombardo said. “We can gather and see so many people in one virtual space, and that really gives attendees that feeling of being part of something bigger.”

CNIB also used Zoom Video Webinars to connect with its community members by using the solution to host special programs, allowing the organization to communicate with large groups of people when they needed it most.

“We play a part in the creation and distribution of Canada’s digital accessible library, and normally, people either download the books or get CDs with the books on them because we do have an older demographic across the country,” Lombardo said. “When COVID first hit, our CD distribution was halted, so we started hosting webinars called the ‘Read to Me’ program where we would read books and stories to our attendees.”



The power of virtual community

With Zoom, CNIB could deliver its services during a critical time while expanding their reach and improving their ability to engage with the Canadians with sight loss. As the organization expands its use of the platform, Zoom will continue to serve as an eager and enthusiastic partner to help CNIB achieve its goal of helping Canadians with sight loss live the lives they choose.

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Zoom helps businesses and organizations bring their teams together in a frictionless cloud environment to get more done. Our easy, reliable, video- first unified communications platform for video, voice, content sharing, and chat runs across mobile devices, desktops, telephones, and room systems. Founded in 2011, Zoom is a publicly traded company on Nasdaq (ticker: ZM) and headquartered in San Jose, California.

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