

Telework: A Look at the Evolving Marketplace of Remote Communications and Collaboration Technologies

THE CASE FOR VIDEO

Video conferencing has been around for decades, but it is enjoying an uptick in popularity as technology improvements and business conditions make it ripe for deployment. The many varieties of video conferencing technology available today present not only efficient means of remote communications, but also creative opportunities for collaboration.

Enterprise investment in video conferencing has yet to soar, but more companies are deploying systems as their operations become global and they seek to save on rising travel costs. Analysts see other good reasons for companies to take a serious look at video conferencing technology: It can facilitate an increasingly mobile workforce, and it can help ensure business continuity in the face of natural catastrophes, man-made disasters or health scares.

What's more, video conferencing equipment has come a long way in recent years, enabling an experience that is much different from the clunky, frustration-inducing video experience of the past. Companies not only get better quality and performance, but they get it for lower prices. The market is maturing, and 2010 has already seen two major acquisitions, which are expected to raise the technology's profile. Logitech's purchase of LifeSize Communications and Cisco Systems' purchase of Tandberg have pulled video technologies into the hub of the overall business communications market.

Despite the business case that can be made, figuring out which video technologies make the most sense in a particular context and how they can be used most effectively is not necessarily easy. Lack of interoperability among products from different vendors has hampered widespread deployment, and the vendors are just beginning to seriously tackle the problem. Further, technologies and user expectations are

From the editors of

FierceCIO
THE EXECUTIVE IT MANAGEMENT BRIEFING

“In the old days, you would go down to the conference room and there would be a speaker phone in the middle of the table. Today, people tend to stay at their desks for audio calls. I think video will follow the same path.”

- ANDREW DAVIS, SENIOR PARTNER
AT WAINHOUSE RESEARCH

evolving so quickly that it is hard to predict which systems will be the most appealing.

For the past couple decades, about 90 percent of the video conferencing market consisted of room-based systems that came with a video component, which typically sat at one end of a conference table, says Andrew Davis, senior partner at Wainhouse Research. The market is gradually evolving away from this model in two directions: A larger percentage of video conferencing will be done by individuals using desktop-based systems, while group conferencing will migrate upward toward telepresence technologies.

“I think the room systems we see today are going to be more along the order of 10 percent of the market, as opposed to 90 percent,” Davis says. “In the old days, you would go down to the conference room and there would be a speaker phone in the middle of the table. Today, people tend to stay at their desks for audio calls. I think video will follow the same path.”

There are video conferencing systems designed for every point in the market today, from PC-based desktop systems all the way up to custom-built, studio-like telepresence systems. In the middle are executive desktop systems and videophones. Increasingly, enterprise communications vendors, including Cisco, Avaya, IBM and Microsoft, are selling desktop-based video technologies in conjunction with their unified communications or conferencing offerings.

While desktop-based systems are expected to gain momentum, analysts also see a growing market for the pricey telepresence systems, which take video conferencing to the next level. By designing and implementing video technologies in particular ways, telepresence vendors try to make conference participants feel like they are together in one room. Telepresence, which often comes with managed services, tends to be easier to use than traditional video conferencing systems. However, there is no universally agreed upon definition for it.

“There’s great confusion around this in the marketplace,” says Conferencing Wainhouse’s Davis. “We’re very clear, though: Telepresence is an experience based on video conferencing that creates the illusion that the remote participants are in the room with you.”

In Davis' view, the remote video in a telepresence system has to be life-sized, and both the audio and video have to be of high quality. While most people associate telepresence with large, multi-screen systems, there are some multi-screen systems that do not create the illusion of "being there," and there are some single-screen products that do, he says.

Environmentalists are touting telepresence as a way to enhance the appeal of remote conferencing to reduce a corporation's travel and carbon footprint. While ecological benefits may not present the most compelling business case for telepresence today, they can be touted as a bonus. If a company with \$1 billion in annual revenue were to deploy four telepresence rooms, it could reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by the same amount as removing 434 vehicles from the roads, according to a recent study sponsored by the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) and AT&T.

Telepresence deployments are taking place in all industries, but what is required to make the business case varies, the CDP found. In the financial and business services sector, where travel costs are high and employee time is extremely valuable, it can take just 25 employees using telepresence to justify the investment. In contrast, in the consumer products industry, where there is less need to travel and costs per employee are lower, it might take an office of 500 employees to make a telepresence investment worthwhile.



Experience HD Video with LifeSize Communications

LifeSize believes the true value of HD video conferencing solutions is realized with video broadly accessible and offers 3 solutions priced to reach this vision:



LifeSize Room 220

Our most powerful end point powering the Telepresence experience with up to 8 sites with an embedded MCU.



LifeSize Express 220

Our most popular system – Full HD, features dual display capabilities and priced for widespread deployment.



LifeSize Passport

Telepresence in the palm of your hand in this point-to-point system. Bring the boardroom to the office.



LGExec, powered by LifeSize

Desktop solution combining a sleek 24" LG display with LifeSize HD video conferencing technology.

Interested in learning more about LifeSize HD videoconferencing solutions? Request a demo today!