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The Role of the User Experience in Video Conferencing



A Frost & Sullivan
Business Brief

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THE ROLE OF THE USER EXPERIENCE IN VIDEO CONFERENCING

“Video is the new voice.” So goes the thinking in many organizations today, where employees are increasingly working remotely from home offices, satellite offices, client sites and the road. But even as companies grow increasingly virtual—and increasingly global—they continue to see budget cuts that limit travel and demand a clear return on investment from any new technology deployment. Enter video conferencing, which boosts productivity, cuts costs, decreases cycle times, speeds decision-making, and ultimately impacts the bottom line.

While video conferencing can offer significant, measurable benefits to companies and their employees, all video conferencing solutions are not alike. To ensure adoption, a successful deployment and implementation—and to maximize return on investment (ROI)—managers must choose their video conferencing tools wisely, matching the right technology to the right use cases. This is critical to ensure that employees actually benefit from the technology, and to keep management costs and headaches as low as possible.

Companies should look for video systems that are easy to use, that integrate well with existing communications platforms, and that require little-to-no management support, especially for day-to-day use. This is especially important as company’s look to make video communications as comfortable as placing an audio call or sending an e-mail or text.

This paper will highlight the key elements companies should look for in a video conferencing system, and offer best-practices recommendations for identifying and working with a video solutions provider.

EASE OF USE

The most important consideration for any video conferencing deployment is how easy the technology is to use. Whether implementing hardware or software-based applications and services, any solution offering must be naturally intuitive. This has always been important to technology (even technology that has nothing to do with IT), but it is increasingly critical in a world in which consumer devices and apps succeed because of simple, elegant design. There’s a reason Apple’s products fly off the shelves: they are so easy to use that new owners can navigate new systems and features without having to consult lengthy training manuals or FAQs. More and more, employees expect the same level of simplicity in the tools they use at work—and organizations should make sure that any new technology they deploy fits the bill.

This is especially true for video conferencing, which is saddled with a reputation for being difficult, cumbersome and ineffective. To overcome that false perception, new video technologies must sport interfaces that work at the touch of a button—every time and for every user. Launching a video conference should literally be as easy as placing a phone call or sending a text message. Finding and using features within the conferencing application should not require time or extra thought. And devices and applications should be designed in a way that makes people feel in command of the technology, and therefore want to use them even more.

SIMPLE MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

Good end-user design should be coupled with good management and administrator design. The easier it is for employees to launch a video conference on their own, without the need for intense training or IT support, the better the solution is for IT. This, in turn, allows support teams to spend their limited time on more strategic or complex ICT initiatives.

At the same time, even the simplest video conferencing tools must give IT robust management and administrative controls. This is one of the things that distinguish business-grade technology from consumer services like Skype. Centralized control, streamlined provisioning, bandwidth management, security and compliance capabilities, and advanced reporting tools will ensure that IT can effectively deliver a high-quality service to their internal users.

RELIABLE PERFORMANCE ON ANY NETWORK, AT ANY SCALE

Today's employee is extremely mobile and is as likely to be working from a home office, commuter train or airport lounge as from a cubicle, conference room or office. To fully participate in video collaboration with colleagues, partners and customers, these employees need access to the technology from a variety of devices—including notebook PCs, smart phones and tablets—running on a variety of networks with varying bandwidth availability.

In some cases, users will be willing and able to attend a video conference from a standard conference room or telepresence environment, one designed for maximum performance over a bullet-proof corporate network. But as companies look to deliver video capabilities to all their employees, they must ensure the endpoints map to their users' devices, and that the solutions work on public Internets and sketchy private LANs. Furthermore, they must be able to handle the increased network traffic (once companies run more than a handful of video calls at any given time, traffic *will* increase) and deliver the best possible performance tailored to the given environment. So, for example, an employee using a room-based HD system has a different experience than someone using an iPad app, but both get the best possible experience for their device and connectivity.

INTEGRATION WITH OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

Unified communications (UC) is the new normal for most businesses and organizations. The goal is to integrate a suite of communications capabilities—including voice, e-mail, instant messaging and presence; audio, Web and video conferencing; and social media capabilities—and give users a single interface from which to access them. Advanced UC deployments are even starting to integrate communications tools into other business and productivity applications. For example, an employee can launch, say, a video conference from within another application without having to leave the environment he is working in. That not only increases usage and productivity, but it also improves business processes.

A good video conferencing system should enable more than just face-to-face communications, including:

- *Multi-point conferences that incorporate mixed-device users in a single meeting;*
- *Record-and-playback capabilities;*
- *Allow audio and video callers into the same conferencing session;*
- *Native integration with desktop UC tools;*
- *Web collaboration and content sharing;*
- *Integrated directory and presence awareness;*
- *High-definition video and audio quality; and*
- *Firewall traversal without sacrificing security.*

Companies should look for a video conferencing solution that integrates easily with common communications platforms from leading vendors, including IBM, Siemens and Microsoft. SIP-based systems are easier to integrate than others, but deep partner relationships are equally important.

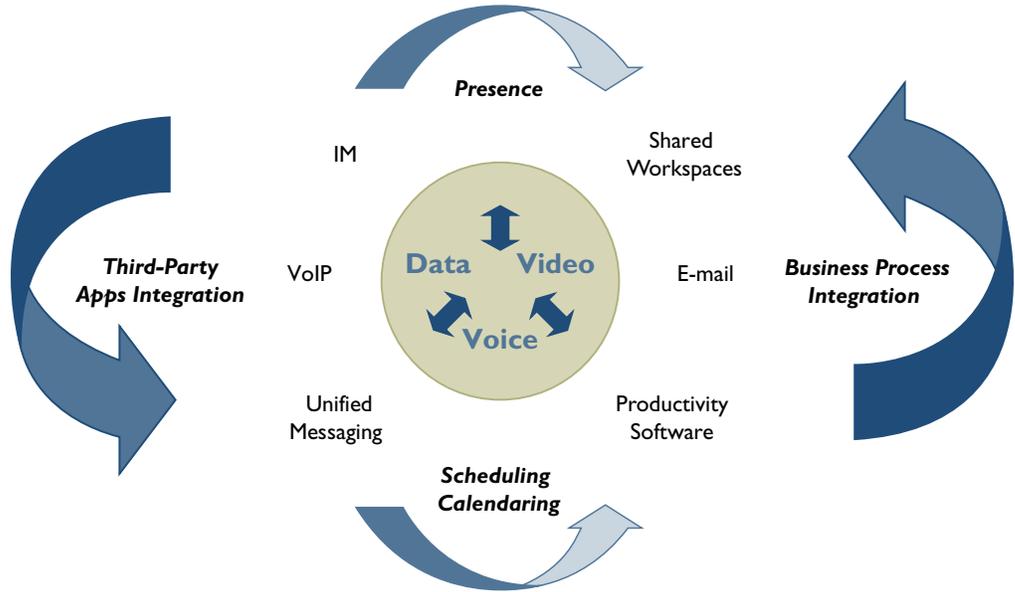


Figure 1: Unified Communications in the Enterprise

Just as important as integration is interoperability: the ability to connect video conferencing systems from different vendors that may have been built on proprietary standards and/or to connect different types of endpoints to one another, so that someone using PC-based video conferencing software from vendor A can meet with someone else in a conference-room environment hosted by vendor B.

CONCLUSION

While video conferencing offers many benefits to organizations and their employees, none of these will materialize if users resist adoption of the technology. The best way to ensure the investments being made are worthwhile is by deploying a conferencing solution that is easy to use, manage and administer, while delivering reliable performance at any scale and on any network. Leading-edge vendors are looking to the consumer market to develop user interfaces that are intuitive and well-designed, and which make using the new technology not just effective, but also fun. Ultimately, that will drive adoption and use, which will deliver the promised benefits to IT and the organization at large, boosting productivity and dramatically improving ROI.

Polycom® Solutions Breakout

As part of its new user experience, Polycom has designed its products to include more than 20 innovations. From a new user-focused interface—built from the ground up to reflect the way people want to work today—to the one-click simplicity of functions like speed dial and calendared meetings, the Polycom UX™ aims to deliver an intuitive and productive video collaboration solution. Polycom looked at the vast array of devices running on its RealPresence® Platform and designed the Polycom UX to enable a visually consistent experience across any endpoint. With features like smart menus that remember the last-used contact source, elegant and intuitive navigation, and a dramatically simplified remote control, the technology lets anyone comfortably engage with the technology with little training or experience. From the moment a customer takes a user assessment, to product delivery and implementation, to the tips, demos and tools provided as part of its adoption services program, Polycom has designed its technology to provide a truly effortless enterprise-class video experience. For more information, please visit <http://www.polycom.co.uk/products-services/polycom-experience.html>.

Knowing What to Use When

- Telepresence is an immersive technology that requires close attention to architecture and design to deliver the impression that users really are in the same room. These systems are designed for multi-purpose scenarios, such as delivering training or educational classes, lengthy conferencing sessions or strategic meetings with high-value clients.
- High-definition, room-based systems are the new standard for traditional video conferencing in which participants gather in a conference room and connect to other participants. They are good for group meetings and strategic sessions, especially if they require a sense of community or involve the dissemination of information rather than in-depth collaboration.
- Executive desktop systems are all-in-one devices that sit on an actual desktop, often replacing a PC monitor. Because they deliver HD-quality images and sound at a relatively low price compared to larger room-based solutions, these are good for small-group meetings among managers and CXOs.
- PC-based applications and services are perfect for one-on-one meetings and are cost-effective enough to be delivered to all employees who need them, including remote-office and home-based workers. The ability to integrate with larger, room-based systems is critical for ensuring everyone stays in the loop.
- Mobile apps and services are increasingly important in today's mobile workplace. They are a requirement for sales and support personnel, as well as knowledge workers and executives who travel but still need to be able to participate in video calls.

Tips for Working Well with Your Provider

It's not enough to look for a video conferencing solution that addresses usability and adoption issues. To ensure a successful implementation, IT managers must choose a technology partner that can and will help, not just with assessment, deployment, and ongoing support, but also in their ability to develop strategies for improving business processes. A good video conferencing provider should:

- Have deep experience with a variety of video conferencing endpoints and infrastructure. Video conferencing has changed much in the past several years, but you should still look for a time-tested vendor that offers a full array of options, ranging from telepresence systems to mobile and PC-based applications.
- Develop tight partnerships with other communications vendors. To enable unified communications and integration among various video conferencing systems, look for a vendor that works closely with leading UC companies, including Microsoft, Siemens and IBM, and which supports standards-based technology.
- Understand business, not just video technology. Companies that want to use video conferencing to improve business processes as well as face-to-face communications should work with a partner that knows how various vertical businesses work, along with best practices for key job roles and lines of business.

Silicon Valley

331 E. Evelyn Ave. Suite 100
Mountain View, CA 94041
Tel 650.475.4500
Fax 650.475.1570

San Antonio

7550 West Interstate 10, Suite 400,
San Antonio, Texas 78229-5616
Tel 210.348.1000
Fax 210.348.1003

London

4, Grosvenor Gardens,
London SW1W 0DH, UK
Tel 44(0)20 7730 3438
Fax 44(0)20 7730 3343

877.GoFrost • myfrost@frost.com
<http://www.frost.com>

ABOUT POLYCOM

Polycom is the global leader in open standards-based unified communications (UC) solutions for voice and video collaboration, trusted by more than 415,000 customers around the world. Polycom solutions are powered by the Polycom® RealPresence® Platform, comprehensive software infrastructure and rich APIs that interoperate with the broadest set of communication, business, mobile and cloud applications and devices to deliver secure face-to-face video collaboration in any environment. Polycom and its ecosystem of over 7,000 partners provide truly unified communications solutions that deliver the best user experience, highest multi-vendor interoperability, and lowest TCO. Visit www.polycom.co.uk or connect with us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#) to learn how we're pushing the greatness of human collaboration forward.

ABOUT FROST & SULLIVAN

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Frost & Sullivan
331 E. Evelyn Ave. Suite 100
Mountain View, CA 94041

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