



There's More to Video than Meets the Eye:

Making the Cultural Shift to Visual Collaboration

Executive Summary

It's 6 a.m. in New York, and a teleworker is rattling off figures from a laptop that's poised on the kitchen counter near last night's dirty dishes. Her colleagues in London and Singapore don't know that she is still wearing her pajamas or that she just walked across the room to pour a cup of coffee.

In fact, this faceless form of communication has become a tool for balancing personal lives with a 24-hour business cycle. But ready or not, video conferencing is on its way. Global enterprises are deploying it as a way to reduce travel, improve teamwork, decrease their carbon footprint, increase face-to-face time with customers, streamline talent recruitment, and facilitate on-demand meetings. By 2015, Gartner estimates over 200 million workers globally will run corporate-supplied video conferencing from their desktops.¹ And a recent Frost & Sullivan study shows that performance increases as organizations employ progressively more advanced IP-enabled UC&C tools.²

With all of these accolades for video conferencing, you may be surprised that even the most technically astute worker can be hesitant to use it. Even if you've deployed cutting-edge, easy-to-use technology, you won't achieve full ROI until you address the concerns employees have with being on camera. This white paper explores the cultural impact of video conferencing in the workplace and provides best practices to overcome employee resistance and make visual collaboration a standard operating procedure.

Not Your Father's Workplace

The business environment depicted in the international hit TV show *Mad Men* has all but disappeared. Most of today's employees have never experienced the 9-to-5, office-centric, face-to-face business culture of the men and women of Sterling Cooper, a fictional 1960s New York advertising agency. The *Mad Men* pitch new ad campaigns to clients in person. The art director meets with the creative team in person. Even the most banal of office exchanges is done in person. There are only two excuses for being out of the office: off-site meetings with clients or being sick with the flu.

If Sterling Cooper existed in 2010, its workers would likely be scattered around the world. Perhaps the creative team would outsource their graphics to a design firm in Bangalore, and the ace copywriter would live in Seattle. That newest client could be London-based, and the photographer might prefer working out of a SoHo loft.

The colleagues you work with could be in the next cubicle or on the next continent. They may be working in an office, but they may just as likely be working at home or answering a call from the 50-yard line of a soccer tournament. In fact, you may be the one answering the call on the soccer field. Where your work has changed since the days of *Mad Men*, what hasn't changed is your need to collaborate. You still need to share ideas, build relationships, and foster a sense of teamwork. In essence, you need to work as though you are meeting face-to-face even though you may be many time zones apart.

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¹ Hackler, Kathie; Bob Hafner; Bern Elliot; et al. *Gartner Predicts 2010: Video, Cloud and UC Services Loom Large in Enterprise Communications*. Gartner, December 3, 2009.

² *Meetings Around the World II: Charting the Course of Advanced Collaboration*. Frost & Sullivan, June 2009.

The Shifting Priorities of Business: Video Conferencing Can Help

The location of workers isn't the only thing that's changed about business. Global competition has increased the need for enhanced, real-time collaboration regardless of location. It's also caused companies to make substantial cost reductions, implement sustainable business initiatives, and efficiently recruit and retain the very best talent.

Enhancing Enterprise Collaboration

Visually enabling business processes helps improve productivity in all sectors of the enterprise. The greatest gains appear among large, diverse groups, such as those involved in R&D, sales, and marketing.³ R&D managers in organizations using advanced collaboration tools report faster development times and improved chances of success with a lower overall cost of development. Video conferencing helps marketing managers acquire new customers. Sales teams report that video offers greater sales successes while helping reduce sales costs.⁴

Corporate Travel Policies

More than ever, businesses have become sharply focused on reducing cost. Limiting travel helps meet this objective. Many of them are turning to conferencing services to meet with their partners, customers and colleagues in real-time, instead of spending precious funds for airfare, hotel rooms, meals and taxis.

Global events can also have an impact on corporate travel policies. Events such as the recent global outbreak of swine flu or some cases of civil unrest in some regions can cause some companies to reconsider their travel plans.

Creating a Sustainable Business Model

One of the most effective ways for an organization to meet its social and environmental responsibilities is to reduce carbon emissions from travel and commuting. Video conferencing can be of great benefit in reducing and controlling the growth of emissions from aviation. When brought to the desktop, it can empower telecommuting, which not only cuts vehicle emissions but allows companies to reduce office space and resulting energy consumption.

Competing Globally

In 2010, Sterling Cooper's competition wouldn't be limited to other Manhattan advertising agencies. Competition would come from anywhere, be it Omaha, Oslo, or Osaka. Video conferencing gives companies the agility they need to respond to critical issues quickly and effectively. Workers can establish relationships in much the way they would during face-to-face meetings, where facial expressions, posture, and other non-verbal cues help them understand the nuances of a conversation. By eliminating travel, they free up time for greater productivity at work and a better balance between work and personal pursuits.

Attracting Talent

To compete globally, you need access to the best talent available no matter where he or she is located. With video conferencing, multiple interviewers can meet qualified candidates without the costs and downtime associated with business travel. It also enables you to expand your talent search without leaving the office. You can see why leading companies have begun using video conferencing for remote interviews, to help improve retention rates and reduce the cost-per-hire, as well as the length of their talent search.

However, Video Conferencing is No Slam Dunk

Based on personal video usage figures and the growth of video conferencing in many businesses, one might assume that employees would easily adapt to workplace video conferencing. However, many employees resist adding video conferencing to their work lives.

Appearance

As a workforce, we've become accustomed to flexible work hours that accommodate the 24-hour business cycle. You may be in New York, but your customers, partners, vendors, and team members could be anywhere in the world. Imagine your 6 a.m. call to a London supplier. Are you business-ready in a suit and tie? Or are you still in your pajamas, waiting until you finish the call before taking a shower?

In a changed business world where bunny slippers are questionable business attire, it's understandable that most employees fear what the video camera will reveal about their lives and appearance.

A workforce used to multitasking even on personal time, closely identifies with an admission made by a senior Verizon Marketing Director. "When we go out to dinner, my wife always drives so I can take advantage of the time it takes to get there to consult my BlackBerry."

³ Meetings Around the World II: Charting the Course of Advanced Collaboration. Frost & Sullivan, June 2009.

⁴ Ibid.



Fast forward to your 9 p.m. call with a customer in Shanghai. You may not be back in your pajamas yet, but perhaps your cat or a sleepy child has taken up residence on your lap. In a changed business world where bunny slippers are questionable business attire, it's understandable that most employees fear what the video camera will reveal about their lives and appearance.

Work/Life Balance

Appearance isn't the only worry your workforce may harbor. Employees have adjusted their work habits to manage hectic business schedules. For example, rather than wait at the office for an expected e-mail, they may go home and answer the e-mail after reading their children a bedtime story. It's likely they've answered business calls while cooking or standing in line at the grocery store. Teleworkers, who are accustomed to flexible schedules filled with both work and personal life may feel increased pressure to be "on," for an extended period of time, well past what is defined as normal business hours.

Multitasking

Employees can fear the repercussions video conferencing could have on their tight schedules. The anonymity of the conference call allows employees to manage big workloads by checking e-mail, text messaging, and even eating lunch during meetings. A workforce used to multitasking even on personal time, closely identifies with an admission made by a senior Verizon Marketing Director. "When we go out to dinner, my wife always drives so I can take advantage of the time it takes to get there to consult my BlackBerry."

The Human Touch

Workers can harbor concerns that video conferencing will usurp one of the most essential aspects of business—the human interaction. Salespeople wonder if they can still close a sales deal without a handshake and a game of golf. Production staff wonder if distance will hamper the back-and-forth exchange of drawings and ideas. And executive board members raise concerns about building consensus without face-to-face contact.

Overcoming Technophobia

Despite all the technological innovations your employees have learned to master in recent years, some of the resistance to video conferencing is sure to grow from uneasiness with new technology. Each may assume that everyone else in the workplace is highly savvy about new technology. Many employees still recall the complications video conferencing presented a few years ago, but they are unlikely to admit they need training. They'll choose to ignore the brand-new video conferencing tools instead.

Bridging the Gap: Helping Employees Adapt to Video Collaboration

There are ways to help employees become comfortable with using video conferencing and experience how it can improve their relationships with co-workers and customers.

State your video conferencing goals

Employees don't want to sabotage your video conferencing initiatives any more than you do, but they do need to understand what your goals are so they don't inadvertently make choices to stymie them. A first step is to clearly define what you expect from video conferencing, such as reduced travel expense, increased productivity, enhanced team building, and a better balance between work and personal lives. Another step to blending video collaboration into your corporate culture is to get your top executives involved in promoting its use.

Define when (and when not) to use video conferencing

Since repeated usage will overcome employee doubts and embed video conferencing in company practices, look for opportunities where it makes sense for employees to use it. Since business-critical areas that involve large groups working toward a common goal tend to get the most benefit from video conferencing, encourage use from naturally collaborative functions, such as product development, sales, marketing, and project kick-off meetings. It's also important to define when face-to-face meetings are a more appropriate means of communication. For example, you may instruct your salespeople to establish initial contact with a prospect via video conferencing, and reserve in-person meetings for hands-on product demonstrations.

Knowing that a lifted eyebrow and nod of the head is a standard greeting in the Philippines that you can return in kind may go a long ways toward establishing rapport in the right setting.

Use informal lunch-and-learns, newsletters, podcasts, and yes, video conferences to demonstrate how video conferencing can solve work-related challenges and create richer work lives.



Provide culture-specific support

Video conferencing enables large numbers of employees to interact with people from around the globe in ways that simulate in-person encounters. But many employees will not be well versed in cultural differences that could significantly impact the success of a video conference. Knowing that a lifted eyebrow and nod of the head is a standard greeting in the Philippines that you can return in kind may go a long ways toward establishing rapport in the right setting. Likewise, respecting the meeting protocol in France by sending materials in advance, speaking clearly, and sticking to the agenda will gain confidence and respect from a Paris participant.

Provide etiquette policies to reduce anxiety

Etiquette rules like those adopted by many academic institutions help reduce employee anxiety by laying out ground rules on everything from how to improve eye contact to the best clothing colors for the camera. The more diverse the uses of video conferencing, the more the rules of etiquette will differ from one meeting to the next. The meeting leader should set the agenda and provide etiquette guidelines based on the country, customs, and time zones of the participants. Employees working from home will want to know if you expect business attire for late night video meetings with Hong Kong. Since their home offices will be captured on camera, they'll benefit from such practical suggestions for setting up a quiet work area with furniture that encourages sitting up straight and looking directly at the camera.

You should be able to convince workers that a ban on multitasking during video conferences is in the best interests of the individual and the company. At the very least, ask employees to limit their movements. Although one person getting up for a cup of coffee may be acceptable, if everyone is getting in and out of their seats, checking and sending e-mail, the efficiency that's possible from a well-run video conference will disappear, and meeting participants will find it hard to concentrate.

Make video conferencing easy to use

Part of making video conferencing easy for employees to use is to make the technology as error-proof as possible. To make sure the video conferencing solution works every time, invest in technology and services from leading companies. Find out where employees are having difficulties by continually asking for feedback regarding their experiences.

Sell the personal benefits of video conferencing

Guidelines and training sessions may not be enough to overcome employee skepticism and garner full-scale employee support for video conferencing. For that, you have to sell employees on the personal benefits of video conferencing as well. Use informal lunch-and-learns, newsletters, podcasts, and yes, video conferences to demonstrate how video conferencing can solve work-related challenges and create richer work lives. Loyalty to video conferencing will grow among salespeople when they see the potential for staying in close contact with clients through weekly video conferences. Video conferencing can end the isolation of remote workers and strengthen their connection to a team.

Video is Worth a Thousand Words (and a Balanced Life)

Video conferencing is more than the next best thing to being there—in many situations it is indeed better than being there. It allows geographically-dispersed individuals—partners, customers, employees, suppliers and prospective employees—to collaborate as if they were sitting together in the same room. It saves all parties the expense and lost productivity of traveling and, in turn, puts breathing room into employee schedules.

Video conferencing will become increasingly commonplace. Employees will need time and experience to fully exploit its potential. But by considering the attitudes and strengths of all workers, from the tech-savvy generation who grew up in front of computer screens to seasoned employees with years of experience at conducting live meetings, companies can speed the acceptance of video conferencing and reap substantial ROI. Those companies that establish policies, offer training, and learn from employee experiences will gain their corporate objectives and boost their competitive advantage over those that don't.

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