5 WAYS TO WIN

HOW MID-SIZE COMPANIES USE COLLABORATION SYSTEMS AND MOBILE DEVICES TO ENGAGE EMPLOYEES AND SIMPLIFY GROUP WORK

There's a reason why the YouTube video "A Video Conference Call in Real Life" has become an instant classic to enterprise IT: Like all good satire, it nails an everyday situation that makes people uncomfortable—in this case, it's a meeting fraught with common video conferencing challenges.

It's hard not to identify with the discomfort business professionals experience in "A Video Conference Call" when, for example, one attendee using hotel Wi-Fi looks like he's in a poorly dubbed kung fu flick because bandwidth issues throw his audio and video out of sync before eventually freezing him altogether. Or when a meeting attendee apologizes for being late because she had to download a new version of the platform, the organizer responds: "You should plan extra time for the updates. There's pretty much one every time."

If you're responsible for specifying and supporting your organization's collaboration systems, this white paper shows how you can avoid these and other problems to maximize employee productivity and reduce your staff's support workload. You'll learn why:

- Smartphones and tablets are increasingly the video collaboration endpoint of choice for many businesspeople.
- Cloud-based virtual meeting rooms are a proven, cost-effective way to provide mobile workers and others with a convenient way to collaborate.
- Wireless presentation systems eliminate not only the hydra of cables in meeting rooms, but also the productivity-busting confusion of figuring out how to connect.
- Management systems are key for maximizing the return on collaboration investments, including the increasingly popular huddle rooms.
- Analytics enable organizations to identify everything from trends in how their employees collaborate to malfunctioning devices.

1: USE VIRTUAL MEETING ROOMS TO ENABLE ANY-DEVICE, ANY-PLATFORM, ANY-SIZE COLLABORATION

The best meeting rooms are always there and yet never there—spaces available 24/7/365 to facilitate even impromptu collaboration, but whose systems are so intuitive that they disappear into the background so participants can focus on the meeting instead of the technology.

Virtual meeting rooms (VMRs) enable that ideal by providing a space in the cloud where employees and guests such as business partners can collaborate with video, audio, documents and other tools using any device and any brand of collaboration platform. For example, some participants could be in a telepresence suite, while others are using tablets and laptops in hotel rooms and still others are on desktop video conferencing endpoints in their cubicles. This flexibility maximizes productivity—including for enterprise IT staff—because no one has to waste time figuring out how to connect.

Another major benefit is scalability. Because their infrastructure is hosted, VMRs enable organizations to accommodate even an unusually large number of participants cost-effectively, unlike premise-based collaboration systems where expensive excess capacity lies fallow. VMRs' on-demand flexibility also gives employees the freedom to engage in impromptu meetings when hot ideas strike, versus on-premise systems whose limited capacity limits spontaneity.

Also, VMRs can include 24/7 technical support. Look for this feature when evaluating options because it frees your staff to focus on tasks that add to the bottom line.
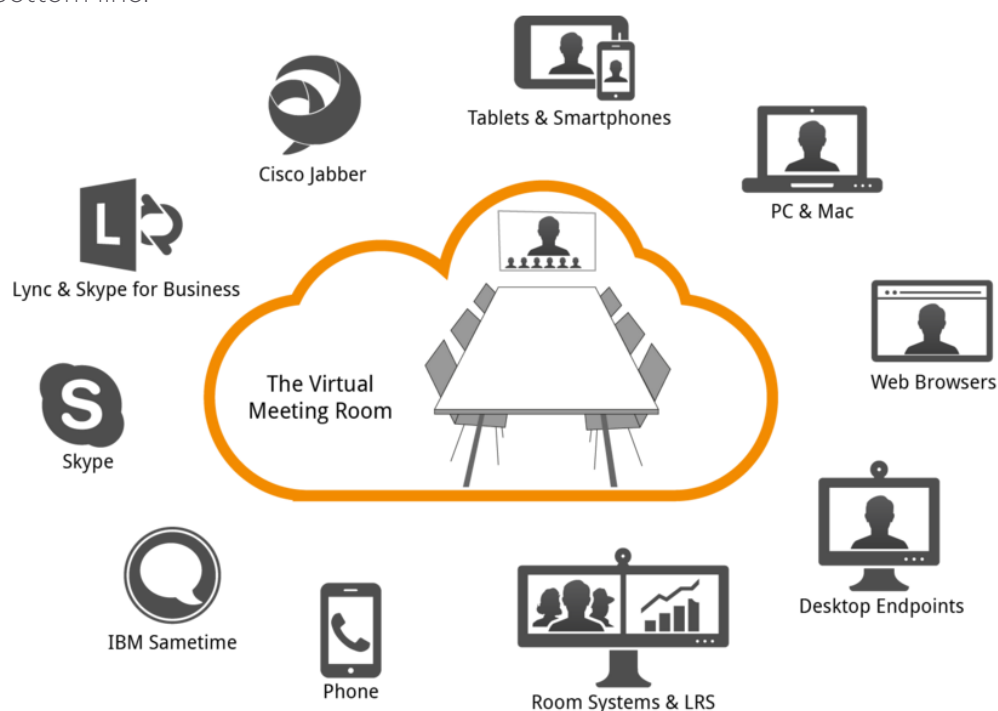
Source: Courtesy of Pexip

MORE THAN TWO YEARS AGO, 30 TO 50% OF MEETING PARTICIPANTS WERE ALREADY USING MOBILE DEVICES.

2: MAKE IT FAST AND EASY FOR MOBILE WORKERS TO PARTICIPATE

Business-class tablets and smartphones such as the iPad have processors, memory, and other features that make these devices as capable as many desktops and laptops. The powerful performance capabilities, along with portability, are among the reasons why some organizations are phasing out PCs not just for their road warriors, but for their office-bound employees, too. This trend is why more than two years ago, some video collaboration providers already said that 30 to 50 percent of meeting participants were using mobile devices.

Therefore, it's important to choose room-based collaboration systems that make it easy for employees and guests to connect via their smartphones and tablets—regardless of whether they're in that room or participating from the road. For example, if most participants will be employees, consider solutions that include apps for Android and iOS. These ensure an optimal user experience by providing an intuitive interface so users can focus on the discussion rather than trying to figure out how to dial in or share content. Ideally, the app should have the same user interface as the one in the room so employees don't have to learn a separate set of controls as they switch between meeting environments.

If some participants will be guests connecting from another site, a VMR is one way to bridge them into a meeting. And regardless of whether they're off-site or in the room, be aware that asking them to download an app—so they can share content, for example—might not be an option if their company's IT policy forbids it.

Finally, make sure all of these capabilities can be extended to huddle rooms too, which are one of the fastest-growing types of collaboration spaces. Huddle rooms are ideal for impromptu meetings, the kind where participants probably have only their tablets or smartphones at hand.

3: CUT THE CORD TO ENABLE FLEXIBILITY AND EASE OF USE

The best collaboration systems let participants focus on the meeting rather than the technology that facilitates it. One way is by making it easy to connect wirelessly, which:

- Eliminates the confusing, often unsightly array of connectors at conference tables.
- Ends guesswork about which physical interfaces—DVI? Thunderbolt? HDMI? USB? Something else?—will be in the laptops, tablets and other devices that participants bring to meetings, both now and in the future.
- Enables greater room configurability because cables are no longer a connectivity requirement. Eliminating cables also gets rid of the eyesores and trip hazards they create.

Most meeting spaces already have Wi-Fi coverage, which is why many organizations use it to connect participants' devices to the room's collaboration system. But that approach does create some issues for IT. Here are a few caveats to consider with Wi-Fi systems:

- Make sure the access points and other Wi-Fi infrastructure have enough capacity to support the maximum number of participants and bandwidth-intensive content such as 1080p or 4K video. If they don't, your support team will be run ragged fielding questions about why participants can't connect, why the video keeps tiling, and more.

- If some participants are guests, consider creating a virtual LAN dedicated to meetings. That partitioning eliminates the risk of a presentation system becoming a back door into the rest of your organization's IT network.

- Choose SSIDs that make it easy for participants to identify which access point to use. For example, if the conference room is nicknamed "Magnolia," make that the SSID. But avoid using ones that help hackers in the parking lot identify where the most sensitive meetings are held, such as "Executive-Boardroom."

4: USE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS TO MAXIMIZE ROOM UTILIZATION AND EQUIPMENT UPTIME

Huddle rooms are increasingly popular meeting spaces, but most organizations will continue to have multiple large, traditional collaboration rooms. Management systems ensure that all of those meeting spaces are used efficiently and effectively, thus maximizing the return on those investments.

For starters, management systems provide employees with an easy way to see which rooms are available, as well as each one's equipment and participant capacity. Management systems also can be integrated with Outlook, Google Calendar, and other enterprise IT platforms so it's easy for employees to reserve rooms and invite participants. These systems also provide insightful data analytics that enable organizations to track usage. For example, companies can employ room usage data to determine whether they need to add rooms or whether their existing facilities are underutilized. The latter could be a sign that more employees need to be educated about the benefits of modern collaboration systems.

Organizations also can use management systems to reduce energy usage, including for LEED certification. In the summer, for example, the system could steer employees toward rooms with the least sun exposure, which require less air conditioning.

The best management systems handle not only the rooms, but also the equipment in each one. For example, the systems provide support staff with visibility into the status of projectors, touch panels, and other gear. Those insights help with remote troubleshooting and identifying maintenance needs to avoid failures that would disrupt meetings and undermine productivity.

5: IDENTIFY GAPS BETWEEN WHAT EMPLOYEES WANT AND WHAT COLLABORATION SYSTEMS PROVIDE

Work styles and technologies evolve, and collaboration spaces must evolve with them. If the collaboration tools don't keep up, productivity suffers. For example, many employees—particularly younger ones—prefer to collaborate via video. Yet according to one study, only about 30 percent of conference rooms provide that option. Forcing those employees to make do with audio conferencing not only undermines their productivity, but it may also frustrate them, stifle their creativity, and give them one more reason to consider leaving the company.

Security can suffer, too. For example, if the collaboration system doesn't make it easy for employees to use their preferred devices and content sources, some will look for alternatives that could create back doors for hackers. When employees started bringing their personal iPads to work, many IT managers initially resisted supporting the devices, even as collaboration tools. But decision-makers relented because they realized that employees were going to use the devices anyway, and by finding a way to accommodate iPads, the companies would actually reduce security risks.

Mobile devices and laptops also highlight how technological evolution can be an opportunity to wring the most out of a collaboration budget. For example, in one survey, 42 percent of respondents said their laptop's built-in camera is good enough for video conferencing in a huddle room. As that percentage increases, it could indicate that spending on huddle room webcams could be decreased, freeing up budget for other collaboration technologies. Another example of a savings opportunity is putting control apps on tablets and smartphones to reduce or eliminate the need for touch panels.

But how can organizations identify the risks or shortcomings along with the opportunities? The aforementioned room management systems are one source of insights into how employees are—and aren't—using those spaces. Another is to work with an AV integrator that can provide advice about trends in workstyles and technologies based on its vendor relationships and experience with dozens of other customers.

DON'T GO IT ALONE

For medium-size organizations, collaboration spaces introduce both opportunities and challenges. The spaces offer opportunities to reduce travel spending, maximize employee productivity, and work more effectively and efficiently with business partners and suppliers. But achieving those and other benefits is challenging because it requires navigating a bewildering array of collaboration products and room options. The vetting process diverts IT resources from other organizational goals, and if the wrong choices are made, the fallout includes unnecessarily high support costs, underutilized facilities, and reduced productivity.

When exploring mobile collaboration solution options, savvy IT pros choose to partner with an AV integrator that can analyze their organization's unique needs, recommend the best ways to meet those, and suggest ways to future-proof those investments.

To learn more about solutions for mobile device use into your meeting rooms, contact AVI Systems at 952-949-3700.

ON-PREMISE? CLOUD? HYBRID?

EBOOK

If You're Considering Mobile Collaboration Solutions, You Have Options. Explore the Pros & Cons.

▶ GET THE EBOOK

ABOUT AVI SYSTEMS

Founded in 1974, AVI Systems is currently the nation's fourth-largest AV solutions provider, and the only 100% employee-owned one.

Our success owes in great part to having the most highly credentialed, capable and motivated workforce in the AV industry. The strength of our process, the unparalleled support we offer, and our conviction that technology should liberate, not impede, are also foundational to our success.

By working together, we remove communication barriers instead of creating them, freeing our customers to seize opportunity, and imagine new possibilities. This is our definition of Communication Liberation, and it's reflected in the incredible diversity of AV solutions we provide for business, commercial, educational and government clients across America.

SOURCES

[i] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMOOG7rWTPg

[ii] http://www.telepresenceoptions.com/2013/08/seizing_the_mobile_video_confe/

[iii] http://www.infocomm.org/cps/rde/xchg/infocomm/hs.xsl/39732.htm/