

Video Conferencing Explained

With the help of Catherine Holt of Imago we take a look at Video Conferencing - the joys, the practicalities and making sure you get the best experience



What Is Videoconferencing?

The long and short of it is that Videoconferencing is exactly what it sounds like. It is a way of having meetings with people who are miles away without leaving your office. The only requirement is that you both have videoconferencing systems and a suitable network. The result is a huge reduction in travel costs as well as increased productivity and efficiency. It is easy to see why it is growing in popularity. In the past people had concerns about the quality of the meeting: can it replace meeting in person? No, it can't, but it is the next best thing. Is it difficult to operate? No and there is training available, and of course cost is a worry. Most of these have now been overcome, with the introduction of HD, improved bandwidths and the systems are now a fraction of the cost..

This article will look into the videoconferencing options that are now available. What will also be considered is the importance of how your VC system will be installed. An unplanned install or one inappropriate to its settings can impact upon the quality the user experiences.

Videoconferencing and the Future?

The Videoconferencing market is predicted to show strong growth in the next few years. In the current climate businesses are looking to cut costs associated with travel and some are implementing bans on unnecessary travel. VC stands out as a clear solution and it has a quick, full, ROI period. Other concerns which face us all are those of being green. This is no longer something we fix by recycling at home but has become a real business



agenda. Videoconferencing helps companies reduce their carbon footprint. These applications are perfect for Videoconferencing and along with the improvements in quality mean its usage in general is on the up.

Your Videoconferencing Choices:

A Videoconferencing system is made up of a number of critical components, all of which are important to the overall experience. All aspects are considered when looking at the different types of VC set up available.

Large Meetings

If you are looking to install VC in a large room, perhaps one of a few multiple sites, then you need to be looking at the higher end solutions. If you travelled to a large meeting where several people were going to be present you would expect to be able to see all the content, hear the people speaking and join in.

Videoconferencing should replicate this experience. Solutions such as the HDX8000 series from Polycom allow High Definition visuals, voice and content sharing and can support multiple users in one conference. So the issues of image and sound quality are now easily overcome. Polycom also offer something called 'Lost Packet Recovery' which prevents packets of information being lost in the call. This then stops the blocky pixelated image which can be associated with videoconferencing. The next thing to consider, along with the codec is the screen. In a large room the best option may be multiple screens so different sites can be displayed on the screens along with content. It may also be the case that with large meetings two or three large screens would allow all participants to have a good view. This is where the installation issues arise. Do you need to move the system into another room? Do you have walls that can take screens?



Do you need the screens to be height adjustable? If you need a portable solution then it would be best to choose a trolley to hold them, this doesn't mean you need a trolley per screen, companies like Unicol can supply twin or triple screen trolleys. These are also the best option if you need height as they are easily adjustable. If you plan on setting the room up as a permanent VC room then wall mounting might be best, this also gives you plenty of options on where to put the screens. Remember to get the strength of the walls checked! Or of course you could use a mixture of both.

Internal Room or Smaller Meetings

At Imago we have, along with other rooms, a smaller VC room which is used for meetings between our offices and some customer meetings as well. This is ideal for those smaller meetings or if you just don't have much room. But this doesn't mean you have to have a lower level of quality. Again there are systems such as the Polycom HDX7000 series which still offers HD voice, video and content but at a lower cost. In this environment it would be more likely that you would use a single screen option, a large screen if needed. With most VC codes it is possible to show content, such as charts and figures, and participants on one screen. In terms of an install some of the options here are wall mounting, again the more permanent and space saving option, or a trolley allowing the VC equipment to be easily transferred to a different room. Again you could use both options, the key is just making sure it is installed so people can see, hear and easily participate.



Quick Note...

It is worth noting that the options for smaller rooms or lower budgets shouldn't be seen as inferior as these smaller scale set ups are just as high quality and offer highly positive user experiences. Rather this should be seen as VC now being able to answer different user requirements.

Is it available for everyone?

One of the biggest issues that is raised with videoconferencing is cost. A few years ago to set up a multiple site VC system would have cost many thousands of pounds and brought with it the problems of having new ISDN lines installed. Now it is possible to get really high quality VC without breaking the bank and it can take place over the internet so no expensive IT installations are required. It is also now possible to consider lease financing VC systems, with things like Imago's Video Rentals scheme. This option allows you to see a return on your investment from as soon as the first month. As with most things when the technology is established the prices come down and lower cost options are available

Videoconferencing but on your Desktop...?

Most of us have used webcams to chat with friends or family who are miles away or in other countries. Desktop video conferencing is basically the same thing but the quality of image and sound is far superior making it suitable for one to one business meetings. It is not always practical to have a whole room set up for what is going to be a quick discussion, or perhaps you just need to have internal meetings between offices in different countries. Products like the Polycom



HDX4000 bring VC to you and so bring meetings that could involve a day out of the office to you as well. Another snazzy little option; the video phone, instant, affordable one to one video calls. It really does seem that videoconferencing is becoming available in all shapes and sizes including these instant and relatively portable solutions.

So, where does that leave us?

Videoconferencing can now meet just about every requirement asked of it. Now, more than ever, it is possible to rectify the old issues videoconferencing faced with the technology mentioned, such as improved codecs and correctly installed equipment. Any disappointing VC experiences are a thing of the past. So, now the myths of expense and complexity are being dispelled you can VC and enjoy!

