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Video collaboration: Lights, camera, user adoption?

Businesses have been interested in video communication for decades as a means to reduce travel expenses, increase efficiency, and spur collaboration and innovation. More recently, the imperative for organizations to become more "green" enterprises has increased video's allure. Still, video deployment has been slow, impeded by cost considerations, technology limitations and lack of a compelling business case for adoption.

Today, those barriers are dissolving. The price points for video technology are dropping rapidly. CIOs are increasingly engaged in driving the business forward with process and technology innovations. Slimly staffed businesses are anxious to improve productivity. The drumbeat for enterprises to reduce their carbon footprints grows louder. And then there is this fact: 55 percent of communication is visual.[1] With voice-only calls, people are denied the important messages and inferences drawn from body language, eye contact and perhaps even a smile.

True video collaboration may, in fact, finally be here. However, for any organization, successful deployment and an effective ROI will ultimately depend on employees' ability and willingness to use it. In this point of view, **Peter Finney**, a member of the Avaya Strategic Communications Consulting Practice, discusses how businesses can improve the prospects for wide, even enthusiastic, user adoption of video collaboration tools.

Peter, why is video collaboration gaining traction more quickly in the marketplace?

Along with the organizational issues around cost containment, efficiency and the environment, technology advances are a key factor. In the past, video deployments were typically large, room-based systems or expensive desktop end points, served by dedicated lines.

[1] "Email Statistics Report, 2010-2014," The Radicati Group, Inc., http://www.radicati.com/?p=5290

Today, as we see with consumer services, such as Skype, Google Video Chat and others, video conversations are happening over the Internet using webcams and PCs. Video-enabled smartphones have created another potential catalyst for video adoption. Also, a new generation of desktop video devices and tablets is emerging, featuring touch screens, high-definition video cameras, Web browsing, e-mail, instant messaging and more. Finally, network providers in many countries are accelerating deployment of the broadband and wireless capacity needed to carry video to the end user at a price point for businesses and consumers that could make video adoption over these mediums attractive.

Along with technology, another important consideration is the readiness of people to use video — in other words, how to drive cultural change. A group that I believe will help accelerate video adoption is Generation Y, or the Millennials. They have grown up with technology. They are constantly online, are comfortable multitasking among activities and technologies, and see video as simply another way to communicate. At the same time, there are other — and it's fair to say, generally older — people who may require some persuading to embrace video.

What actions should be at the top of the list for companies considering video collaboration?

A key first step is to establish a business case for the initiative. Determine how video aligns with the organization's vision, strategy and objectives. Then, establish criteria for measuring return on the investment.

ROI comprises two components. One is business relevance — how the organization will benefit. The drivers may be cost savings, productivity improvements, better customer relations, a greener organization or a combination of factors. In some cases, the business benefits of video are tied to the particular vertical industry.

A good example of this is health care. Enabling a consulting surgeon to communicate with patient caregivers via video rather than driving two hours to another hospital provides obvious benefits, including more time to operate. Or, in financial services, kiosks can be set up in bank branches, where customers can talk to loan officers in a centralized service center. This supports better resource allocation, while giving the loan officer the benefits of visual communication — the other 55 percent.

The second component of ROI — and the key to achieving your projected benefits — is personal relevance for the user. Or, put another way, "What's in it for me?" Answering this question persuasively is fundamental to user adoption, to converting people from detractors to advocates who embrace change.

For some people, the case can be fairly easy to articulate. If someone is working 80 hours a week, and 30 of those are spent traveling, the ability to eliminate part or all of that time on the road can provide obvious benefits in better work-life balance, less stress and better health, not to mention more time for productive work.

What are some leading practices that can help companies promote and increase user adoption of new video collaboration applications?

An important first step is to identify the real-life scenarios of potential users and determine how video is relevant to their role and daily work. How do people communicate and collaborate, and what is the associated culture today? Next, it is important to make users aware of how video can improve communications for them within their departments and between cross-functional teams.

The IT department will need to be organized and tasked to support the video deployment and operation across IT areas, including desktops, networks and operations. Also ensure that the IT help desk team is fully trained on the video solution and ready to support users.

A critical aspect of designing the system is to embed cultural change. One way to do that is to reduce the options and choices given to users. For instance, if a meeting involves people in two video-enabled locations, human resource policy can mandate that video be used rather than having people travel. Denying travel requests will put teeth into the policy.

Also, keep change simple. The IT organization needs to clearly understand how to deploy and manage the solution.

Begin system deployment with a small user trial or pilot prior to mass rollout. Before the trial, communicate what is happening to users so they are not surprised by the new features available to them. This also will help them feel more involved in the process and potentially embrace the change better.

Trial users should be selected from those who will benefit most from video and collaborate regularly across different departments, business units and teams. This trial user base will attract co-workers to the benefits of video by word of mouth.

Gain feedback from the trial users and use it to build a list of frequently asked questions for initial user self-support. Adapt the rollout strategy and training as required based on feedback. You may also want to adopt a "train the trainer" approach to user training—one user trains five others, those five train five and so on. Remember that focusing on relevant benefits to the end user, as well as the business, will help drive user adoption.

A well-thought-out communications plan is also key to driving user adoption. Examples of this include news alerts via e-mail and the Intranet, simple and quick reference cards, tips of the day, flash demos, and video clips.

After deployment, monitor video utilization to determine if employees are adopting the new methods of communication and collaboration and not reverting to previous methods and habits. Adapt training as required for those who are slow to adopt video.

Finally, develop a road map to evolve the video deployment and integrate the benefits of video into existing or new business processes, procedures, workflows and applications.

Prepare your people for the spotlight

As business imperatives and technology advances converge to help jump-start video collaboration, a key to successful deployment is wide user adoption. Educating users regarding the potential for this new way of communicating to make their jobs—and lives—easier and more productive can be a vital element in supporting and realizing the business case for video tools.

About the author

Peter Finney is a senior consultant in the Strategic Communications Consulting Practice of Avaya, Inc. He helps organizations align customer interaction strategies with business objectives and facilitate the positioning of communication technologies to achieve strategic goals.

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