

VIDEO – ALL THE RAGE

by Ray Nelson

Everyone has heard the mantra of converged voice, video and data, but until recently most people limited their attention to the voice and data portion of the triumvirate. With more and more people working from remote locations, the high cost of travel, internationalization of business and the need to partner; a growing number of organizations are relying on video to add a personal touch to their communications strategy.



When deploying video, it is important to consider how to integrate video with other forms of communication. Most organizations have deployed VOIP communications systems and presence systems.

Many of these platforms can easily be integrated to support video communications through add-on products that work in parallel. Organizations need to determine how robust they want that to be. Do they just want to deploy simple cameras that can be bought at the local electronics store or are they looking at deploying the more robust platforms and cameras such as high definition video and telepresence systems? Do they want to roll them out to regional offices, home based users and/or partner organizations? Do they want to communicate to legacy systems using ISDN or adopt the new IP-based communications protocols? Do they require the ability to broadcast to multiple locations or endpoints? All of these questions should be answered before a comprehensive platform can be designed and implemented.

High definition (HD) video and telepresence offer some of the most interesting options. Many organizations are replacing their standard video conferencing with high definition video for several reasons.

- As the name states, the clarity of the picture on HD video conferencing is far superior to the older, standard definition (SD) signals. HD systems typically use a 1024p or 720p video stream, which allows life-size and life-like video to appear on today's modern displays. Many platforms are backwards compatible and can communicate to older SD systems.
- Most modern systems use IP communications instead of older ISDN protocols for transmission. Although IP is the direction most organizations are going, there is the need to make sure your network, firewalls and other devices are ready to support this.

Like HD video, telepresence offers benefits that make it an important subject to consider. In its simplest form, telepresence allows the use of video conferencing and other devices to make remote individuals appear as if they were in the room with you. In a typical telepresence system, remote people appear

life-size, there is more than a single screen and there are multiple camera angles. Combined, these techniques make it feel as if the remote individuals are just a couple of feet away from you. Almost all of the video conferencing vendors have a telepresence platform, but these features do not come without a high price tag.

Beyond the camera and the display there are a lot of other add-ons that you need to consider when implementing a video conferencing solution. How many people do you want to include on a single video conference? If the number goes beyond just a few, you need to consider a multipoint control unit. These units are designed to bridge many different users together. There is also the ability to record and stream content when a video conference has ended, which is important for some organizations. Larger organizations need to integrate their video conference with scheduling and management platforms. Another feature is the ability to share desktops while conducting video conferences. Vendors have add-ons that allow the user to show both the video and desktop through the same devices. Once these questions have been answered about all the features that you want, you must assess your network to determine whether it is ready to support these data streams. A typical video stream can consume anywhere from 300-600Kbps. High definition video can require even more bandwidth. Even with QOS enabled, this could overwhelm many companies' internet connections as well as inter-office circuits. A careful QOS strategy and enforcement policy needs to be established to allow for video.

Although there are a lot of things to consider before deploying video conferencing, the benefits are tremendous. Reduced travel costs, employee satisfaction, better communications and reduced operating expenses are just a few of the many benefits of video conferencing. With today's high-speed internet connections, it is now possible for people thousands of miles away to appear as if they were just sitting next to you.

Effective communication isn't a luxury. It's a necessity for any business focused on its bottom line and future competitiveness.

