

Ehrmann: In the Picture Around the World

LifeSize video solutions save on travel costs while considerably increasing efficiency

Organization

Ehrmann AG, Oberschönegg, Germany

When Alois Ehrmann set up his “one-man dairy” in 1920, he had big things in mind. Yet not even in his wildest dreams could he have imagined that his Allgäu business would one day become a global player. Today, the Ehrmann Group has production sites in Germany, the USA, Russia and the Czech Republic, sales offices in England, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands and the People’s Republic of China, and generates an annual turnover of around 680 million euros.



Challenge

Ehrmann depends on uniform processes at an international level and ensures that the strict Group quality assurance guidelines are adhered to, even in the production sites around the world. The dairy also uses a central SAP system so that purchasing and financial accounting have to work closely together in the different locations. International coordination that runs smoothly is therefore a strategic factor for the Allgäu-based company. “E-mail and telephone are and will remain important tools for everyday work. But immediately after the first trials with video conferencing systems we knew that it could enhance our options considerably,” reports Hubert Heiß, global IT manager at Ehrmann.

The company was set to make huge savings through not having to travel. Site visits to the USA and Russia were particularly expensive and time-consuming. “The traffic situation around our site near Moscow is very stressful, which means that our employees often waste hours on the road,” continues Heiß. In addition to the purely financial aspect, an “HR factor” plays an important role. “The introduction of a video conferencing solution means that more employees than ever are able to communicate with their colleagues in faraway locations.”

During the expansion and renovation works at the headquarters, Ehrmann wanted to implement video conferencing facilities in the most important conference rooms, in addition to new media technology. A company specializing in video conferencing technology presented the LifeSize solution and installed a trial system. Heiß and his team carefully assessed this system and those from two other manufacturers.

Ehrmann’s Key Requirements:

Easy to use

High image quality

Reduction in costs



CHALLENGE

Ehrmann was looking for a solution that made coordination with international locations easier on the one hand and brought about savings in costs and time through the reduction of business trips on the other.



SOLUTION

Ehrmann attaches particular importance to ease of use and good image quality. This is why it opted for two of the LifeSize Room 220™ solutions. At three other locations, in the USA, Russia and Freiberg, Saxony, the LifeSize® Express 220™ solution is in use.



RESULT

Thanks to its ease of use, the staff are enjoying using the LifeSize systems regularly. In addition to the cut in travel costs, whole departments can now coordinate with each other quickly and over long distances.



Solution

Ehrmann was actively looking for a Room system. "In this way we could bring together more people more efficiently in one go," explains Heiß. For the IT manager, the solution had to be easy to use and have a good image quality, preferably in HD. In both of these areas, the solutions from LifeSize were streets ahead of the competitor products, also in terms of the bandwidths required. In addition to image quality, the sound of the LifeSize solution had to be optimum. "Lip-synchronized sound is extremely important for video conferences. If the sound and image do not match, then the conference is quickly over," says Heiß. This is where the systems from the other providers fell into difficulties.



At the moment, the company uses two of the IP-based LifeSize Room 220™ solutions with 10 cameras in two rooms and one Networker for telephone and ISDN integration. What's more, people who simply want to take part in the conference over the telephone can link into it at any time. At three other locations, in the USA, Russia and Freiberg, Saxony, an IP-based LifeSize® Express 220™ solution with 10 cameras is in use. Ehrmann opted for the premium HD camera models from LifeSize because they are not affected by the lighting conditions in the modern, light-filled conference rooms. This was something that the other cameras could not cope with.



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– HUBERT HEISS, GLOBAL IT MANAGER AT EHRMANN



Results

These days, the staff at Ehrmann enjoy using the LifeSize systems regularly. "While in the past only individual people were able to communicate with one contact person, now whole departments can coordinate with each other quickly and over long distances," explains Heiß. "This of course means considerable advantages for the company over and above the savings in travel costs alone."

In particular, the simple operation proved useful when setting up the technology. "All we need to do is press a button and the conference is up and running," says Heiß. Presentations can also be imported from a laptop and made visible to all participants in the best quality. Thanks to the high-resolution cameras, product management can now demonstrate a new product to international colleagues better than ever before. At Ehrmann it is also possible to show documents and objects on the table to the conference partners using a ceiling camera.



Heiß estimates that the LifeSize system will pay for itself in about a year. Further development of the video conferencing solution also plays a big role in the company's ambitious plans for growth in the future. Convinced by the advantages, the IT experts are already planning to kit out other locations with the Room solutions. Desktop solutions are also an option where possible. For example, the sales office in Spain could in practice be integrated into the video communication world at Ehrmann. Heiß is in any case enthusiastic about the easy implementation of the individual updates: "Since the LifeSize systems are easily scalable and complement each other we have no need to fear this step."



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