



Four Trends Driving Cloud Video Conferencing in 2014

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As enterprise technology moves increasingly to the cloud, the proliferation of connected devices, mobility solutions, and infrastructure-as-a-service offerings has made video conferencing more useful than ever before to businesses of any size.

This paper looks at the four leading areas in which video conferencing is likely to grow in today's business:

- IT-as-a-Service
- Connected Devices
- Supply Chain Dynamics (and the "First Mover Advantage")
- WebRTC

Preparing companies for the wide-reaching benefits of video has become much easier in this new technological environment. In the cloud, IT infrastructure and security concerns are virtually a thing of the past. Boosting collaboration and productivity with minimal total cost of ownership, video conferencing in the cloud is quickly emerging as the preferred communications medium for business.

Let's look first at the business drivers for video conferencing today.

Mobility Grows, and IT Moves to the Cloud

A survey by IDG Connect recently concluded that the global mobile workforce will reach 1.3 billion by 2015—more than one-third of the world's total workers. The IDG survey also shows that 40 percent of workers use their own smartphones for work; 18 percent use their own tablet devices for work once a day.

At the same time, the business world is undeniably moving to software- and infrastructure-as-a-service (as opposed to packaged products). According to the analyst firm Gartner®, 80 percent of organizations intend to use cloud services in some form within 12 months.

These changes in business have created an increased demand for visual connection in an increasingly mobile workforce. Companies need to maintain the productivity of in-person meetings without restricting their employees—all while avoiding complicated, expensive solutions.

Wainhouse Research has concluded that nearly 75 percent of organizations intend to introduce mobile video conferencing. Of that group, 61 percent want to integrate video conferencing with a unified communication platform.

With a visual conversation, Wainhouse contends, response rates, sales, and customer loyalty rise, and remote workers feel more connected and productive.

How are these trends in business video conferencing being put to practical use?

IT-as-a-Service: The Cloud and Video

Putting video's IT infrastructure in the cloud is changing everything for business. The security issues that have prevented many companies from making full use of the technology are no longer relevant.

Even a few months ago, video had no real outside lines—use of the technology among organizations was greatly restricted. After all, would you allow any but the most trusted outside contractors inside the corporate firewall to make full use of video? Most corporate IT security officers would refuse.

With the cloud, IT is delivered and maintained as a service, without the need for expensive and complicated on-premise server technology. Equally important, software-as-a-service video conferencing delivery has made this technology just as easy to use. No one has to worry about firewall issues any longer, making it simple to gain the collaborative and operational benefits of video across and among organizations. Users no longer need to know where infrastructure leaves off and the video endpoint begins.



Connected Devices

According to a new report from IHS Technology, the worldwide market for connected devices—products that allow users to access the Internet—may surpass 6 billion units this year. Worldwide production of connected equipment is estimated to jump 6 percent from 2013 numbers, which IHS claims is the largest increase for the market in four years.



As demand grows, connected devices and the services behind them are becoming seamless, which is as it should be. After all, without the service, the connected device is not particularly useful. Combined, they bring more value to each other. The device and the network are becoming linked to the point of transparency—and intuitively obvious in their usability.

For business, that means that everyone in your mobile workforce—and your supply chain—can get a top quality, high definition video conferencing experience on any connected device without complicated setup. Collaboration and file sharing happen using less bandwidth than it takes to download an MP3, almost as simply as pushing a button.

As connected devices continue to grow in popularity, that kind of visual access will become an expected way of doing business.

Supply Chain Dynamics and the “First Mover Advantage”

The real value of video becomes apparent when companies begin to talk across and among organizations.

Most companies have a circle of important customers, suppliers, fabricators, and vendors with whom they have to maintain close contact. Video conferencing enables businesses to keep that contact going without having to spend time traveling to and from outside locations. The result is better supply chain management with more time left over for important business-building activities.

As technology moves to the cloud, customers, vendors, and everyone else in the supply chain can have equal access to video conferencing capabilities, regardless of their size. Technology used to be the domain of the “Last Mover Advantage,” in which the later organizations adopted technology, the less expensive it became and the more existing users they could connect with.

In the cloud, that concept has been turned on its ear. Now, the earliest adopters of the technology are often the most important link in the supply chain because they can enable video conferencing with every other organization with a minimal investment of time, money, and infrastructure. This “First Mover Advantage” is becoming essential for the best results in supply chain dynamics.



WebRTC

WebRTC (Web Real-Time Communication) enables browser-to-browser applications for voice calling, video chat, and file sharing without using plug-ins. This extremely lightweight application also allows browser-based application users to talk to users of room-based video conferencing systems.

For now available primarily in the Google Chrome™ and Mozilla Firefox® browsers, WebRTC still lacks a full-featured mobile component. In time, it will allow anyone with a smart device to have video conferencing capability, whether or not his or her device has a video conferencing application.

WebRTC technology won't replace existing video conferencing products. It has some fundamental limitations: lack of an address book or the capability of communicating with multiple participants. Streaming and recording conferences for later viewing also is not yet possible.

It will, however, complement existing technologies—and WebRTC also clearly competes effectively with web conferencing systems, which offer considerably lower quality video capabilities. For most companies, WebRTC can be an easy and secure means of connecting external users to video conferences. Rather than downloading a proprietary system that may not allow intercommunication among users, WebRTC makes video conference connection essentially as easy as pushing a button on a browser.

So, while WebRTC may be more restrictive than full-featured video conferencing applications, it will transform business communications for companies just starting out on the road to video for collaboration.

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Conclusion

The cloud is democratizing the use of video conferencing. Instead of being a tool affordable only to multinational businesses, video conferencing is now easily within the reach of even small and medium-sized companies.

Because of advances in Infrastructure-as-a-Service and Software-as-a-Service, ownership costs for video conferencing are being driven down, security concerns are greatly reduced, and new opportunities are being uncovered for improved efficiency in nearly every part of a business's operations.

This is particularly important to note in light of the growing number of mobile workers and the commensurate increase in connected devices used by this segment of the workforce. The cost to adopt video conferencing is going down and the benefit of being an early adopter is going up, so video conferencing is becoming more valuable. That value continues to drive demand and innovation, with solutions emerging to put video within the reach of anyone with a smart device—even when that device may not include a dedicated video option.

Video conferencing advances are poised to profoundly transform the way companies do business. If your company is to be among the market leaders of tomorrow, it's important to take control of video technology today.

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