Video Conferencing vs. Web Conferencing

A comprehensive guide

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To understand the true difference between video conferencing and web conferencing, we need to set the stage by defining the basics. A meeting is more than a chance to get a free lunch and stare out the window.

In the same way that technology has enabled a more efficient way to share the written word, it has also brought forth a number of solutions for interactive, synchronous collaboration. If an in-person meeting is not possible, due to time, budget or travel constraints, solutions such as web conferencing and video conferencing provide viable alternatives. Let's examine the similarities and differences between the two.

WHAT IS A MEETING?

meet·ing

/ˈmētiNG/

Noun

1. the act of coming together
2. an assembly or conference of persons for a specific purpose

Synonyms

assembly - gathering - session - rally

Throughout your career, you have likely attended countless meetings for a variety of topics: brainstorms, evaluations, training sessions, project planning and staff meetings, just to name a few. Meetings are truly a staple in the business world. But you may find yourself wondering, "What is the point of gathering a team together in a room for these activities? Why meet face-to-face to share ideas, instead of via email or instant messaging?"

The answer is simple. Even though technology enables collaboration through the written word (such as emails, IMs and texts), there is something intangible about the type of collaboration that happens when a group of people come together in-person to accomplish a common goal. It is this kind of meeting that allows you to gauge the acceptance of the project by your employees using visual and verbal cues. When you leave a meeting, you not only know what you need to achieve next, but you also have a greater understanding of whether the goals will be met.

WHY VIDEO?

Video conferencing builds relationships irrespective of distance. In business, it is especially important to foster strong, connected relationships with colleagues, customers and vendors, and that type of engagement can only be achieved through genuine, true-to-life interpersonal communication. The only possible way to recreate this kind of interaction over considerable distance is through the use of high definition video conferencing.

In 1967, UCLA professors Albert Mehrabian and Susan R. Ferris conducted a series of experiments to describe how the mind determines meaning. The result of these studies led to a formula which concluded that the interpretation of a message is 7 percent verbal, 38 percent vocal and 55 percent visual. The conclusion was that 93 percent of communication is "non-verbal" in nature. The implications on business communications are clear. In order to be in total control of shaping your message and effectively communicating it to constituents, HD video collaboration is the natural choice. After all, can your company really afford to leave 93 percent of its message to chance?

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Web conferencing does not promote engaging interactions among meeting attendees

THE BENEFITS OF WEB CONFERENCING

Another alternative to an in-person meeting is the use of web conferencing technology. You may have heard how these tools work from various vendors, but little attention is ever put on why users should consider this solution in the first place. A recent white paper touted "security" and "customer service" as two priorities to consider when purchasing a web conferencing system. The truth is, aside from some free applications, any responsible organization will be able to provide data security and will always strive to deliver excellent customer service.

Some benefits that web conferencing vendors have touted include:

- No equipment required
- Free or inexpensive
- Less technically challenging to set up
- Lower bandwidth requirements

Again, these benefits merely describe how web conferencing is different from video conferencing, not why web conferencing would be a better choice for your business. Though arguably more cost-effective than many video solutions, web conferencing simply does not deliver the same genuine, lifelike collaboration experience as video technology. As is often said, the cheapest, easiest thing to do is usually not the most effective option.

Perhaps the biggest drawback to web conferencing from a manager's viewpoint is the inability to prevent multitasking. While juggling multiple tasks is an important skill to cultivate, a meeting is not the appropriate time to do so. A meeting is meant to engage all participants, not for the presenter to listen to himself speak. Additionally web conferencing solutions such as Citrix GotoMeeting, Cisco WebEx, Adobe Connect or ReadyTalk™ typically require a software client or a web browser plug-in in order for them to work. Once the software or plug-in is installed, further delay can occur while configuring audio and video settings. This interruption inconveniences both the meeting organizer and participants, effectively minimizing the chance for productive collaboration.

Are there compelling reasons to utilize web conferencing? Absolutely, but they have nothing to do with technical requirements or the core of what a meeting is.

WEB CONFERENCING HAS ITS PLACE

A webinar is an excellent example of when a business should implement web conferencing. A webinar is a presentation, seminar or lecture presented online. The goal is typically to attract visitors and share relevant information about a certain industry topic. Recently, there have been a number of interactive enhancements introduced to various webinar platforms such as surveys and polls, but the ultimate goal is not interaction among participants, it is one-way sharing of information.

Several web conferencing vendors now include video capabilities, but managers must ask themselves if the quality is good enough to experience complete visual communication, even minor nuances such as a raised eyebrow or slight frown. Not to mention, a poor quality video experience such as a pixelated or frozen image of your colleague can be a serious distraction. Here is the bottom line. If you want to achieve a specific goal in a meeting, a web conference lacks the features necessary to have meaningful human interactions.

CHECKLIST WHILE IGNORING THE WEB CONFERENCE

- Check Email
- Text your "bestie"
- Work on other projects
- Update Facebook
- Look at photos of cats

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**BENEFITS OF VIDEO CONFERENCING
AS TOLD BY CUSTOMERS**

"Video conferencing enables trust."

Colorado-based SmartSearch Marketing specializes in search marketing solutions for their widely distributed clients. According to founder Patricia Hursh, "The biggest decision factors in hiring an agency are compatibility with your organization, and whether your organization trusts the agency. Video goes much farther in building trust than a voice on the phone."

"Meetings were just natural from the start."

One of the UK's best known charities, Children's Hospice South West, needed a communications tool that could provide face-to-face communication with dispersed work teams. "Video conferencing solutions cannot, and should not, be seen as a total replacement for face to face meetings. But the picture and voice quality is so sufficiently good that this technology should now be actively considered as a viable cost effective proposition for organizations with dispersed locations," said Steve Benson, IT coordinator.

"The ideal solution for conferencing."

Virgin Mobile India, a leading mobile service provider, required a cost-effective communication tool that provided exceptional audio and video quality at very low bandwidths as many regions in India have a maximum upload limit of 512Kbps. "Video has found its place in basic infrastructure setup for virtually any corporation, which was not the case five years ago. We are excited to be at the forefront in implementing this vital technology in India," said Sanjay Singh, general manager of operations.

THE DECISION: VIDEO CONFERENCING

Simply put, if the meeting matters, you will need to see the people involved in the most lifelike, HD quality as possible. If the meeting does not truly matter, a phone call or email should suffice. A successful meeting requires visual communication, which can be accomplished only though video conferencing in place of a physical meeting.
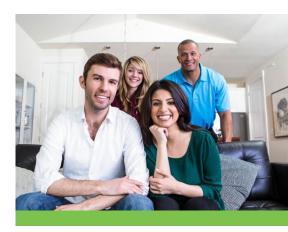
The initial investment in video conferencing technology may be more than a web conferencing solution, but the long term gains are unlimited by building relationships that lead to quick and efficient decision making.

RESOURCES

If you would like to learn more about using video conferencing to host successful meetings that lead to quicker decisions and a stronger sense of community, please view our links below or contact us for a demo at 1.512.347.9300 or 1.877.LIFESIZE.

Video: How Do You LifeSize? Benefits of Video Conferencing from LifeSize

Video: Communication in the 21st Century Workforce

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