

# How Do You Manage Your Video Facilities?



The field of unified communications and collaboration (UC&C) covers an enormous span of technologies; technologies which are not only related in some way to each other (otherwise collaboration would not be possible), but which also require some level of specialisation in their deployment and, particularly, in the way they are configured and run, in order to deliver what the organisation needs from them.

Video is the latest case in point. Quite apart from the technological complexities of video, are all the subtleties of more than a hundred years of clever film-making and television production techniques with which the medium is bound. Much as video has been democratised in recent years, with the advent of desktop webcams and the likes of YouTube putting the power of moving visuals into the hands of the man in the street, it nonetheless carries a mystique. As organisations are beginning to realise, it is this quality that makes video such a potent communication tool.

A Gartner Report\* states that

“by 2015, over 200 million workers globally will run corporate-supplied video conferencing from their desktops. By 2012, 40% of enterprises will adopt a blend of Cloud- and premises-based approaches to meet their UC needs,” and “by 2015, large companies will cut the number of vendors they use to deploy UC solutions by 60%, but they will still need at least three vendors for a full UC solution.”

The indications are clear: video is a must-have. But organisations need help setting it up and maintaining it.

\* Gartner, Inc. Predicts 2010: Video, Cloud and UC Services Loom Large in Enterprise Communications, Kathie Hackler et al, December 3, 2009.

In fact, managed video services may be the fastest way to move from having no video communications element in your UC&C strategy to a full integration so that you can get financial and operational benefits as remarkable as those enjoyed by Parsons Brinkerhoff Australia Pacific (PB A-P).

As PB A-P proved, deploying video is not a technology issue, it's a business one.

“The business needs to focus on making itself more effective, by whatever means,”

says Chris Johnson (CIO).

“Video is only one of those means.”

## The video highway

Gerard Florian, Dimension Data's chief technology officer in Australia agrees.

“When organisations consider video, they focus first on whether or not they have enough bandwidth. PB A-P proved that, while video does put more demands on bandwidth, you can always prioritise network traffic and schedule video conferences and calls. Bandwidth can be managed. It's secondary to the outcomes the organisation wants from having video capability.”

“Outcomes are all about deployment and utilisation. Deployment and utilisation are absolutely dependent on the experience users have. If they like what happens when they're interacting through video, they'll use it more. If it's difficult to use, they'll avoid it.”

“Making it simple to use involves a raft of other activities, only a few of which have anything to do with bandwidth.”

## The soft side

Florian says organisations forget to train their users, not only on how the video equipment works but also on how to get the best out of it.

“There's a tendency to think that because people have their own digital cameras they have an innate understanding of sound, lighting, composition, and camera angles. That's rarely true.”

“Most people who have used webcams at home put up with bad sound and visuals in exchange for being able to see and hear, however poorly, friends and family. That's not a training ground for good video use. It certainly doesn't set the kind of standard that is needed for effective corporate communication via video, where first impressions make all the difference and the inability to convey information, both with a live feed and in person, can make or break a deal.”

This 'soft skills' side of video makes it necessary for management of not only the technical but also the human component of visual communications. Measurement and training are crucial to ensuring that the organisation gets as many people as possible to exploit video to the benefit of the organisation.

Also essential are usage policies – such as those PB A-P used to create a collaboration charter.

Having made the investment in **video facilities**, it's important for an organisation to know whether it's getting **value** out of it.

## Why not let the **personal assistant** take the flack when the screen flickers?

### Chop wood, carry water

Other activities that organisations tend to overlook are the simple but essential hygiene factors: regularly checking that the equipment works, that it's still in the rooms to which it was allocated, that maintenance is done – and that the batteries in the remote are charged!

Invariably, the CEO's personal assistant is the one who has to take some harassed action when the video conference has already started and a piece of equipment is found to have failed. Hardly her job! And probably not her area of expertise.

There's also the question of whether or not video conferencing rooms and other facilities are being under- or over-utilised.

“Having made the investment in video facilities, it's important for an organisation to know whether it's getting value out of it,”

says Robert Weddepohl, Dimension Data's general manager for Converged Communications in Australia.

“To ensure adequate uptake of video, you need to gather and analyse utilisation stats of the video communications' environment. This enables you to focus on areas of the business in which uptake is poor as well as ensure there is sufficient capacity planning in place. Remedies needed to facilitate further uptake may include changing room environments or adding training.”

“Sometimes an awareness campaign is necessary. Sometimes, you have to change the way you schedule the facilities.”

“None of this is work employees have time to do or have the insight to be able to make suggestions about. A managed video service provider does it all as a matter of course, as part of a larger package of services that ensures that you get the most out of your video communication.”

“Much of the value of video communication lies in its ability to give users in different geographic areas the ability to communicate face-to-face. For instance, monitoring and managing multiple dispersed video conferencing units means that an organisation must either have a few dedicated head office people constantly travelling to the regional facilities – thereby obviating the reduction in travel benefits that video provides – or train someone in each region, causing them to take on extra responsibilities.”

“Again, a managed video service provider can do the job more effectively and affordably – while giving the organisation a single point of contact when something goes wrong.”

As with everything else in life, you can't manage or change what you can't measure. One of the managed video baseline services is the collection, analysis, and reporting on statistics related to everything in the video system, from end points and the availability of rooms, to bandwidth and user competence.

It's also important to remember that video is not appropriate for every circumstance. If you don't have the budget for the right lighting and audio for a presentation that could as easily be done by phone, do it by phone.

In the same context, why pay for an extra circuit to do a video call when an international telephone call will cost less and give better quality?

As Florian says:

“Always think about how to create the desired user experience within the budget you have. If you don't have the expertise to do that in-house, get help.”

It doesn't have to be either/or

For many organisations, a fully managed – or concierge – service seems to be the ideal. The service provider takes over the entire video system and uses remote, automated means to monitor and manage it. In addition, the concierge service provider puts permanent full time resources on the client site to handhold all major video-based meetings – continuously checking and maintaining equipment. Client employees walk into a room in which everything always works all the time.

This can be more expensive than the client's use of video justifies, in which case organisations opt for a more narrowly defined service based on their particular requirements. The service provider assists in this way for a short period, usually six months, providing staff for certain pre-agreed video conferences and monitoring only those facilities deemed most important by the organisation. As the client becomes more comfortable with the technology, so the service provider scales back its assistance.

“One of the cultural problems with video that we have seen as both a concierge and managed video provider is that the IT department usually avoids having anything to do with the video system,”

Florian says.

“Historically, it's been a high end activity, located in the boardroom and presided over by the CEO's personal assistant.”

“Also, strictly speaking, video technology hasn't been IT based. Many IT departments don't know how to fix a malfunction. In those circumstances, why not let the personal assistant take the flack when the screen flickers?”

“We like to use our concierge service as a way of showing the IT department that video isn't the enemy and that there are automated management tools that take the stress out of running such a high profile facility for the organisation.”

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