

## 'Green' IT: Cut Your Travel Costs and Carbon Footprint With Web Conferencing

David Mario Smith, Jeffrey Mann, Simon Mingay

"Green" IT initiatives typically include a significant cost-cutting component. Application managers should investigate Web conferencing as a good first step for cutting travel costs and improving productivity.

### Key Findings

- Companies are reducing travel budgets because of the tough economic climate, as well as carbon reduction and efficiency concerns.
- Travel reduction facilitated by increased use of Web conferencing provides measurable cost-cutting benefits.
- Planners should aim to reduce, but not totally eliminate, corporate travel. Enterprises with greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals need to start measuring travel in detail to calculate the GHG emissions associated with business travel (see Scope 3 emissions of the [GHG Protocol](#) devised by the World Resources Institute and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development). This includes measuring distances traveled by different modes of transport.

### Recommendations

Key things to do now:

- Start measuring business travel — at least distances traveled by different modes of transport. Much of this information is already available through enterprise systems, fuel card services and corporate travel agents.
- Confirm the Web-conferencing options that may already be available.
- Understand the market, and evaluate the vendor and product options available.
- Understand the scale and nature of the demand for Web conferencing in your organization.
- Determine the types of meetings being held and the number of participants, including internal and external constituents.
- Determine the delivery model for deployment.

## ANALYSIS

---

### The Drivers

There are two main drivers for enterprises wishing to reduce business travel:

- Cost reduction.
- GHG emissions reduction.

For most organizations, cutting business travel is about cost reduction, but increasingly it will be about GHG emissions reduction. For some, it's also a recognition of the need to use employees' time more efficiently.

In an organization, the proportion of total GHG emissions that business travel represents can vary from a few percent to as much as 50%. In BT, for example, business travel represents 8% of total emissions, whereas in SAP it's responsible for 48%. But whatever the percentage, it is almost always worthy of attention, as it represents an opportunity to apply IT to drive both cost and carbon efficiencies. Congestion, pollution, security and health concerns have combined to make business travel increasingly inefficient and unpleasant.

With travel freezes being announced on an almost daily basis, enterprises are realizing that Web conferencing is an easy way to conduct meetings at significantly less expense than traditional face-to-face interactions. The current economic situation worldwide has resulted in a tightening of budgets in most organizations. As fuel prices remain relatively high and travel becomes increasingly expensive, business travel is an area that is always scrutinized in trying economic times. Web conferencing can be used to replace some meetings virtually, whether internal ones or with clients.

### When a Virtual Meeting May Be the Most Appropriate Option

Virtual meetings will never be a complete substitute for face-to-face meetings. However, they are particularly effective where any of the following conditions exist:

- The participants have already met.
- Conflict between participants is expected.
- The process being followed or applied within the meeting is familiar to all the participants.
- The topic is one everyone is reasonably comfortable with.

*Digital natives* are much more comfortable with the use of technology than older workers and need much less encouragement to use Web conferencing.

In countries with a high sensitivity to climate change, we are starting to see some change in attitudes to business travel — for example, suppliers aren't expected to visit quite as frequently as they used to.

Gartner has a library of recent research on Web conferencing. In this report, we discuss Web conferencing as a means to reduce travel costs and the technology's applicability to environmental initiatives.

Web conferencing is typically sold into departments and deployed via a software as a service (SaaS) model. This means there is normally little IT involvement needed initially. Pricing for a typical named user/host model can range from an undiscounted \$40 to \$80 per month, per host, for up to five meeting hosts. The fixed price per user makes planning costs fairly simple. The unlimited use structure can also encourage use (see "Web Conferencing: Dealing With Changing Pricing Models"). Organizations use these products to enable people to participate in meetings when they cannot — or prefer not to — assemble in the same location. Better communications can lead to better decisions, and great benefits generally result from using this type of collaboration technology, as it enables meetings to be held that would not occur were there no online option. Where information sharing is crucial to the success of a project and where people may be spread across different regions, Web conferencing can be used to share data in real time.

With increasing environmental concerns, organizations are more cognizant now not only of the need for cost reduction, but of the need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Reducing emissions, although related to cutting travel costs, is a growing trend, resulting in organizations developing environmental initiatives to lessen the negative effects of business travel. Gartner defines green IT as the "optimal use of information and communication technology (ICT) for managing the environmental sustainability of enterprise operations and the supply chain, as well as that of its products, services and resources, throughout their life cycles (see "Green IT: The New Industry Shock Wave")." Several Web-conferencing providers are offering green or carbon calculators to help organizations measure how much carbon they have saved the environment by using Web conferencing instead of physical meetings. Although we can question the accuracy of these tools, vendors are positioning them as a way for organizations to display how green they are.

As well as providing cost savings and helping in green initiatives, Web conferencing can help bring other benefits for organizations (see "Case Study: Swiss Re Implements Enterprisewide Web Conferencing"). These can include the ability to:

- Connect remote workers and teams that are dispersed geographically.
- Enable an economical and consistent means of collaboration and communication across the organization.
- Reduce cycle times for key business processes.
- Enable employees to collaborate in real time with external participants globally.
- Potentially improve productivity and increase business efficiencies by reducing time spent traveling.
- Schedule more frequent meetings.
- Enable attendees to access virtual meetings from anywhere or any PC.

The most popular business use for Web conferencing is as a real-time communications tool to present information in a one-to-many or a many-to-many format. There is also significant use of it to enable teams to get together virtually to collaborate on documents as part of a business process. Training and support needs can also be met by the technology, with most vendors providing those facilities. Intrinsic to the nature of Web-conferencing products/services is that the aforementioned capabilities can be provided with reduced overhead expenses. As companies look at other options such as teleworking or working from home, Web conferencing can be used to help create a virtual office environment. There is a tie in there to green IT, as daily travel to work and other business-related travel can contribute to GHG emissions and higher business expenses. For green initiatives, Web conferencing is a good place to start to achieve quick, measurable wins and return on investment (ROI).

## Changing Behaviors

One of the biggest challenges to the use of Web conferencing for travel substitution is changing behaviors. It is not enough to simply put the services in place and hope that people will use them instead of traveling to meetings. If the enterprise has a wider environmental program, it certainly makes IT's job much easier, as IT can link the Web-conferencing initiatives to the activities of the wider program. To change employees' behavior so that they use Web conferencing instead of traveling to meetings, enterprises need to:

- Extend enterprise environmental policy statements to cover travel, laying out guidance on how employees should make choices related to travel.
- Create an awareness and education campaign related to the travel goals and guidelines, as well as Web-conferencing services.
- Put in place rewards and recognition for those that meet their operational and business goals while exhibiting the "right" behaviors regarding travel and the use of Web conferencing.
- Create the opportunity for people to share best practices.
- Set a travel reduction target that is broken down into appropriate goals for business units, departments and, where appropriate, teams. We recommend that these should be expressed in financial terms and, assuming the enterprise has environmental goals as well, in carbon terms. The advantage of carbon targets is that they give people the ability to make trade-offs and choices about modes of transport as well, with, for example, trains being "cleaner" than planes and cars.
- Implement a detailed travel tracking and consolidated reporting system.
- Implement a detailed Web-conferencing tracking system that logs, for example, how many people used it and in which locations.

## Where to Start?

Organizations should confirm the Web-conferencing options available in-house, if there are any. Use Gartner's "Magic Quadrant for Web Conferencing" to understand the market and the vendor and product options available. Assess the scale and nature of the demand for Web conferencing in your organization, and determine the types of meetings being held and the number of participants, including internal and external constituents.

To ensure meeting best practices:

- Determine that content is ready for Web-conferencing use.
- Ensure presenters know how to use the moderator tools, including use of polling and chat.
- Do test runs with moderators to ensure the comfort level.
- Contact participants in advance to ensure they have the client software loaded.

To measure the cost savings, track the number of meetings replaced by Web conferencing and multiply it by employees' average traveling costs. This approach can help application managers to demonstrate the system's value, as well as show the ROI from Web-conferencing expenditure.

## RECOMMENDED READING

---

"Magic Quadrant for Web Conferencing"

"Web Conferencing: Dealing With Changing Pricing Models"

[Web Conferencing: Comparison of the Leading Software Solutions](#)

"Toolkit: How to Understand Web Conferencing Product Features"

["Smart 2020: Enabling the Low-Carbon Economy in the Information Age"](#)

## REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS

---

### Corporate Headquarters

56 Top Gallant Road  
Stamford, CT 06902-7700  
U.S.A.  
+1 203 964 0096

### European Headquarters

Tamesis  
The Glanty  
Egham  
Surrey, TW20 9AW  
UNITED KINGDOM  
+44 1784 431611

### Asia/Pacific Headquarters

Gartner Australasia Pty. Ltd.  
Level 9, 141 Walker Street  
North Sydney  
New South Wales 2060  
AUSTRALIA  
+61 2 9459 4600

### Japan Headquarters

Gartner Japan Ltd.  
Aobadai Hills, 6F  
7-7, Aobadai, 4-chome  
Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-0042  
JAPAN  
+81 3 3481 3670

### Latin America Headquarters

Gartner do Brazil  
Av. das Nações Unidas, 12551  
9º andar—World Trade Center  
04578-903—São Paulo SP  
BRAZIL  
+55 11 3443 1509