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Video Conferencing is Not Just for Executives:

Leveraging the Cloud to Make Video Conferencing More Pervasive in Your Organization

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For many years video conferencing has been a well-established communications tool within large organizations. Specifically, customers have long deployed purpose-built solutions in their organizations to support room-based video conferencing as a virtual substitute for traditional boardroom meetings. However, such approaches are self-limiting and, therefore, are now becoming quickly outmoded.

Dedicated rooms and specialized standalone equipment to support discrete use cases can prove to be an expensive proposition. The cost to acquire, install, operate, and maintain traditional hardware-centric video conferencing components such as multi-point switches, media servers, gateways and purpose-built hardware endpoints has historically imposed significant upfront capital investments. As a result, adoption for this monolithic, hardware-centric design has been sparse outside of resource-rich, large organizations.

Further, the high cost of ownership for traditional video conferencing deployments often caused organizations to treat their investments as a tightly controlled resource with access restricted to executives and other high-ranking personnel.

THE NEW ERA OF VIDEO COMMUNICATIONS

Thankfully, technology advancements and customer demand have ushered in a new era of solutions. Software-centric and services-based video conferencing solutions have lowered the barriers to adoption and improved flexibility. Today, a greater variety of organizations and types of users can benefit from rich visual communications.

Flexible Deployment Models

Customers can still deploy their video conferencing components in traditional, dedicated hardware architectures as is sometimes required to meet certain performance, security and other criteria. However, this approach is certainly not the best fit for all organizations.

The trend to implement communications software in virtualized environments is on the rise. Use of virtualization technologies enables video conferencing to move away from the more costly traditional architecture in which components are deployed individually on dedicated server hardware. Leading vendors have enabled gateway, management/scheduling, recording/streaming and even multi-point control components to be implemented on virtual machines that co-reside on industry-standard server hardware in order to share and optimize power, processing, physical footprint, and other resources. The hardware consolidation reduces up-front purchase cost, time required for initial installation as well as ongoing operational expenses.

Virtualized infrastructure solutions open new opportunities for flexible deployment and consumption. Customers can implement virtual video conferencing infrastructure on-site similar to traditional deployment models, or they can deploy it in their data centers alongside their virtualized IT platforms in private clouds to enable centralized command and control across their network.

Providers also seek the same operational efficiencies, hardware consolidation and optimization of processing power when building their networks. As a result, virtualized infrastructure is enabling a new breed of cloud-based video conferencing services that lower the barrier to entry. Today, customers have more choices than ever in selecting the deployment model, the right technology and partner for their individual needs.

Benefits of Cloud Video Conferencing Services

Cloud-based video conferencing services provide a number of advantages for customers seeking to outsource their solutions. The advantages are particularly appealing to organizations without the resources or desire to own and maintain the equipment internally.

Cloud services allow customers to **implement video conferencing on a subscription basis, which eliminates the upfront CapEx** associated with equipment ownership.

Compared to CPE solutions, **cloud services offer significant improvements in speed and agility.** Initial roll out is much faster, often getting customers up and running in a matter of hours or days rather than months. Furthermore, cloud services offer the ability to quickly ramp up or wind down capacity, as needed, with seasonal business cycles or on a project basis.

Cloud services obviate the costs associated with initial installation and ongoing maintenance. It moves customers to an **OpEx-based model with consistent, recurring and predictable billing.** There are no additional charges for upgrades to the latest software releases, warranties or need to train internal support staff.

Without direct ownership, customers on a subscription service have the ability to negotiate contracts and change providers at regular intervals. They can hold their chosen provider accountable and **put aside concerns about vendor lock-in or long-term product viability.**

Cloud services can be employed as a means to **add capacity or new features on top of premises-based solutions.** Cloud services can be implemented at distributed sites and integrated with CPE solutions at main sites to cost-effectively expand the user base and add value to existing investments. Feature additions may include leveraging cloud services to arm certain business units or work groups with desktop or mobile video conferencing.

Expanded Use Cases

In the past, video conferences were rigid, requiring complex set up to connect two or more distant rooms at prearranged times for select participants. Times have changed. The pace of business today is faster and business interaction has evolved.

Most meetings are informal and unscheduled, taking place within workflows. Desktop video conferencing clients enable users to launch ad hoc rich-media interactions without the disruption of leaving their office or with the convenience of taking the call from a coffee shop. Integrating desktop video conferencing within business processes allows questions to be answered and problems solved with an immediacy that improves decision-making.

Soft clients are ideally suited to address the rise of smart phones and tablets in the workplace. Mobile video conferencing clients can be provisioned to all the most widely used devices, including iOS, Android, Windows Phone and others. Users that can truly access all of their communications capabilities from their preferred device and from any location are more reachable, responsive and productive for the organization.

HD audio and video, media compression and packet recovery techniques make today's video conferencing a higher-quality and more reliable experience. Combined with the improved availability of desktop and mobile soft clients, video conferencing is increasingly being put to use for tasks in which clarity and accuracy are critical, whether from fixed locations or on the go.

Organizations of all types use video conferencing to improve productivity and collaboration. Studies show that video conferencing reduces user tendencies to multi-task and promotes participation—which allows shorter, more effective meetings.

Clinicians are using video conferencing to meet with patients and colleagues more regularly, as well as to remotely monitor, diagnose and treat a greater number of patients across a wider geography than is possible with traditional office visits.

Service support groups are leveraging video conferencing to enhance technical training on-site or in the field. They often make senior technicians available to troubleshoot, perform diagnostics and otherwise resolve a greater volume of escalations in order to improve business processes and customer service.

Distance learning organizations are taking advantage of video conferencing to expand their reach and diversify their student population, to enrich their programs and engage pupils with interactive content and to keep the best instructors in front of students as much as possible.

Human resources departments increasingly employ video conferencing for recruiting, to conduct candidate interviews and employee reviews, as well as to train new and existing employees.

Sales and marketing teams rely on video conferencing for training on new products and campaigns, for demonstrations and to effectively make their pitches to customers and partners.

CONCLUSION

Technology advancements have driven rapid shifts in video conferencing. A new era of solutions has been ushered into a collaboration tool that select organizations once restricted to elite personnel.

The availability of software-based solutions and cloud services, coupled with low-priced devices, is resulting in democratization of video conferencing, extending its reach to new users. With improved quality, reliability and flexibility, the use cases are expanding. It is now possible for organizations large and small to leverage video conferencing across their environments to increase business agility, accelerate decision-making, strengthen relationships, and improve customer support.

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