



# Video made the HR star

The latest technology has transformed video conferencing from the sole domain of executives to a tool increasingly being used by HR departments for internal communication and education. **Tim Fulton** reports

**T**he use of video conferencing can be used to improve communication between employees, keep teleworkers engaged, transform internal education programs and help cut down on travel time for staff. Smart HR professionals can play a pivotal role in the use of these systems but they need to know what's out there and what's possible.

While the benefits of video communication have been expounded for many years, until recently the experience left much to be desired and was a technology of last resort. With the introduction of new, high definition (HD) video conferencing, video now offers an exceptional quality image over lower bandwidths, making it more accessible for use in home offices and on the road. HD also means that images are sharper and true-to-life and, with proper configuration, lets users see people in full size, replicating the feel of being together in the same room.

In addition to delivering an immediate reduction in travel expenses, companies that implement video communication quickly see gains in productivity and business performance thanks to improved communication, accelerated business decision cycles, increased employee morale and decreased turnover.

Video communication offers broad HR benefits to all organisations, no matter the size. Many companies start by installing HD video conferencing in the locations where employees travel to most, and often find that the systems pay for themselves within three to six months in travel savings alone. Conference rooms, executive offices, field offices and home offices can all be video enabled. The latest technology allows for mobile video devices to be taken on the road or streamed over the web, and for multi-person calls of up to 16 locations without compromising quality. This is in strong contrast to the days when video conferencing was confined to the boardrooms.

The most exciting aspect of video communications, however, is the way in which innovative HR departments are using it to redefine how their company does business. More and more, HR professionals are looking beyond cost savings and utilising the wider application of video to serve their staff better and more efficiently.

**Recruitment** Video can enable an HR department to reduce recruitment costs without losing effectiveness. By using video communication to meet candidates, interview times are not limited by travel or time differences and the team can look further afield

interstate or internationally. Bringing new staff on board and carrying out an effective and personal induction process can involve both HR and other senior managers by remote access.

The adoption of video communication is important for those organisations trying to recruit the best candidates, particularly graduates. The next generation of staff - in particular graduates - are video savvy and used to video communication as a standard; delivering the technology they expect will help attract top people.

**Training and staff development** Staff development and training are a significant but necessary cost for all businesses. Training courses can mean a few days out of the office, often in other towns or cities. HD video communications allow companies to bring in remote experts for training and continuing education, with instant benefit to the professional development of employees at a far reduced price. The true-to-life experience of today's video communications also allows highly technical training, such as medical and engineering training, to be successfully conducted remotely. Video enables remote talent coaching and more meaningful and frequent contact between staff and their mentors, no matter the location.

**Business and HR communication** Business communication doesn't end at what we traditionally call the 'office'. New technology now allows video communication to be viewed on any desktop

### Slow on the uptake?

Australia's focus on face-to-face meetings is likely to have a real impact on productivity, with the nation's workers slow to embrace the collaborative technologies used as everyday tools in other countries. Citrix research revealed:

- **Audio-conferencing:** only a quarter (26%) of Australians use shared phone lines to work, collaborate and share information, versus almost half of Brits (49%)
- **Web-conferencing:** only 10% of locals turn to web-conferencing, against 28% in the US
- **Video conferencing:** despite the enhanced personal interaction offered by video conferencing, only 13% of our workers use video conferencing, compared to 28% in France
- **Social networking tools:** even though we're the most dominant users of personal social networks like Facebook, only 5% of Aussies use social networking as part of their role, versus 18% in Germany

computer, streamed live over the internet or connected through portable devices while out of the office. This enables HR to take business communication to all staff, anywhere – whether they are in another time zone, on the road for business, out of the office sick, or those who may have special needs that cannot be met in a specific business setting. Important information, multimedia presentations and communication can be shared with all employees

### **Hard habit to break**

Australian workers are wedded to a 'seeing is believing' approach to business communication, still using physical meetings as a primary way to collaborate, according to research by Citrix Online. It showed that almost half (45%) of local employees insist on organising face-to-face meetings with their teams every day, even though an increasing number of Australians now work out of the office – either at home or on the road. One quarter (24%) work from home during a typical week, and 15% leave headquarters to go client-side. Only Americans meet more often (51%).

The survey, conducted by Forrester Consulting, explains why more than a third (38%) of the Australian respondents felt overloaded with day-to-day meetings, but find it nearly impossible to break the habit of catching up face-to-face.

An overwhelming majority – 83% – say they prefer to meet in person to build trust, but the findings imply their focus is just as much about monitoring the responses of others:

- 77% of Australians believe seeing each other is crucial to encouraging participation
- 67% of Australians need to eyeball each other to reassure themselves that people are paying attention

Australians are also the most likely to insist on the pre-eminence of body language – 90% say reading each others' reactions is the reason they see each other. This compares to only two-thirds (67%) of that characteristically more expressive race, the French.

Reviewing the findings, psychologist Jacqueline Saad commented:

"Despite having greater access to rapidly-improving technologies, people are clinging to the tradition of face-to-face meetings. This comes as no surprise as Australians love a bit of a chat among colleagues – a reflection of our laid back, friendly nature. It seems Australians betray a lack of confidence in their own abilities and they need to meet in person to ensure people are paying attention. From a psychological perspective, it allows an opportunity to establish rapport, to assert our personal feelings and opinions and feel connected to both internal and external colleagues. It is a significant forum for communication exchange within an organisation.

"Moving away from traditional belief systems is not always an easy thing to do. The majority of employees have become accustomed to this way of doing business – and will not embrace new technologies if there is no perceived adequate replacement to meet their psychological needs. Technologies where you can physically see someone, however, such as video conferencing, can provide an equally rewarding alternative by allowing individuals to gauge expressions and style of the meeting attendees, fulfilling the need for face-to-face interaction, while providing a more time and cost effective option to both employees and their organisation."

through HD video. Technology enables video to be recorded and shared with new staff or replayed repeatedly for those needing to review the discussion.

**Rostering and staffing management** With HD video communications, staffing is limited only to an HR department's imagination. Staff at retail outlets can be complemented by having a video communications point at each branch, allowing a staff member at a central location to service customers during busy periods, no matter where they are in the country.

**Reducing travel time for staff** Each meeting carried out over video conference reduces the need for a business trip. For companies and staff using this technology, hundreds and sometimes thousands of hours are saved through a reduction in travel; the result is greater productivity during work hours and a more balanced lifestyle.

**Greater employee collaboration** The simplicity of high quality video communications promises significant usage and value; with high level usage comes enhanced organisational communication. In fact, employees engage in the conversation more than when using just a telephone, so productivity, efficiency and retention are significantly increased.

**Team morale** Increased collaboration and communication between staff brings with it greater morale amongst workgroups. Staff can feel as if they are part of a larger team and not working in silos, and have more people with which to discuss and share issues and best practice. Video communications also allows for greater and more productive home working, with staff able to make valuable contributions while maintaining a happy work-life balance.

**Creative teamwork** HD video communication allows geographically-dispersed teams to share everything from rich media on the PC to hand-drawn sketches on a table; thus supporting creativity among colleagues.

With video communications increasingly becoming a vital tool to supporting companies, most often this technology is not being driven by the IT department, but rather the HR team who sees value in better and more personal communication across the business. They are supporting intelligent business growth through the smart use of video, and will continue to be the major driver into the future. **HC**

#### **About the author**

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