

Title: **Driving Adoption Of Collaborative Conferencing**

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## **Introduction**

The current state of the collaborative conferencing market is both dynamic and confusing. Today's multimedia solutions include communications by telephone, local area networks (LAN), and the Internet. They also cover a range of interactivity from two-way collaborative working groups to one-way remote presentations to retrieval of data. Some products are stand-alone, while others are integrated into other products. Collaborative conferencing includes audio conferencing, data/web conferencing and video conferencing.

The purpose of this document is to review the current state of the collaborative conferencing industry and emphasize what needs to be done to drive adoption of these technologies so they become second nature to users.

## **The Current Situation**

The use of collaborative conferencing has the potential of increasing productivity and efficiency by reducing unproductive travel time, preventing meeting delays, creating shorter and more structured meetings, and providing faster exchange of information, thus allowing for greater reach of a message since individuals can obtain information when it is convenient for them. Collaborative conferencing also allows for an increased number of participants. It is difficult to get information to everyone at the same time. With collaborative conferencing, all individuals who need data, can get the data

when it is easiest for them. Additionally, people who would never have obtained information in the past, can now easily do so.

Unfortunately, many users of these technologies are confused because the industry has been pushing technology and buzz words at them that they don't understand.

Simply put, users (not those implementing the technologies) don't care about the buzzwords, but want technology to be transparent to allow them to conduct business. If the technology can help them be more strategic and competitive that is even better. One way of looking at collaborative conferencing is to equate it to a personal computer. When PCs first entered the marketplace no one was expected to immediately sit down and use a PC to solve all business problems. Instead, most users found a learning curve associated with the hardware and with each software package. And, as we all now know, few of us use all the packages loaded on our PCs.

The same holds true for collaborative conferencing. Users look at a set of technologies that will improve productivity, increase access to subject matter experts, and allow meetings to be held when needed. These are all factors that are difficult to quantify and place a dollar value on. Yet many users have discovered that collaborative conferencing provides many advantages. The problem is that few users, or vendors for that matter, understand how to make collaborative conferencing something wanted by everyone.

### How We Got This Way

When videoconferencing was first commercially introduced in 1982 by CLI and NEC, as an industry we made the mistake of telling everyone that videoconferencing looked like a television and sounded like a telephone.

As a result, users felt that a videoconferencing unit would last 20 years before needing replacement and calls would complete like telephone calls. We all know that videoconferencing systems are really computers that need software updating with regularity and, if you haven't been told let me tell you that the carriers have NEVER established a call completion rate for video calls over ISDN as has been done for audio calls. Further, you need to realize that IP is an evolutionary process that will take 10 years to complete. (We are in about year 4 of that process.)

Let's not leave audio conferencing out of this equation. Although we have done much better with audio conferencing, there are still an awful lot of offices and conference rooms without conference phones. In fact, there are still conference rooms without telephones!

Clearly the use of data and web conferencing has grown. However, technology is not the only issue to be concerned with regarding data and web conferencing. People resist change and find nothing wrong with their current work style. They need to be shown the value of the technologies. Fortunately, the SEC ruling regarding the dissemination of information has greatly helped the growth of data and web conferencing. But users don't know where the responsibility for these technologies belongs within their organization and they don't know which technology to request for a particular situation. Confusion reigns.

### So what needs to be done to drive adoption?

The answer is to start small and grow. The answer is to continue to provide promotions and training. The answer is to be sure equipment is updated and procedures are in place across an organization. The answer is for vendors to advertise and place public relations articles in general business publications, not just technology magazines.

### User Recommendations

TRI recently conducted a study of 100 end user organizations asking them for recommendations on what they do to successfully adopt audio, web, and video conferencing within their organizations. While their responses sound logical and intuitive, when further study was done to determine how well their recommendations were put into practice it was sad to see that many forget the obvious.

#### ***Following are the recommendations made by these users:***

#### **Audio conferencing**

- Make it easy to use
- Quantify cost savings
- Better describe internal PBX capabilities
- Provide training & case study experiences
- Purchase good quality equipment
- Trial usage, create awareness
- Adopt self service reservationless model
- Promote, promote, promote

#### **Web conferencing**

- Do a business case and promote it
- Use it and see how it works
- Remember that not everyone is web friendly
- Provide training & case study experiences
- Advertise and don't restrict use

- Explore all products & standardize on one
- Make it easy to use

#### Vide Conferencing

- Make it easy to use
- Provide open house demonstrations
- Quantify cost savings
- Provide training
- Provide a user competency test
- Pick up charges under general overhead to promote usage
- Get senior management endorsement
- Make it part of the corporate culture that everyone be trained & required to use the technology
- Promote, promote, promote
- Hire a consultant

Given all the suggestions presented above, the next obvious question is how do you get started?

#### Driving Adoption – Getting Started

The following advice, which has been paid for many times and therefore has value, is based on 22 years of consulting within the conferencing industry. The recommendations offered are not magic and may seem very simple. What is amazing is the number of organizations who do not consider these suggestions when implementing collaborative conferencing or decide to overlook these recommendations. Answering the following four questions will make your adoption of collaborative conferencing easier and more worthwhile to your organization.

- What is our benchmark for success?
- Why are we implementing these technologies?
- What are they going to do for us?
- What will we do with the technologies once they are installed?

#### Recommendation 1: Determine Your Benchmark for Success

Generally, someone within an organization gets the idea it is time to install one or more collaborative conferencing technologies. Usually, they approach a telecom or computer person and ask them to implement the technology. Before any steps are taken the following question should be posed of the person making the request: “What is your benchmark for success?” In other words, how will you know if you have accomplished your job? Too often no one bothers to ask this question. As a result, technology is installed without any thought to how it will positively impact the bottom line of the organization. Collaborative conferencing is not a telephone. It is not

an intuitive instrument everyone needs to use. Rather, it is more like those telephones with all the fancy features that no one understands how or why to use. It is time to make collaborative conferencing a necessity. Not only must it be easy to use, but people need to know why they should bother using it at all. One way to start the process is to establish a benchmark for success at the beginning.

#### Examples of benchmarks include:

- Increasing communication with non-corporate sites by holding conferences once a month
- Getting a specific product to market more quickly using conferencing technologies to shorten the manufacturing cycle
- Training a larger number of end users, who are scattered at multiple sites, in a shorter timeframe.

#### Recommendation 2: Assess Your Needs

Assess the needs of your organization. Doing so in a structured way allows you to

(a) select the right technology to meet specific user needs, (b) identify individuals who will champion the project because they have a need, (c) cost justify the project, and (d) provide data for growth in all areas of collaborative conferencing. Many people, especially those selling you equipment, shy away from conducting a needs assessment. They wrongly believe that the process takes a long time, costs too much, and may convince you to buy someone else's equipment. In reality, a needs assessment can be accomplished, on average, in a 2-4 week period. The value of the data in selecting the right technology and ensuring its usage far outweighs the cost to the user and the vendor. In fact, in many instances those who conduct a needs assessment are better prepared to purchase more equipment in a shorter timeframe than those who did not conduct a needs assessment.

A needs assessment also helps you uncover unique applications for the use of collaborative conferencing technologies (i.e. using conferencing for review of legal documents, interviews for potential employees prior to having them fly in for a meeting, marketing campaign for a new product, etc.).

### **Recommendation 3: Return on Investment**

Understanding the value obtained by implementing collaborative conferencing technologies helps management understand why the technologies should be viewed as a necessity, not just a nicety. While many view the benefits of these technologies to be measured with soft dollars, in reality those who have identified useful applications have had no trouble developing a return on investment to justify both their initial capital expenditures and their ongoing recurring costs. By calculating a return on investment it is easier for management to see the value of collaborative

conferencing and, thus, understand the need to continue growing the usage of the technology. Without understanding this value what often happens is that when one champion of the technology departs another is not easy to find. When value is understood everyone wishes to claim the deployment and usage of collaborative conferencing as their idea. Types of ROI calculations for collaborative conferencing include travel cost savings, increased productivity, and time efficiency. As an example, one company found they achieved a return on their investment after only 67 days because they paid for their equipment by not traveling. Another company increased productivity to enable them to get a product to market three months sooner, thus saving millions of dollars.

### **Recommendation 4: Applications Development**

To ensure successful, ongoing usage of collaborative conferencing technologies it is important to have a variety of applications in mind and others waiting to be tried. In addition to wanting to find champions for the systems it is important to develop and report on applications for the technologies so others learn and can generate their own uses for collaborative conferencing. As mentioned by the 100 firms interviewed, writing case study experiences and sharing them with others is key to ongoing success with these technologies.

### **New Technologies Today**

New technologies continue to be introduced to stretch the envelope for what is offered in the collaborative conferencing space and provide new alternatives for how people meet. Four technologies to watch unfold are: Interactive Telepresence, Megapixel Picture Phones, PERSPECTIVE™ and FATHOM™.

### Interactive Telepresence

Interactive Telepresence can be defined as the ability to share audio, data, and video with a distant site or sites as though the person were truly in the same room, across the conference table from you. In other words, the ability to have a meeting that is as good as being there. What makes Interactive Telepresence different from traditional videoconferencing relates to how the audio, video, document sharing, control systems, room environment, and transport are handled. More information about Interactive Telepresence can be found in a white paper available on the IMCCA web site at [www.IMCCA.org](http://www.IMCCA.org).

### Megapixel Picture Phones

A new generation of camera phones is due on the market later this year with resolutions of about 1.2 megapixels. These camera phones will take higher resolution images and will help grow the interest in video communications, especially at the consumer level.

### PERSPECTIVE™

PERSPECTIVE is an interactive video and web interface service, offered by Applied Global Technologies ([www.appliedglobal.com](http://www.appliedglobal.com)), which allows you to centrally access workplace tools available on any IP network and share those tools in real-time with anyone you want regardless of communication device. This means that web conferencing can now speak to videoconferencing and PDAs can talk to laptop and desktop computers.

### FATHOM™

FATHOM is a network analysis tool that allows you to pre-engineer a network prior to rolling out H.323 video, has the ability to troubleshoot current networks, and can systematically monitor network QoS under actual conditions

to help anticipate and prevent end user problems as network usage patterns evolve. FATHOM may be used for point-to-point and multipoint call analysis.

More information on this tool is available at [www.appliedglobal.com](http://www.appliedglobal.com)

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## Summary

The future for collaborative conferencing is bright. Dynamic changes in the global communications environment – decreasing network and equipment costs and the need for businesses to compete in a global economy – will propel the adoption of collaborative conferencing at a rapid rate. It will be important for organizations to develop a plan to efficiently and effectively adopt collaborative conferencing technologies and ensure their successful and ongoing usage. This can be done through attention to detail including establishing a benchmark, assessing your needs, determining a realistic return on investment, and developing a variety of applications.

Keep in mind that you can always consider hiring someone else to assist you with your efforts (i.e. assess your organization, develop applications, and manage your network). This way your IT department can oversee what is done and you can concentrate on your core business.

Users need to get the benefit of quality technology that works flawlessly, is easy for them to use, and designed to meet their ongoing needs.

### About TRI

Telemanagement Resources International Inc. (TRI) is a 22 year old management consulting firm specializing in marketing, communications, and training with an emphasis on design, assessment, project management, promotions,

and training for collaborative conferencing systems. More information about TRI can be obtained at [www.TRInc.com](http://www.TRInc.com).

#### **About S. Ann Earon**

S. Ann Earon has been a researcher and consultant in multimedia communications for 22 years. She holds a Masters in instructional technology and educational administration from Northeastern University, and a Ph.D. from Boston College in business, speech & communications, and education. Dr. Earon currently chairs the Interactive Multimedia & Collaborative Communications Alliance (IMCCA), the non-profit industry association for conferencing & collaborative communications. She can be reached at [AnnEaron@aol.com](mailto:AnnEaron@aol.com).