

Streamlined Productivity on a Budget: The Latest in Conference Bridge and Web Conferencing Technology

A new marketing campaign is launching. You need to make a presentation with the client in Tokyo, and include product teams that are spread across five states. The presentation is to include a video demo of the product and a PowerPoint® of its highlights. This used to be an expensive and complicated proposition. But new conference bridge and web conferencing technology enables you to bring everyone virtually under one roof, easily and cost effectively.

Meetings, training sessions, quarterly reports — there are almost limitless applications where a remote conference can save time, cost and hassle by eliminating travel. In the past, there was a limit to the productivity gained by this approach, as previous phone systems could only enable a small conference of maybe 5 people or less. But a single conference bridge can now handle as many as 30 call participants, and an organization can add as many bridges as they would like. This creates the potential for an almost unlimited meeting size with participants spread out across many geographic regions. With a full web conferencing platform, an organization can also enable audio, PowerPoint presentations, video and a full interactive suite of technologies.

Move your conference to the cloud

Many conference bridges are now available through the “cloud” — with all technology associated with conference bridges hosted at the vendor's location. Audio conferencing services can also be acquired through a licensing on-demand model. In this format, you only pay for what you need when it's needed. The license can easily scale to meet the demand of your organization. The result is that the cost of audio conferencing is falling dramatically, with a per connection charge dropping to an average of \$.04-\$.05 per minute.

The most effective conference bridges are completely software-based devices that eliminate the need for additional hardware or costly recurring subscription-based conference services. The right technology will be a multi-party conference bridge fully integrated as part of Unified Communications. The conference owner will be able to schedule, manage and launch audio conferences right through his or her desktop or laptop and send invitations out through Outlook®. A good system can integrate all communications functions, including presence status, phone calls, Instant Messaging and visual voicemail. A user can even drag and drop ringing phones, active calls and calls-on-hold right into a conference call.

Web conferencing

By integrating web conferencing into a system, a user will be able to launch a multi-party web conference right from their computer. Files can be uploaded and shared through web conferencing, eliminating the time and file size constraints of email. An organization can make sales presentations, product demos and collaborate through intuitive interactive tools. Webcam support will enable live video presentations, and seminars for "view only attendees" can be enabled without installing software on the attendee's computer. The right system should be totally platform and browser independent.



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Columbia, SC 29212
1-866-IDEACOM (433-2266)
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The smart way to deploy web conferencing is through your own network. By combining web and audio conferencing, a user can set up an audio conference session without distributing a bridge number to invitees or having to dial into a new phone number at the start of each conference. This results in a much higher connection rate and attendance on the part of your customers, partners and your own team.

Employees can conduct web conferencing with participants anywhere in the world at a moment's notice via the Internet. Typical web conferencing solutions can scale up to 20 rooms, and include as many as 100 users — more than enough to meet the needs of a small-to-medium enterprise.

What to look for.

A good web or audio conferencing solution should not create any significant workload for IT. Automatic updates should be included. The system should be fully customizable and able to integrate with your existing applications and corporate websites.

A quality audio conferencing system should ensure that all attendees are able to join a call in 5 seconds or less. Do not compromise with "free" audio conferencing packages that cost much more than expected in long distance charges and poor connection/voice quality.

A proprietary, cloud-based audio conferencing solution will build collaboration across your enterprise at a much lower cost — even when compared to just 5 years ago. Performing the proper diligence during your vendor selection process is the key to realizing these benefits, while alleviating the support burden on your internal IT staff. And the productivity benefits gained will make the entire process worth the effort.



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