THE TECHNOLOGY MANAGER’S GUIDE TO HUDDLE SPACES

Featuring:

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IMPROVING THE USER EXPERIENCE IN CONFERENCING

IT'S NEVER BEEN EASIER TO ENHANCE THE COLLABORATION EXPERIENCE.

By Perry Goldstein

Why would a company spend the money and time to install a better camera, mic, and lighting for their conference room? It does not improve the experience for the party originating the call, in reality. It’s the receiving party who benefits the most. They see a better picture, and hear the conversation more clearly. But, if you are the originating party, the age-old question may pop up... "What’s in it for me?"

It’s for the same reason we wear a suit and tie for an important meeting. It makes us feel better about ourselves. I love to hear the party on the other side say, “Perry, you look great!” Audio has a more practical reason. It is also to make sure you are clearly understood. Bad audio can cause a problem. But a better camera and lights? Yes, these also have a significant impact on the picture quality and are necessary for a better conferencing experience.

With the advent of low-cost software for web conferencing, along with new collaboration capabilities, videoconferences are rapidly growing in popularity and taking the place of audio-only conferences. If it doesn’t cost anymore to add video to a call, why not add it? There is nothing like a face-to-face conversation.

In the past, videoconferencing equipment was reserved for the “important” conversations, taking place in the executive conference room. Major customer presentations, shareholder meetings, and the like were considered worthy of the expense of a videoconference.

The telephone was good enough for the rou... (continued on page 61)
How It's Done
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tine calls. A good videoconference system cost upwards of $20,000 and more.

When Skype and similar consumer video calling systems were introduced into the market, corporate America quickly adapted the technology to their existing conference rooms. But the calls were still few and far between. The service quality was still new—and limited. A consumer web cam with a pinhole mic was good enough. As long as we could see and hear (kind of) the other party, that's all we needed.

Today, however, the software is greatly improved. The audio transmission is clearer, and the video is capable of 1080p. The first thing that is happening is that the users are finding that a quality mic is required. And, moving closer to the person speaking is essential. It's not to say that the mic in a consumer web cam is not good quality. Sound is very complicated, and crucial to a meeting. The pinhole mic is good for someone within 5 to ten feet of the mic, and in a small room. When you add distance to the mic, and enter a larger room, the mic can't keep up. It's the physics of sound.

Since we are spending more time on video conference calls, the users are getting more demanding. They want the best experience they can get. A really good mic is not that expensive. And you no longer need echo canceling in the mic anymore. It's done in the software. Why use a mic that is not meant for a conference room? There are more elaborate mic systems that can cover an even larger area, and are still reasonably priced. In audio, there is no One-Size-Fits-All.

The same holds true for a camera. Now that the conferencing services can transmit high defini-tion, why not use it? The cost of a Full-HD 2 megapixel miniature POV camera is now only around $450. A good USB, HD pan/tilt/zoom camera is under $1,000 these days. It's a far cry from the costs even three years ago. People are also moving the camera off the top of the monitor, and lowering it to eye level. We want to look someone in the eye, not at the top of their head.

Adding a fill light in the front of the room takes away the shadows from the overhead fluorescent lighting that dominates the conference room. It makes us all look better, and maybe even younger. Isn't that what we all want?

Back to my original question about spending the time and money on something that benefits the receiving party. Why do it? It's like wearing that brand new suit; it leaves a good impression with your audience. And that is what makes a business successful.

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tell the story of an employee—a member of the ERG, or perhaps one of its officers—describing their experiences and the value they see in joining. Better still? Find a member of the group who is interested in telling their own story, in their own words, and give them a platform where they can share that story with others.

If none of the tenets above feels particularly groundbreaking, that's a good sign; they shouldn't be. The bottom line is that your employees are people—not automatons and not statistics. If your internal communications are built on a foundation that treats them like people—busy, discerning people whose trust and attention must be earned—then you're well positioned no matter what technological advances may be around the corner.

As the Senior Manager of Digital Communications for Aramark's corporate communications team, Greg Lennox uses a variety of web, interactive media, and other digital solutions to inform, engage, connect, and align over 270,000 employees in 22 countries around the world. His areas of responsibility include Aramark's intranet, digital signage network, and internal social media channels. He also produces a monthly video series through which senior leaders reach front line associates across multiple lines of business, and helps the CEO and executive leadership team deliver strategic direction through live and virtual event production. Lennox lives in Philadelphia where he works in Aramark's world headquarters.

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means by which relatively uninformed consumers can be certain that highly skilled individuals have scrutinized a product for standards-compliance. It will provide the same benefits for AVB/TSN that it has for other new technologies. At present, AVnu Alliance certification is the best method we have to assure interoperability across devices from many manufacturers.

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a world in which streaming platforms do more than just provide a workflow for capturing and distributing webcasts. Rather, these solutions emerge as a tool for collecting content from sources commonly used by business communicators and converting it into offerings that are more broadly accessible on a range of devices.

No longer islands of technology unto themselves, streaming platforms are evolving into solutions that will be a key part of the future fabric of unified communications. As the capabilities of web conferencing, video conferencing and instant messaging continue to converge into a single platform, the unifying role of video-enabling technologies will only grow.

But like Gilligan and his fellow castaways, patience will be necessary. This is no "three-hour tour." The evolution of these unified communications trends will take years—not months—to unfold. But the trends are unmistakable. Streaming video will get off the webcasting island over time and play an increasingly central role in enabling innovation in business communications.

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