



## ON-DEMAND VIDEO CONFERENCE: WHY NOW?

### EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Companies today are facing several critical business challenges brought on by the increasingly virtual nature of their workplaces. More and more, employees are scattered across regions, nations, and continents—and yet they must be able to collaborate with one another, as well as with partners and customers, at any time and from anywhere. At the same time, both managers and employees want to keep travel to a minimum, since it's only getting more difficult and more expensive, both in real dollars and in terms of lost productivity before, during and after the event.

Organizations need tools to help them lower operational costs while increasing productivity; support remote, geographically dispersed and mobile workers so they can perform as a single team; shrink decision cycles and times to market; and pursue new business opportunities by delivering faster, more efficient customer and partner interactions.

One of the best technologies for helping companies achieve these and other critical business goals is on-demand video conferencing, which allows for ad-hoc collaboration that's easy to use and cost effective. On-demand conferencing lets employees meet on the fly, without making plans or reservations in advance. As a result, they can collaborate exactly when they need to, with whomever they need to, as soon as the need arises. So if a group of marketing employees is working on an imminent new-product launch, they can quickly start a collaborative session to discuss the particulars face to face; or, a team of research and development professionals might initiate a video conference with web collaboration, to share documents and drawings as they discuss the product's particulars with the aid of video input. And thanks to new pricing models, they can do all this without worrying about skyrocketing costs.

With on-demand conferencing, the technology (the bridge port) does not need to be reserved, eliminating the need for a conferencing scheduling system or a conference operator. As a result, on-demand conferences can be completely ad hoc, or they can be planned in advance and scheduled using Outlook or another calendaring tool. Either way, end users and IT administrators don't need to think about the availability of the underlying technology.

This paper drills down on the value of on-demand video conferencing. We'll discuss what it is and why it's key to solving some of today's most immediate business challenges; how companies are integrating the technology into a larger communications infrastructure; and how to assess and achieve a strong return on investment.

### ON-DEMAND CONFERENCING INFRASTRUCTURE:

There are many reasons for the growth of video conferencing in general, and on-demand services and applications in particular. Knowledge workers in the next-generation enterprise are increasingly empowered, with decision making and innovation increasingly distributed and decentralized in turn. These 21st-century enterprises need technologies that disrupt traditional command and control structures and enable the bottom-up creation and dispersal of ideas. Additionally, the availability of high speed networks is facilitating anytime/anywhere connectivity, access to information, and real-time collaboration. This fast emerging "power of collective knowledge" will fuel business in the future.

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Reducing travel has a positive impact on the environment by reducing fuel consumption and emissions.



On-demand conferencing does several things to support the next-generation enterprise:

- It eliminates the need for IT to schedule and launch conferences, getting users up and running faster and regardless of where they're located (especially critical for timesensitive issues);
- It delivers a high-quality conferencing experience, without requiring that end users understand (or even think about) the underlying technology;
- It enables companies to form project-focused teams comprising co-workers, partners, and even customers;
- It helps managers integrate conferencing into daily business processes, to improve decision making, knowledge sharing, issue resolution and collaboration;
- Its simplicity and fixed cost encourages increased, enterprise-wide use, boosting productivity and driving ROI.
- HR teams (decision makers traveling) can still conduct interviews with candidates in other countries.

### **Superior Quality, Simple to Use**

Video conferencing has long offered business and bottom-line benefits, but it hasn't always delivered on its promise; early products often offered grainy images and poor sound quality. What's more, the systems have historically been difficult for non-technical users to operate, leaving many end users reluctant to take advantage of the technology even when it was available to them.

*New video conferencing tools change the game.* They offer remarkably good picture and sound quality—especially high-definition and telepresence systems that deliver life-like, you-are-there experiences. And because these higher-end systems are operated by a simple remote control device, anyone who can use TiVo can operate the new systems, making it easier for end users to routinely leverage the technology. On-demand video makes it all even simpler, letting employees collaborate with colleagues whenever they need to, as soon as they need to—no more reserving the technology in advance.

What's more, easy-to-use on-demand conferencing eliminates the need for end users to get IT support whenever they need to launch a conference, a fact that both encourages use and lessens the strain on overstretched IT departments. These have significant impacts on end user and admin productivity, as well as positive effects on conferencing ROI.

### **Growing Number & Maturity of IP Deployments**

IT managers no longer have to defend their deployment of IP networks: The technology works; it can save companies money and management headaches; and it can support nextgeneration collaboration tools, including presence, video and web conferencing.

Furthermore, IP deployments are moving beyond pilot projects and small departmental deployments to enterprise-wide roll-outs.

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Although almost all companies start by running voice over their IP networks, as soon as that's done they look for the next technology to take advantage of the new network. Often, that's video. (Please see Figure 1.) Running video conferencing over an IP network can have multiple benefits: Video over IP costs significantly less than its traditional counterpart (usually ISDN); IP is more conducive to supporting integrated collaboration applications, of which video is usually a part; and IP supports on demand conferencing, ensuring employees can collaborate whenever they need to, with little or no additional cost.

## **FOCUS ON THE FUTURE**

On-demand video conferencing lets users meet face-to-face, virtually, without having to schedule the event in advance. Conference hosts and attendees can simply launch a collaboration session any time they choose to, as needs and circumstances require. Even when attendees and rooms do need to be booked in advance, with on-demand conferencing, the conferencing bridge itself doesn't need to be reserved, making it that much simpler to have a scheduled collaboration session.

On-demand conferencing is especially relevant today, as the number of remote and virtual workers is growing, while the demands on businesses to stay competitive in an increasingly global world continue to increase. Those far-flung teams need to collaborate regularly, easily and cost-effectively to ensure companies boost revenues and decrease costs, and unified communication technologies matter more than ever.

On-demand collaboration tools can play a huge role in helping companies to meet those goals. There are several key areas of development that will make it even easier and more cost-effective for employees to connect and collaborate.

## **MEASURING THE VALUE OF ON-DEMAND VIDEO CONFERENCING**

Many companies realize a return on their video conferencing investment in 12-24 months, and it is not unusual to see an ROI of as little as three months. A few companies will even see payback after just a single meeting, if that meeting would otherwise have required long-distance travel by several dozen participants (not an anomalous event in today's globally dispersed workplace). But the same forces that are enabling on-demand video conferencing also boost its ROI. Value lies in several key places:

**IP networks cut costs dramatically.** Running video over an IP network can cut down on costs substantially, since companies need pay for only the network and the software itself—there are no per-minute usage charges to ratchet up costs, as there are with ISDN. It also reduces the time it takes to configure system changes, and reduces application downtime.

Even factoring in annual maintenance fees of 15%-20% and the time IT may spend supporting the software, video over IP is a game-changing technology. Better still, because employees don't need to worry about incurring costs when they launch a video conference, they are much more likely to do so. That increased usage decreases the time it takes to achieve ROI.

Finally, running video over IP lets companies leverage their existing IP infrastructures, which helps justify the costs incurred in deploying the new network and encourages future deployments in other areas of the enterprise.

**Increased usage.** Because it's easy and available, offering video conferencing on an on demand basis virtually ensures its usage will increase. This is especially true when it's run on an IP network, since costs do not increase significantly with use—employees don't have to wonder if they will have to justify their use of the system.

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Because ROI cycles decrease as usage grows, companies that encourage employees to use video conferencing as much as possible will likely see their return on investment much sooner than in the past.

**Boosting Productivity.** Companies that deploy on-demand video conferencing solutions can bet that employees will use the technology more often—and that can lead to a dramatic increase in productivity, as project teams and departmental groups meet more often and more effectively than they otherwise would. Indeed, it's common for companies to find that when they offer employees on-demand access to video conferencing, employees don't just use it to replace in-person meetings they would have otherwise had; they actually use it to meet and collaborate when they would not have in the past. That often leads to shorter cycle times, faster decision making, increased creativity and significantly better productivity.

**Administrative & Management Gains.** On-demand video conferencing offers significant benefits to IT staff, since managing the technology is so much simpler. For one thing, IT is no longer required to set up or support the conferences themselves, freeing them up to focus on more strategic IT initiatives.

Furthermore, a good on-demand conferencing service like Easyvc will deliver significant improvements in management, performance and control capabilities, making IT's job easier and more successful thanks to reduced setup, configuration and resource requirements, as well as lower maintenance costs. The technology should also free administrators to remotely manage conferencing from anywhere, anytime, as well as reduce the need for (and time spent) training IT staffers and end users.