



PLANNING A VIDEO-CONFERENCE



You might want to know

3M Meeting Network

Whether you're planning your first videoconference or you consider yourself an old hand, there are some things you should know to ensure it's successful. Effective face-to-face meetings with colleagues take planning, such as setting meeting objectives, creating an agenda or preparing and distributing materials. With videoconferencing, you should consider all of these things and more.

Meeting Basics

The first thing you'll want to do when you decide that any meeting is necessary is to outline your meeting objectives and create an agenda. What are the desirable outcomes for this meeting? Will you need to have a Q&A session or to set aside time for brainstorming? Outlining the direction of the meeting will help you keep the meeting on track and participants will know in advance what is expected of them.

You already consider others' schedules when planning a face-to-face meeting. When choosing a time for a videoconference, be sure to consider the different time zones of other participating sites. Try to avoid meetings during other participants' lunchtime or before or after their regular business hours. Once you have the time set, send out your invitation or announcement to all the participants, along with the meeting objectives and agenda. It's also useful to choose a spokesperson or primary contact for each site who can handle equipment setup, operate the videoconferencing system and hand out any last-minute materials.

Equipment Needs

Reviewing your agenda will give you a good idea of what tools and equipment you'll need in the various rooms besides the videoconferencing system. If Q&A sessions, brainstorming sessions or presentations are scheduled, consider using easels and flip charts, digital whiteboards, multimedia projectors or dataconferencing systems.

If your videoconference involves three or more sites, you'll need to connect through a bridging service unless your videoconferencing system comes equipped with a multipoint control unit. When a bridging service is used, each site simply dials into an 800 number and an operator connects all the sites.

Make sure all the equipment for each site is reserved well in advance. Notify your appointed site contact to make sure they are involved in the coordination and setup. Lastly, get a telephone number for the telephone in the meeting room at each site in case last-minute technical difficulties occur. This way, you can either reschedule or continue your meeting over the phone.

Preparing Visual Aids

Good presentation design and implementation are a must for every presentation, no matter what the delivery medium. If you're showing your presentation to remote sites through your videoconferencing system, these design rules will help make the presentation more effective:

- Compose your slides or visuals using 24-point type or larger. Sans serif fonts are best. Use

upper- and lowercase characters, with no more than six lines per screen.

- Black type on a light blue background has the best visual appearance and readability. Avoid using red fonts, as they appear to "bleed" on the screen, and avoid underlining words because it makes them harder to read when presented on a television screen.
- When composing your presentation, set your computer's display settings to VGA (640 x 480) resolution. The standard TV resolution that videoconferencing systems use is even less than VGA, and your graphics will be compressed to fit, losing any fine detail. This can be a big problem if your presentation is composed using high resolution computer settings like SVGA (800 x 600) or XGA (1024 x 768).

The last item to remember is to distribute copies of your presentation materials or handouts to all participants in advance of the videoconference. If any last-minute changes occur, fax or email them to the appointed site contact to be distributed at the beginning of the videoconference, or use dataconferencing tools to show the changes in "real time."

Make the meeting.

Related Reading
Cyber Meeting: How to Link People and Technology in Your Organization, James L. Creighton and James W.R. Adams. ANA-COM, New York, 1998.

Effective Videoconferencing: Techniques for Better Business Meetings, Lynn Diamond. Crisp Publications, 1996.

Helpful Hints

The best reasons for holding a videoconference:

- Relationship building and management
- Team formation
- Problem solving
- Working on divisive or contentious issues
- Negotiating

The benefits of using videoconferencing:

- Reduces travel costs
- Allows you to meet with remote team members more often
- Reduces travel stresses: time away from family, work piling up, handling personal responsibilities

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