# MEETING FACE-TO-FACE THROUGH VIDEO

## 3M Meeting Network

We all have experienced the sense of inclusion that comes from being part of a meeting. Face-to-face meetings allow people to come together with a shared purpose and accomplish their goals through discussion with one another.

But what's so special about actually seeing the other participants? Some studies and books, including Doyle & Strauss' *How To Make Meetings Work*, have shown that people are more likely to buy into a concept if they can see the person who is presenting it. And because visual data can be shared in real time, face-to-face meetings can reduce the time it takes to complete the most daunting projects. Despite their many conveniences, phones, fax machines and e-mail don't come close to delivering the collaborative energy of a face-to-face meeting because so many of the sociological communication cues are missing. Yet while high travel costs often rule out assembling far-flung employees and clients for frequent meetings, videoconferencing can be used to recreate the synergistic energy of the face-to-face meeting.

### Videoconferencing Technology Hits Its Stride

Early videoconferencing equipment was complex, difficult to use and very expensive, with systems costing $50,000 and more. Manufacturers used proprietary audio/video algorithms, which created incompatibilities with systems from other makers. What's more, most company networks simply didn't have bandwidth to handle the mega-data requirements of video-conferencing systems, which sometimes resulted in choppy audio and video.

Manufacturers have been working to address these problems in the last decade. New products will offer easier installation, have simpler on-screen controls and deliver superior performance — all at a lower cost. Network bandwidth is also improving, as companies invest in the high-speed lines necessary for modern communication. Most important, major equipment manufacturers are eliminating cross-product compatibility problems by agreeing to follow

new industry communications standards. As prices continue to fall, it is clear that videoconferencing will soon become as indispensable as phones and faxes for supporting remote meetings.

**Two Ways To Go**

Videoconferencing systems come in two flavors: personal and group. The personal systems, which plug into your PC, cost under $500 and allow you to conveniently share files (dataconferencing) in addition to videoconferencing. These very low-end systems, however, still deliver choppy, low-resolution video images.

Group videoconferencing systems, however, do a much better job of reproducing the face-to-face meeting experience by using large TV monitors or multimedia projectors to show remote participants as though they were in the room with you. Standard now are controllable cameras with high-resolution optics and enhanced sound systems to make the experience even more natural. This makes group videoconferencing systems the most sensible solution when three or more people meet. Fortunately, many current-generation personal and group videoconferencing systems are compatible with each other, making it easy for a group to add a person who is sitting at their desk.

**Where Can You Use Videoconferencing?**

Videoconferencing can be used in just about any situation that would warrant a meeting. These include weekly staff meetings and presentations to prospective clients. Creative sessions, bargaining sessions and training sessions can also be delivered via videoconferencing. While videoconferencing cannot completely replace all of the natural qualities of a face-to-face meeting, participants can see each other in the discussion and share important visual aids. And having access to the nonverbal part of communication greatly enhances the quality of communication and fosters collaboration.

Perhaps the biggest advantage to using videoconferencing systems is that they often incorporate and easily integrate with other vital business technologies like spreadsheets and presentation software. And with recent technology breakthroughs, all this is becoming absolutely simple, obviously useful and quite affordable.

*Make the meeting.*

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

**How To Make Meetings Work,** Michael Doyle and David Straus, The Berkley Publishing Group, New York, NY 10016.

**Internet Telephony for Dummies,** Daniel D. Briere, Patrick J. Hurley, IDG Books, 1996.

**Helpful Hints**
Use third party bridging services to do the work of connecting more than two sites into the same video-conference.

At the beginning of a videoconfer-ence make sure that participants introduce themselves.

To simulate eye contact with remote meeting members, looking directly at the camera as often as you can when speaking.