



REMOTE MEETING PREPARATION



Tools
of the
trade

3M Meeting Network

Want to have a better audioconference or videoconference? If so, then pay attention to these four factors: scheduling, distribution, equipment and protocol. Plans that avert potential problems in these areas will go a long way toward compensating for lack of physical proximity among participants.

Scheduling people and facilities.

Use email, phone, fax or other means to inform each participant of the meeting and to schedule their attendance. Allow plenty of time for juggling individual calendars. A good rule of thumb is to give yourself one full week for scheduling — adjust upward or downward based on the number of participants and the complexity of their schedules.

While scheduling and verifying participants' attendance, make sure they all know where they will be conferencing from and that they know how to use their equipment to "call into" the conference.

Planning material distribution.

It's easy to lose track of time when planning meetings that include remote participants. It's tempting to work on materials up to the last minute, but you may run out of time to distribute them to participants at remote sites. This is a sure way to make remote people feel even less included.

To ensure that no one feels left out:

1. Use a reliable distribution system for meeting materials. This can be overnight mail, fax, email, or real-time dataconferencing — as long as it works.
2. Set a deadline for materials submitted to you for distribution that allows for fouled faxes or slow networks.

3. Establish a procedure to verify receipt of materials by each conferee or each site.
4. Check the status of everyone's materials at the start of the meeting. Use fax or real-time dataconferencing to distribute any corrections if required.

Check equipment.

Test all the equipment used for the conference prior to the scheduled starting time. Make sure operation of the equipment is:

- Self-explanatory,
- Familiar to at least one participant who has agreed to operate the technology, or
- Assisted by an expert on location.

Protocols and facilitation.

Since some participants can't see each other, audioconferences often require simple protocols and/or facilitation. It can be hard to tell which voice belongs to whom or when it is appropriate to speak, especially if participants are not already acquainted with each other. Videoconferencing cushions the hard edges caused by lack of physical proximity, since participants are visible to each

other. But even the effectiveness of videoconferences can be increased by using a few protocols.

One highly effective protocol is simply to have participants begin speaking by giving their name and location: "This is Larry in Toronto. I want to ask. . ." It is also helpful to establish a speaking order that relates to the meeting's agenda.

Protocols for asking questions will enhance effective communication and will strengthen the sense of "connection" between participants.

Lastly, when there are many participants gathered in one location to conference with remote individuals (or groups) by phone, a designated facilitator may be useful. The facilitator can remind the large group to include the remote participants in the discussion and to attend to their more limited opportunity to provide input. A good facilitator will also check in with remote participants every few minutes to solicit their input for the gathered group.

By tending to scheduling, material distribution, equipment and protocols, you can ensure your remote meetings are flawless and productive.

Make the meeting.

Related Reading
Effective Videoconferencing: Techniques for Better Business Meetings; Lynn Diamond & Stephanie Roberts; Crisp Publications; 1996.

Virtual Teams: Reaching Across Space, Time, and Organizations with Technology; Jessica Lipnack & Jeffrey Stamps; John Wiley & Sons; 1997.

Useful Tools

- 3M™ Audioconferencing System ACS3000
- 3M™ Dataconferencing System DCS3000
- 3M™ Videoconferencing System VCS3000

Helpful Hints

Almost every major long-distance telephone company offers conferencing services that make it easy to share audio, video and data between multiple locations.

Reserve enough time before the meeting starts to make sure your conferencing equipment is working at all locations.

Have a designated technical contact at each location to help with any last-minute problems.

1-800-952-4059

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