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## THE MANY BENEFITS OF VIDEO CONFERENCING

Almost everyone is familiar with video conferencing today, and for good reason. Video conferencing is convenient. Video conferencing saves money. Video conferencing makes money. And it is so much easier than it used to be.

I know because I installed one of the first video conferencing systems for a former employer when I ran the information systems department of a large company. In those days that meant a very substantial investment in equipment and installing a dedicated ISDN line (that was when 56kpbs was considered blindingly fast!). At first it wasn't easy to convince people to sit in front of a 25-inch TV for a 30-minute video conference instead of traveling and giving up those nice travel reimbursements, but soon they realized the many benefits. The rest is history.

Today, of course, video conferencing has become part of doing business. There is no longer a need to waste time and money traveling, and the technology has advanced to a point where there is a solution for every conferencing need. Audio, web and video all combine to provide cutting edge conferencing solutions tailored to anything from one-on-one to large conferences with Q&A sessions and private chat. There are even solutions specific to industries such as accounting, banking, insurance or legal.

Why is video conferencing so successful when other technologies have come and gone? Because it is convenient and cost-effective. At a time of skyrocketing costs for gas, air travel and hotel accommodations, conducting video conference meetings makes more sense than ever. And in addition to saving time and money, video conferencing from one's office or board room is a lot less stressful than a meeting after a day of hassling with cabs, airport security, delayed flights and bungled hotel reservations.

But cutting edge conferencing has grown beyond mere time and cost savings; it has become a business opportunity and strategic advantage. Conferences can be recorded and made available for call-in playback. Moderation tools allow for large conferences with operator services, toll-free audio call-in and unique PINs to track attendance. For especially important calls, conferencing companies and service providers can assist for a professional touch, making sure that everything goes right.

The sky's the limit when it comes to new and exciting uses for web casting and video conferencing. We've seen new product announcements using the technology, reaching far more potential customers than conventional press conferences. Webinars provide new ways of training people or making sales presentations. And today's office tools can easily be integrated into a conference. Sharing PowerPoint presentations, documents and even applications is easy, as are multiparty video and virtual whiteboards.

Best of all, video conferencing no longer requires a large capital investment. Web, video and audio conferencing service providers can quickly get you up and running, often without setup fees, steep per minute charges or pesky contracts. With all that's available today, the question is no longer if a business can afford professional, cutting edge video conferencing, but whether it can afford not to use it.

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