THE NEW 'RULES' FOR VIDEOCONFERENCING

Etiquette isn't keeping Americans from video chatting. Still, read on for a few tips to smooth those work calls.

By Eric Lai,
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In his celebrated novel *Infinite Jest,* the late satirist David Foster Wallace imagined a reality where video chatting quickly rose, then plummeted, in popularity. Why?

Because video calling made everyone overly self-conscious about their appearance—about their clothes, facial features, whether they had a piece of spinach stuck in their teeth, etc. It became so stressful and unpleasant that users chose to hide their faces behind masks. Wallace may have been a comic genius, but in this case, his predictions are more comic than genius. For sure, video chatting is becoming more mainstream. Call it the "FaceTime Effect," after the popular iOS app. But rather than falling again, it appears to be creating interest in mobile and desktop video chatting for work.

According to a summer 2012 survey by Harris Interactive sponsored by Avaya, 40 percent of American adults have participated in a video call or videoconference. 21 percent of American adults have used video calling for customer client meetings, while 16 percent have used it during a job interview or an employment termination.

And also contrary to Wallace, Americans don't seem ridden with angst over their appearance on camera. The opposite seems true. For instance, 20 percent of Americans say they would dress MORE CASUALLY for a work-related video call than an in-person meeting. The percentage of business video slobs rises among younger, single people.

There's more. More than 10 percent of American adults say that business video chatting while in the bathroom is A-OK, while 25 percent think the bedroom is fine. **What about a videoconference while you're poolside, lounging in a bikini or, horrors, a Speedo?** More than 35 percent of employed—yes, EMPLOYED—U.S. adults think that's kosher.

Fortunately, not everyone's so relaxed. Just like '80s female office workers who blended power suits and Reeboks, an increasing number (one out of seven) of women are donning work attire on top and casual attire on the bottom for video calls. Think a nice silk blouse and old, faded sweatpants.

What are some other emerging new "rules" of videoconferencing? Here are a few:

"Hold my videoconferencing calls, Gina."

Source: *The New Yorker.*

- **Light yourself decently.** Close those bright windows behind you that leave your face dark and inscrutable. That defeats the whole purpose.

- Your video camera and screen are rarely in the same place. So when listening to the other person, **look into the CAMERA**, not at the screen, as much as possible. That will confirm to the other person that you are listening intently and help smooth the conversation.

- Some people, when they get on camera, **over-gesture** or move their hands frantically. Don't.

- While videoconferencing, **don't check your email**, watch YouTube, smoke, eat with your mouth open, or do other things that would be considered rude IRL (in real life).

- Don't wear **distracting clothing**. So no Hawaiian shirts, overly chunky jewelry, or loud sports team jerseys. Actually, that's a good rule for LIFE.●

Eric Lai is Editorial Director at Avaya. When he video chats for work, he likes to pair a blue dress shirt with acid-washed jean shorts.