# Video Collaboration Trends & Benefits

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***Discussion Transcript****

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***Video Collaboration Trends & Benefits***

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Patte Johnson: Thank you for joining us for this podcast on Video Collaboration Trends & Benefits. My name is Patte Johnson. I am pleased to introduce another of our podcast series for you. Today we will be joined by Gary Audin, our industry analyst on unified communications here at Webtorials®. And Gary will be chatting with Bob Romano, the Vice President of Global Marketing for Radvision, an Avaya Company. I'll turn it right over to you, Gary.

Gary Audin: Thank you, Patte. Bob, being in marketing means you have to really look at the market. Video conferencing has been around for years, but what has changed in the market recently that makes it even more important to discuss it?

Bob Romano: Well, you're exactly right, video conferencing has been around for almost 30 years now. And some interesting things have happened that have really changed the marketplace. And I would say probably the most significant was the advent of high definition video conferencing. That so dramatically changed the experience to where people could actually use video conferencing in a conference room, be able to see everybody with a widescreen and high definition resolution, that you really saw a jump in the video conferencing industry. This was in the 2007 timeframe.

The second thing that's happened that I think is very important is we've moved video conferencing from being just a conference room phenomenon to allowing participation from desktops and mobile devices. And the whole

concept of bring your own device to work and use it for conferencing capabilities is now applying to video conferencing with technologies that we brought to the market that allow participants to be able to join a conference – voice, video, and data portions of a conference – from their desktop or mobile device.

Gary Audin: Thanks. I've been hearing a lot of people justify video conferencing on reducing travel costs. But I would think there are other advantages as well. Do you have some to suggest?

Bob Romano: Well, you know, it's interesting when we looked at video conferencing—and we've been selling it for years. Obviously a hard return on investment was something that customers were looking for. And, clearly, being able to have meetings across distance using video conferencing without having to travel was one of the ways of justifying video conferencing.

But to me, interestingly enough, the biggest value isn't meetings that you do over video that you might otherwise have traveled to. It's more the recurring meetings where it's very helpful to have the visual component to it. So, for example, almost every sales organization today has remote sales people because it's important to be able to access national or global markets, and so the sales people are out there. And when you have a weekly sales meeting, doing it by an audio conference and sending spreadsheets around as a forecast is not nearly as effective as having a video conference where everybody sees everybody. And often times watching the reaction of people that aren't speaking is more interesting than not. And so it's really to make recurring meetings much more productive by adding a visual component to it that I think is the compelling advantage.

Gary Audin: I worked with video conferencing back in the ISDN days, and it seemed like I needed technical support the entire time I did the conference. But it seems like this should be as simple as making a phone call. Are we there yet?

Bob Romano: We're getting very close. I'd argue “yes” in many cases. For example, what we've implemented at Radvision and Avaya is the concept of a virtual room. And essentially it's the same concept as an audio conference. Everybody has a dial-in number, and in the case of a video conference, it's even easier. It actually is in an Outlook invite where you simply click on the link. And if you do that from a desktop, or you do it from a mobile device, the required components to be able to join get pushed to the client and you can join the call.

So, effectively, it's the same as what we see in audio conferencing or in web conferencing today. The same capability is being brought forward in video conferencing that allows you simply to click on a link and join it. You don't have to worry about downloading any special licensed clients, you don't have to worry about firewall traversal. So many of the things that precluded you from getting into a video conference before have now been taken care of automatically within the system.

Gary Audin: I know that video conferencing has been accepted in large businesses, but it's slow getting into the SMB. Do you have any reasons why the SMB is not picking up this technology quickly?

Bob Romano: There were two main reasons for this. With video conferencing, it did require that you needed to traverse network boundaries. And as video conferencing moved to the IP network, there were some issues with being able to get through the firewalls between corporations. And so, within video conferencing, it really ended up being inside a large enterprise where they would talk to each other with many locations. And that had great value to them.

The SMB market certainly sees the value of video conferencing. The problem with it was it needed to be able to get through firewalls. And now that we've developed technologies to allow that to happen automatically, it's much more deployable to the SMB.

The second issue that we had was in order to be able to do video conferencing requires some network components that were in some cases too expensive or too complicated for the SMBs to install. And we solved that with two different ways. One is we've created very simple solutions that don't require the high capital outlay or the technical expertise to install them. And then secondly, you see more and more of video conferencing being offered as a service, where the SMB can go in and buy the service as they use it, as opposed to having to install the necessary equipment themselves.

Gary Audin: Both of those reasons are an awful lot about bring your own device. And everyone keeps talking about it and it's quite a phenomenon, and it probably is going to impact video adoption. What are the advantages and what are the "gotchas" that businesses should be aware of when they do BYOD video?

Bob Romano: Well, for so many years, enterprises, particularly the IT organizations, really felt they needed to control the environment, and for good reason – for security, for ease of deployment, for providing a good quality service. But the concept of customers, if you will, or employees wanting to use their own devices for a wide variety of things – to access email, to be able to use them for voice calls, and more and more for conferencing, including video conferencing – is a phenomenon that's not going to go away. And as I mentioned to you, we have developed technologies that allow you to be able to conference from an iPad, from an Android device, from a desktop, from a Mac – from virtually any platform or any operating system. And this is really what the market wants.

So I think that the value is clear to the users. They now have the capability to be able to join a conference from whatever device is available to them at the time and whatever network that device is connected to. And from an IT perspective, since this is a phenomenon that's being embraced across a number of different applications – not just video conferencing – it's something

that they are embracing. And I think that for all it's a good thing. It will provide better access and better communications and better collaboration environment.

Gary Audin: But do you have any significant "gotchas" we should learn about?

Bob Romano: Well, I think that it is clear that if you're going to provide a BYOD capability, it has to be across all of the different devices. And there's a wide variety of user devices out there, so you can't just do it on a PC platform on the Windows operating system. You also have to do the Apple and Mac operating system. You can't just do it on an iOS or the Apple mobile operating system. You also have to do it on Android. So from our perspective, you should have a consistent capability across all of those different platforms in order to really be able to address the needs of the market.

Gary Audin: Next question, there seems to be some confusion about the difference between web conferencing and video conferencing. And then when you explain what the difference is, which one would be better for us?

Bob Romano: So it is interesting that when you take a look at audio conferencing, web conferencing, and video conferencing, all three of them were really separate communications and, in many cases, ran on separate networks. Audio conferencing on the PSTN network, and web conferencing on the internet, really pioneered by companies like WebEx and others. And then video conferencing was done originally over ISDN and then moved to the IP network. But the concept is that if you really want to have a collaboration meeting, you want all three of those capabilities. And so what you're starting to see is each one of those individual capabilities or services or offering starting to add components of the other.

So web conferencing is starting to add elements of video conferencing. Video conferencing is starting to add certainly elements of web conferencing, or data presentation or sharing. Ultimately the goal – and this is clearly Avaya's view of the world – is that we need a completely unified solution that allows users to be able to have a conference with any of those capabilities. And so you can add them on an ad hoc basis. You know, we could start a call with instant messaging, "How are you?" Add audio capability to discuss, "Let me show you this presentation." Add video, and then add other users to it. It should be completely seamless to the user as to whether that's a web conferencing application or video conferencing or an audio conferencing. That's the real value of unified communications, and that is the vision that Avaya has – to be able to provide that as a unified experience to the users.

Gary Audin: And I think the word seamless would be one of the things you would add here to move from one media to another media, or expand or contract your conference.

Bob Romano: It's absolutely right, and there are two components to it. One is at the network level. At the network level, the idea of being able to have a single call control, probably built on SIP (Session Oriented Protocol), has tremendous benefit to the network level and bandwidth management and a single management system.

But there's also the concept of the unified experience at the user level. And even though some of the individual technologies may remain independent, the unification at the user level would say, "I have a seamless experience, just like you described, where I have a single user interface and I can reach out to anybody and communicate with them and collaborate with them using any one of these capabilities."

Gary Audin: One of the things that I think for some people, is a competitor to what you're talking about are FaceTime and Skype. They are free. Why not just use those instead of using an Avaya product?

Bob Romano: You're absolutely right. Some of the consumer products that are available are very functional. You've just mentioned FaceTime and Skype, and tons and tons of people use those. I think the Skype numbers are staggering – 600 million registered users and quite a bit of capability. What those lack are some of the requirements for an enterprise-grade solution. And that would include the management of them – which is a critical component if you're going to be using resources on the network – for an administrator to be able to add users, manage users, and control all the bandwidth capabilities and resource utilization.

And the second part of it is, is that there is a real requirement in the video market, not just to provide a desktop capability to individual users, but to also tightly integrate it into the existing installed base of video conferencing systems. And those are all running on the H.323 standard, and full interoperability between those is critical. And that's what the Radvision/Avaya/Scopia platform brings to the market, is an enterprise-grade, manageable and interoperable solution that allows customers to be able to maintain their investment in room video conferencing and extend it with the scale necessary to be able to provide it to the users in the organization.

Gary Audin: You brought up the word interoperable, and I've noticed over the years that many of the solutions for video conferencing collaboration can't talk to each other. Is that getting better or worse?

Bob Romano: I'd say a bit of both to be honest with you. In the pure video conferencing market, the industry, amongst all the vendors, had done a pretty good job of providing interoperability. And there was a lot of effort to ensure that as products got rolled out, they were done under the agreed-to standards and that there was a tremendous amount of interoperability testing to ensure that they worked. So that's good.

The other side of it, though, is that there are a number of other environments that are adding video to it, and customers want to be able to utilize those also. We had just talked about Skype as an example. And with that number of users that are familiar with Skype, many of them have said, "Hey, why can't I use Skype to join a video call?" And so there is a requirement to start adding interoperability capability between these difference video environments.

That's one of the things that Radvision has really focused on a lot. We have gateways that allow you to interact with the major unified communication platforms in the market that have video capabilities, such as Microsoft Lync or IBM Sametime or Google and their video environment. So, it's really going both ways. I think because video is becoming so important and so recognized, there are a number of different environments that are being offered in the market, and the interoperability between those are something that customers are asking for. And that's something that Radvision has focused on for a long time: providing that capability.

Gary Audin: I've noticed over the years we've been moving from a hardware approach to more of a software approach for this conferencing. Which is more viable, and why?

Bob Romano: You know, it's often characterized as hardware versus software, but it's really slightly different than that. It's really about transcoding or switched, and I'll explain what I mean.

In the video conferencing world, the way that it works is it brings in all of the devices, decodes their video, mixes it into a nice composite imagine, and then sends it back to everybody at their native capability. The advantage to that architecture is that you can bring in very disparate devices – high end telepresence rooms, mobile devices, conference rooms, and other desktop clients – and they can all participate at their own capability and still get back a very rich video experience with all the participants displayed in the window.

The alternate to that is a switched environment where the video is just routed through the network, which is arguably more scalable, and that's usually referred to or looked at as a software solution. That's more scalable, but today doesn't have the richness of experience that the transcoding world has. So at Radvision and Avaya, one of the values of the merger between these two companies is the ability to bring both of those capabilities together and to provide a unified capability where you can use them together. And so, where you need a very rich video experience, then you'll use a transcoding MCU, which typically utilizes hardware. And where you need a switched and highly scalable environment, you'll use the switched environment and will allow those two to be able to work together with each other.

Gary Audin: Well, I have one more question. You've made a lot of comments here and recommendations. What do you think are the most important takeaways from this podcast?

Bob Romano: The most important is that there are some really, really good video collaboration solutions in the market today, and the richness of the experience dramatically changed the way that companies are able to be able to communicate and collaborate across distance. No question, the world is becoming smaller and it's a requirement for customers to be able to reach global markets, to be able to source products from global suppliers, and to be able to utilize a much more global workforce. And the ability to be able to reach across distance and cultures with a collaboration platform is something that's, I think, going to be critical to being successful in the market. The visual collaboration platforms, the Scopia conferencing platform and the Avaya, or an AAC7, platform provide that capability. And we now have solutions that are affordable and scalable, easy to deploy, and it is absolutely the time to go and look at those and ensure that you'll be able to provide your employees with the best collaboration platform in the market.

Gary Audin: Well, thanks a lot, Bob, and I'm looking forward to our next podcast. Patte?

Patte Johnson: I'd like to thank both of you for this most insightful discussion that you shared with us. And to our listeners and readers, I cordially invite you to continue the discussion and share your thoughts and opinions with our interactive discussion at the website. Thank you.

THE END

** The discussion has been edited slightly for clarity and length.*

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