



## Business to Consumer Videoconferencing (B2C)

# THE FINAL FRONTIER

Video is a humanizing experience, one that engages customers much more than a disembodied voice on the telephone. But a video call on a PC, tablet or smartphone isn't just a deeper connection, it's a multi-media connection, one that a sales rep, customer service agent, or technical support rep can use to improve retention and comprehension by sharing data.

Friction Surf Shop, in New Smyrna Beach, Florida, has outfitted its staff with iPads equipped with Apple's FaceTime (a video-calling software application for supported mobile devices) to connect online shoppers with in-store reps. Decker Dreyer, the company's managing director, summed up the benefits in an article on RetailCustomerExperience.com: "We could beat them [competitors] on our home court with experienced sales reps that know our products and live the brand," he said. "When you dial into Friction you don't just get a customer service call center, you get guys who represent, in every way, what our products are about. We've found a way to expand the hip little indie shop feel into online retail."

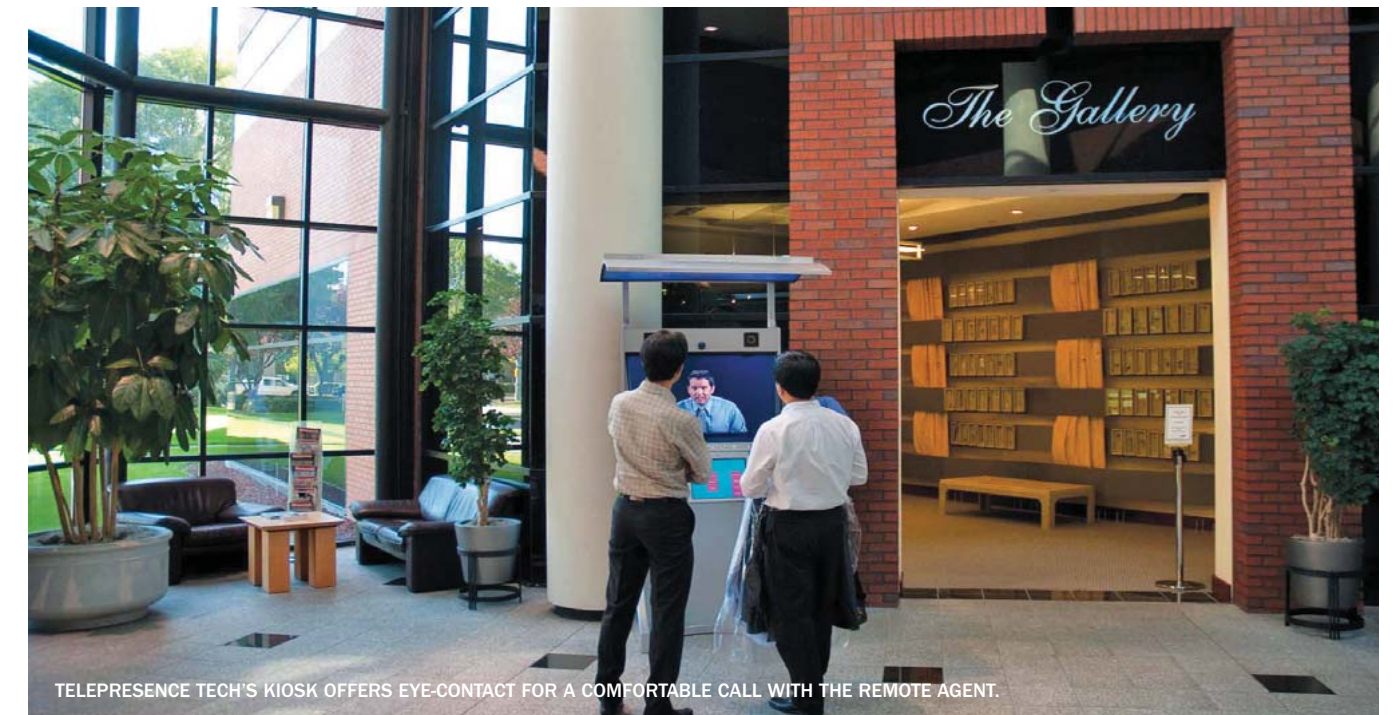
For many years the limitations of the public Internet made videoconferencing a mostly internal communications tool. And even then, getting a quality connection between two locations within the same company could be a problem. But recent advances in VC technology, camera and computing hardware, as well as the reliability of the public Internet have eliminated many of these hurdles.

professional, business-class videoconferencing equipment in their homes. However, most consumers have a computer that can at least support an acceptable videoconferencing experience along the lines of Skype and FaceTime.

Businesses can connect to the customer's computer in two ways:

**The Guest Client:** Most of the current software-based, business-class videoconferencing solutions include some form of guest desktop client. Typically a user within the company can send an email invite to a customer that includes a link to install the guest client and join the meeting. The power, flexibility and ease of use of the guest client make the difference between a good B2C and a great B2C solution.

**Interop with Commercial VC:** Very few typical consumers have access to professional business VC, but everyone can easily access Gtalk and Skype, and soon, WebRTC (please see our article on WebRTC in this magazine for more details). In fact, hundreds of millions of people already have these clients installed. New B2C services offer cloud-based



TELEPRESENCE TECH'S KIOSK OFFERS EYE-CONTACT FOR A COMFORTABLE CALL WITH THE REMOTE AGENT.

### STEPPING OUTSIDE

Business first enjoyed the increased impact, productivity, trust building and connectedness of visual communications with internal colleagues through B2B communications. (For more detail on B2B, please read the companion piece to this article.) Companies have since realized these same benefits when using B2B VC with partners. But when it comes to their most important relationships—those with their clients—most businesses still rely on the telephone.

Even if all the issues facing B2B (security, interop, firewalls, dial plans, experience) were completely solved today, it wouldn't begin to address the number one problem blocking B2C videoconferencing: the fact that most consumers don't have

meeting rooms, which can connect to these consumer solutions, as well as traditional business solutions. These new services are built around the concept of connecting anyone, anywhere, anytime.

### Business Models and Applications

#### EXPERT CONNECTIONS

Friction Surf Shop isn't the only business out there doing B2C. Several high-profile Wall Street banks are running pilots with B2C services, including installing telepresence displays in banks to connect customers in the local branch to product specialists. These initial programs generally provide "high-touch" service to big clients, but they're expected to serve a greater set of banking customers as they grow. The real power benefit here is the ability

# TELEPRESENCE OPTIONS

## Cloud Videoconferencing Interop Services



	EncoreB2B	Blue Jeans	easyConference	MyEasyVision	OpenVideo	MIV	VNET Connect	SeeVogh	Lentaris	The VideoCloud	MeetMe Cloud VC Service	VidyoWay	Yorktel VideoCloud
<b>Basic Features</b>													
Deployment Options	Cloud or Hardware Based	Cloud Based Only	Cloud Based Only	Cloud Based Only	Cloud or Hardware Based	Cloud or Hardware Based	Cloud or Hardware Based	Cloud or Hardware Based	Cloud or Hardware Based	Cloud or Hardware Based	Cloud Based only	Cloud or Hardware Based	Cloud Based only
Virtualized Platform	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meet Me Rooms	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Permanent "Standing" Rooms	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Virtual Room Size Support	Up to 25 participants in a single conference	Currently the hard cap that we set on the service is 25 participants.	Up to 28 participants on screen.	Up to 25 participants. Can be increased.	Up to 25 participants in a single conference.	Up to 20 participants in a single conference. Peak load.	5 interactive participants. (Possible to allocation during ads)	50 participant video streams plus 50 screen shares plus an audience of 1,000	Varies based on customer subscription level.	Point-to-point, 4, 6, 9, 16, and 25 way rooms.	Standard room sizes are 5, 8 and 20 participants. Larger sizes are available upon request.	Up to 25 participants in a single conference.	Varies based on customer needs.
Meeting Moderation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Device Registration (Easy Dialing)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
White-Glove / Concierge	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Data Sharing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Group Text Chat	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗		✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
iPad / Mobile Support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Telephone Dial-In	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Integration / Interop</b>													
H.323 / H.264	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
SIP	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ISDN / H.320	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓		✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Microsoft Lync	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓		✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Consumer VC (Skype / Google)	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓		✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
<b>Guest Invite</b>													
Proprietary Client / Web App	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓		✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Browser Based (WebRTC, etc)	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
<b>Pricing</b>													
Description of Pricing Models	AGT offers a variety of options including virtual meeting rooms and virtual MCU ports.	Blue Jeans Networks has a variety of offerings designed to fit the customers needs.	Flat monthly, based on room size. Contact qualified resellers for exact quotes.	Flat hourly. Starts at \$9. Flat daily. Starts at \$29. Flat monthly. Starts at \$49.	Monthly Unlimited Use Plans \$199 - 6 person room \$799 - Unlimited room size Monthly Per Minute Plans \$149 - 500 minutes \$399 - 1500 minutes \$1150 - 5000 minutes	Free with subscription. Pay as you go rates with no fee start at our (with 2 lines at 640x480	th all MIVNET options.	Annual unlimited community license \$10k.	Teliris endpoint users: Monthly subscription per virtual room. Non-Teliris users: Monthly subscription per set of ports. Pricing details available on request.	VideoCentric offers tailored solutions so pricing greatly varies.	Monthly Unlimited Use Rates start at: \$149 - 5 participant room Final pricing from channel partners may vary. Full pricing details are at: <a href="http://www.vidtel.com/services/vidtel-meetme/meetme-pricing/">http://www.vidtel.com/services/vidtel-meetme/meetme-pricing/</a>	VidyoWay B2B inter-connectivity service is FREE.	Yorktel has multiple offerings to fit different customer's needs.

to provide a face-to-face experience with the right expert for a customer's needs at any given moment.

#### VIDEO KIOSKS

AT&T has installed video kiosks at a number of its retail stores, enabling video talks with specialists on a variety of topics in a growing number of geographies. Texas energy company First Choice Power is trialing Telepresence Tech kiosks in malls to provide an eye-contact experience between potential customers and the company's agents.

#### VIDEO-EQUIPPED FIELD SERVICE TECHNICIANS

Cloud Office Manager, covered recently by TelepresenceOptions.com, gives field service technicians the tools to connect customers to a video call center ... and to a company salesperson. When techs show up at customers' doors and get to fixing the problem at hand, the laptops they bring along establish video connections with sales pros who consult with the client about additional services.

#### TELEMEDICINE

Andy Howard, a consultant with the Human Productivity Lab, is working on a video call center for a health maintenance organization to roll out later this year that will field video calls from their insured and route them to the proper specialist. Howard says it's only a matter of time before telemedicine ramps up to widespread usage in the United States. "Driving to a doctor's office for one of these visits end up being useless anyway, the patient could be diagnosed over video without the time and expense of the drive and waiting time in the office," he says. "They can get their issue resolved more quickly. The

doctor gets to be more productive. And the insurance company doesn't have to pay for that visit, so it can even turn a profit by facilitating the video call."

## How to Connect

Here are a few of the ways to connect with your customers.

### 1. INTEROP CLOUD SERVICE PROVIDERS

This class of service provider only came into existence in recent years, and is now one of the hottest segments of the videoconferencing marketplace. The chart on the following page includes several providers of note. (Check TelepresenceOptions.com for updates). While a deep discussion of all providers is beyond the scope of this article, we can briefly discuss two pioneers in the field: Blue Jeans Network and Vidtel.

#### BLUE JEANS

This company lets users host meetings that contain both traditional endpoints and Skype clients. With a particularly clever (and often controversial) marketing approach, the company has enjoyed constant buzz about its groundbreaking service. Buzz aside, Blue Jeans continues to push development hard, seeming to come out every few months with something completely new, such as Lync integration, advanced collaboration features and mobile capabilities, as well as some new layout controls providing a better experience for users watching both video and shared content. Blue Jeans is a start-up, but it provides the quality look and feel you expect from a company with some resources. The result is a professional and "ready-for-prime-time" user experience.

#### VIDTEL

Despite the inevitable comparisons, this small startup with impressive interop technology takes a very different approach from Blue Jeans. For one: its cloud gateway service. Organizations with existing MCUs may want to add interop without having to shift to a new cloud meeting room service. The company lets clients use their existing MCUs to host the meetings and the Vidtel cloud for the interop piece. Vidtel also doesn't employ the same level of consumer-facing marketing, focused instead on building and supporting partner relationships with diverse companies representing both go-to-market and technology partners. Some notable partnerships include:

- Solutionz: Video integrator/solutions provider
- ACT: Conferencing service provider
- Intelpeer: Telephony service with SIP trunking and video
- AVer: Equipment manufacturer
- Compunetix: MCU provider
- Burstpoint: Streaming and recording Solution

Don't mistake Vidtel's lower key approach for a lack of activity. The company is moving quickly in both the development and improvement of its platform, with almost 100 partners worldwide selling the service. The company is extremely technology focused and working to lead in a number of directions, so many in fact that CEO Scott Wharton has become synonymous with WebRTC.

### 2. GUEST CLIENTS

Videoconferencing endpoint vendors may not see these cloud interop services as a threat, but as a positive force encouraging adoption, which in turn will help them sell their own products. However, that doesn't mean these vendors will just give up the B2C market without making some play of their own. While some VC players are coming up with interop B2C cloud services of their own (Polycom's CloudAXIS being a notable example), others are simply encouraging their users to invite consumers via guest client to their B2B cloud services.

#### VIDYOWAY

VidyoWay was originally created to disrupt the B2B market by providing free cloud interop that supported both traditional hardware video systems and Vidyo's software-based solution. But anyone with a Vidyo account can invite guests to join a VidyoWay meeting room via the VidyoDesktop guest client. Therefore, for Vidyo account owners, the VidyoWay B2B solution can easily be used as a B2C solution.

#### ZOOM

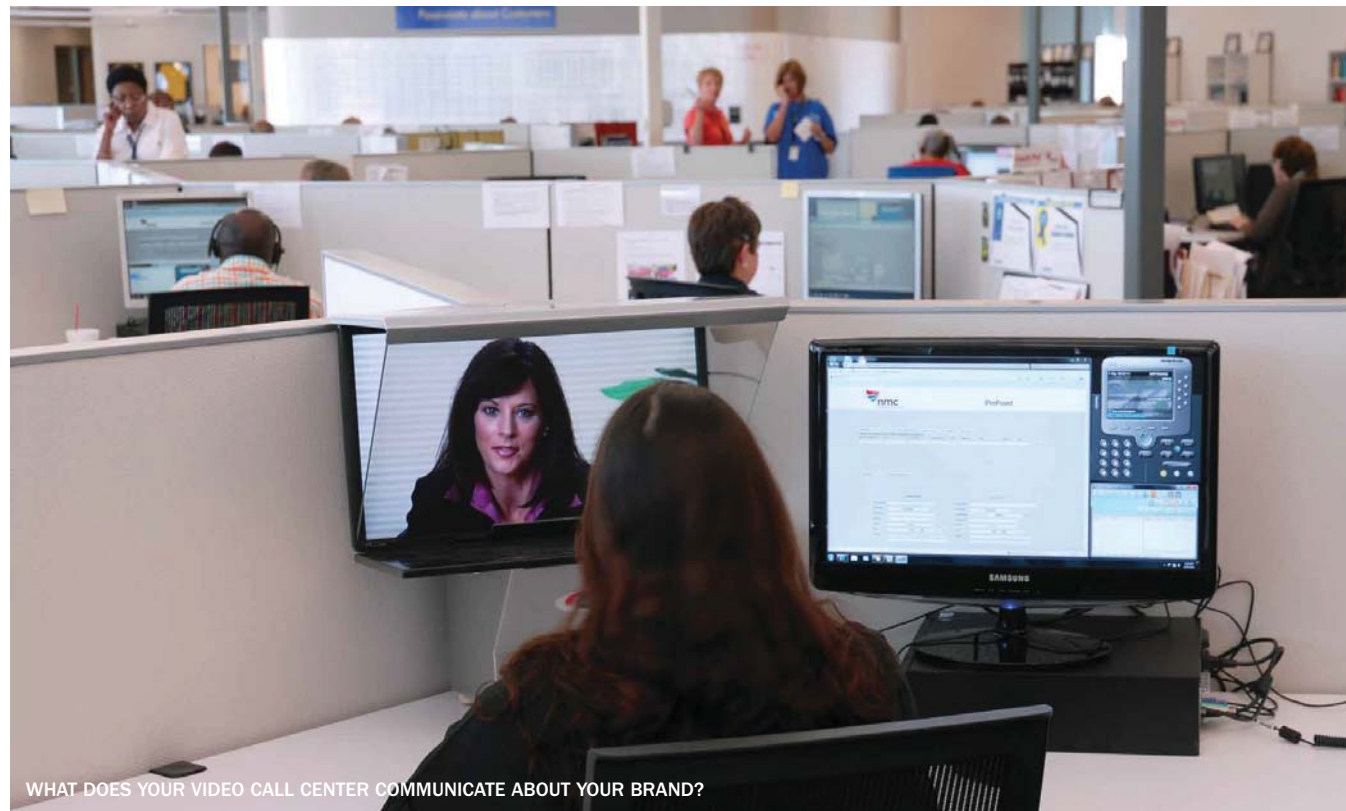
First offered as a free, consumer VC app, Zoom stood out from the rest of the consumer crowd with a cutting-edge UI and business-quality video. Recently, Zoom has added a laundry list of business features and capabilities, including recording and advanced document sharing. The service is still free for 1-to-1 meetings (and limited-duration multipoint meetings), and only costs \$9.99 a month for unlimited use of a 25-seat virtual room. With H.323 interop pending, this may be the first real B2C contender coming from the consumer side of the industry.

#### GOOGLE HANGOUTS

When Google created its new social network, Google+, many were (rightfully) doubtful that it could challenge Facebook. However, few foresaw the runaway success of its killer feature, the Google Hangout. Powered by Vidyo (set to consumer-quality so as not to compete with its business version), Google Hangouts provides a highly reliable, accessible experience that has inspired some of the most creative and innovative applications of B2C video to date: fan meetups, live performances, cooking classes, interviews, informal webcasts, book launches, contests, Q&A sessions, coaching, consulting, and more. At the very least, Google Hangouts is a proof-of-concept laboratory of many groups experimenting with new and different ways to conduct B2C video communications.

## Conclusion

We're still at the early stages of B2C, where just making a basic connection between business and customer is an exciting development. But as videoconferencing technology becomes more and more accessible and the barriers continue to dissolve, we'll see more novel uses proliferate. Several Companies in this article are creating novel uses for VC and blazing the trail for what will follow. The bottom line is that as the video industry solves the interop, connectivity and other technology issues, the rest of the business world will develop uses for B2C that we cannot even begin to foresee. **TPO**



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**David Maldow, Esq.** is a visual collaboration technologist and analyst with the **Human Productivity Lab** and an associate editor at **Telepresence Options**. David has extensive expertise in testing, evaluating, and explaining telepresence and other visual collaboration/rich-media solutions. David focuses on providing third-party independent analysis and opinion of these technologies and helping end users better understand their visual collaboration options including video call centers, video network operations centers, and B2C strategies. You can follow David on Twitter.com/LetsDoVideo.