Video Conferencing Trends of 2016

Heralding the Future of Business Communications

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Video Conferencing: A Gamechanger in 2015

Before talking about the Video Conferencing trends that are set to storm the business landscape in 2016, it is important to go back and revisit its definition:

"*Video Conferencing is the set of technologies and processes that allows dispersed parties to communicate **using video leveraging proprietary systems**, with the internet providing the required connectivity. The whole process is quite affordable.*"

Video Conferencing users are familiar with the two dimensional nature of the technology, and they expect the interaction with their virtual peers to be characterized by high quality audio and grainy video. However, the next two years will force them to revise their opinion of what is possible with VC and embrace some concepts that will definitely stretch their thinking. This shift is inevitable because by definition Video Conferencing is not limited to video screens or static VC equipment. There is plenty of room for innovation, and these breakthroughs will start making waves come 2016.

> Businesses around the world will spend 3.5 billion dollars on Video Conferencing in 2016 – **OneStopClick**

The analysis firm Ovum has reported that the Video Conferencing market's revenue has grown exponentially in the past 4 years, at a compounded annual rate of 5.79%.

In 2016, VC will live up to the highest expectations – it will be a platform that completely eliminates geographical boundaries and renders meetings and conversations with virtual team members astonishingly real.

Some Video Conferencing Trends from 2015:

2015 was a year of improvements and widespread adoption. For the very first time, even small companies viewed VC as an integral part of their communication strategy.

Enterprises woke up to the possibility of using Video Conferencing to facilitate training sessions.

Well established retail stores and upscale franchises adopted Video Conferencing systems and set up virtual product displays that allowed their star customers and buyers to receive personalized attention from sales attendants and enjoy the newest product demonstrations without leaving the comfort of their homes.

Obviously, VC solutions have been paired with Unified Communication (UC) systems to offer the convenience of participant availability checks before the initiation of decent quality video calls from almost any smart device, without prior planning.

In short, Video Conferencing was accepted as an essential part of business' efforts to bridge the gap between dispersed teams and put remote workers and in-office peers on the same page, and not just as a fad for Fortune 500 companies.

Many experts have hailed 2015 as a tipping point; VC has 'crossed the chasm'. It has gathered enough momentum to compete with more conventional means of communication (as we shall see later on in the paper) and is now focused on adding the bells and whistles that can make video calls a truly immersive experience.

A Taste of 2016: Some VC Statistics You Should Know

These Video Conferencing statistics compiled by [Polycom](#) are the result of an authoritative survey that included 1,205 businesses in 17 countries convey some eye-opening and insightful revelations about the growing popularity of Video Conferencing and its impact on the way people work and communicate with each other.

Video Conferencing: Popularity

In 2013, email reigned supreme. It was the most preferred channel of communication for businesses, followed closely by the telephone. Trailing far behind was the nascent trend of Video Conferencing.

2016 will change this scenario drastically. It is fully expected that VC will leave its competitors far behind and emerge as the most frequently used medium of collaboration and conversation. Considering that **56% of the executives interviewed by Polycom admitted to participating in at least one videoconference of appreciable duration every week,** the picture becomes clear – VC will not be trumped by static email or inadequate voice calls.

The way workers interact with their peers, stakeholders and bosses will mimic face to face conversations, more effectively leading to **about 75% of senior managers replacing their conventional conferencing practice and equipment with VC systems**.

Video Conferencing: Productivity

A whopping 96% of survey participants agreed that Video Conferencing improves productivity. In fact, through the strategic use of VC, the average attention span of conference attendees is lengthened **from 23 minutes (on regular calls) to 35 minutes**. Additionally, **76% of decision makers use Video Conferencing** and recommend it without reservations to their line managers and direct reports.

2016: Trends & Innovations

2016 will start off on the solid foundation laid by the year of 2015. It is expected that the Video Conferencing market will thrive, driving the greater use of SaaS (Software-as-a-Solution) alternatives and giving many progressive vendors a chance to entice buyers with their features and functionalities.

If a keyword were to define the VC trends of the coming twelve months, it would be '***experimentation***'. Companies will look beyond the standard usage of Video Conferencing solutions for board meetings, and will seek out new and exciting ways to employ its advantages and improve processes.

1. Telepresence

Telepresence is fascinating. With the growing popularity of VC, technologies offering top notch Telepresence services will find more takers. It should be understood that Video Conferencing will continue to penetrate more and more market segment, but this doesn't mean that investment in it will reduce all across the board. It just means that the range of options available will broaden.

> The Telepresence market is growing at the accelerated rate of 19.49% every year, proving that the more VC upgrades, the more it will be embraced.

Just as small enterprises will be grateful for Video Conferencing apps, giants like HSBC and GlaxoSmithKline will welcome the opportunity to communicate with employees and colleagues in state of the art VC rooms that boast *padded walls, surround sound, life-sized HD television screens and the ability to switch focus from one speaker to another or transfer content from the computer of the presenter to the screen with the flick of a finger.*

Video Conferencing that offers an 'immersive' experience, where there is absolutely no loss of productivity or difficulty in reaching a consensus despite vast physical differences separating the users, is a boon that companies are eager to explore.

Most importantly, Telepresence is expected to cut down travel expense by over 90%. Such consistent savings will quickly compensate for the initial financial outlay for such as system.

2. Proliferation of VC Managers

It has already been discussed that the number of Video Conferencing vendors is increasing almost every year. But in 2016 and beyond, VC Managers will become just as important. These will be professionals who are trained in the art and science of handling and maintaining the Video Conferencing set-up of a company. They will be responsible for supervising the use of the equipment, checking when parts (and software) may become obsolete, and tracking the latest breakthroughs in the field. VC Managers will be

accountable to the highest decision makers as they help individual teams understand their project goals, and they will customize the Video Conferencing set up to serve company objectives in the best way possible.

The reason behind the emergence of this new role is two-fold:

- *The reliance of businesses on Video Conferencing to serve as the backbone of their communication system*
- *The increasing diversity of the VC accessories and systems available, which requires specialized knowledge and expertise to handle*

> In 2016, Video Conferencing Managers will see a hike of 11.6% in the demand for their services.

It is expected that this managed service will be offered either by vendors or by independent third party providers who will relieve in-house IT teams from the burden of grappling with the relatively alien hassles of Video Conferencing equipment and the multitude of conference calls during peak hours.

3. Expected Growth of Mobile Alternatives

If immersive Video Conferencing is going to be increasingly sought after, the mobile segment will definitely not lag behind. By 2016, VC will be serving two different user types.

- The decision makers and large firms that will want to work with Telepresence in its best form
- The representatives and field employees on the go or the startups eager for the convenience of Video Conferencing will most definitely be content with ever improving mobile VC applications.

> In 2016, 70% of all Videoconference calls will be placed from mobile smart devices and will involve data sharing – **R-Hub**

Thus, a *mobile first strategy* will rule the policies and decisions of the second user group, which is defined by a BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) savvy workforce that will need to pay attention to the safety of data contained on its smart devices and shared or accessed during video calls with partners and prospects. Because of this dependence on mobile apps, a new code of conduct for Video Conferencing on the fly will also develop, encompassing rules like:

- No calls from washrooms or powder rooms
- No calls initiated from places that are close to power lines, which can introduce static
- No calls while eating

4. SaaS Video Conferencing & Heightened Security

There is nothing novel about SaaS Video Conferencing, but the trend deserves mention simply because it will continue strengthening for the foreseeable future. In 2015, SaaS Video Conferencing investment rose to 3,579 million dollars, up from 367 million dollars in 2009. 2016 may well see it touch the 4000 million mark.

Another significant development will be the introduction of better encryption for video streams and password protection for the '**Shared Files**' section of VC consoles, especially in online account based systems. SaaS has always had the reputation of being more vulnerable than 'on-premise' installations, so the '*cyber security consciousness*' for Video Conferencing will start with cloud based platforms.

With the increasing prominence of Video Conferencing, especially in sensitive industries like medicine and defense, more stringent provisions will become common-place, such as:

- Role based permission to access certain Video Conferencing features
- The ability to hide the identity of attendees
- The ability to wipe clean (or back-up) conference data and recordings
- The ability to gate or guard presentations and shared files

5. 3D Video Conferencing

It seems to be the stuff of science fiction stories, but three-dimensional Video Conferencing is no longer a distant probability. According to the pioneers of this technology, *National Institute of Optics of the National Research Council (INO-CNR)* and *Quintetto of Pont-Saint-Martin*, the means to package and sell holographic Telepresence for a reasonable price is already in the works and may hit the market by the middle of next year. This means that users will be able to converse and collaborate with their peers and colleagues in a setting that will finally blur the line between reality and VR (virtual reality).

Ongoing VC with a Holographic Participant

The software will automatically convert two dimensional images into 3D renditions. As a high quality video stream is nothing but a large number of such images transmitted per second to leverage the perception of human beings, the end result will be a holographic replica of Video Conferencing attendees that will move, talk and imitate actions to perfection.

In terms of ROI, 3D VC will:

- **Bring a sense of urgency to meetings** because individuals will actually 'sit' around a table and take important decisions. Accountability experienced by the participants of a three dimensional Video Conference will improve dramatically.

- **Bring clarity to conversations**. 90% of our communications are non-verbal, picked up from gestures and tone inflections. In 3D, these subtle inputs will not be lost and negotiations will become easier and more rewarding.

- **Finally make Video Conferencing completely 'immersive'** and render travel for work obsolete.

6. Tighter Coupling with Unified Communication

Video Conferencing is an integral part of Unified Communication. But VC also demands the most processing power and is bandwidth intensive. While a UC system is capable of supporting VC, it hasn't yet been tested in an environment where Video Conferencing is the primary mode of communication. 2016 will witness that first test, and vendors in the market who provide a complement of very basic features without robust Video Conferencing facilities will be forced to remove the Unified Communications tag from their offerings.

It is common knowledge that most Video Conferencing platforms already come equipped with chat boxes and data sharing facilities. What this tighter coupling with UC will make possible is one click access to all essential features with the convenience of VC. So users will be able to check their enterprise's **Presence Directory** and based on their role in the hierarchy or the command chain, they will have the option of directly calling peers who have their status set to 'Available'. They can engage in an impromptu Videoconference, without the need to send out invites and co-ordinate times. If needed, emails can also be exchanged from the same dashboard while continuing the conversation so that a well-rounded and productive session is conducted without hassles and excessive formalities.

Video Conferencing is a great stand-alone tool, but with Unified Communication it can elevate how businesses go about their daily activities and co-ordinate with dispersed and itinerant workers.

7. The Evolution of the Video Conferencing Code of Etiquette

Professionals know and respect the code of etiquette that governs emails. As VC gains further prominence, creating and adhering to a set of '*Dos and Don't's*' for Video Conferencing will becoming increasingly important. Users have already begun to identify distinct practices that add value to sessions or that distract participants. It is expected that in 2016, these insights will coalesce and create a standard protocol that can govern virtual interactions.

Referring back to the Polycom survey, the following are some initial thoughts:

- **Microphone positioning is of utmost importance**. If audio is lost, video is not of much use. Thus, there should be a sound check before every Video Conference to auto-calibrate the microphones of the attendees and ensure that individuals seated in different parts of the room can contribute their thoughts and opinions with the same force and clarity.

- **58% of survey participants voted in favor of eye contact**. The right balance between conveying interest and conveying insolence has to be determined by the users, especially if they are in conferences with peers who hail from different cultures.

- **Simplicity is appreciated in Video Conferences**. An immersive virtual presence is still alien to many people and individuals need to acclimatize themselves to its feel at their own pace. The ideal practice seems to be a consolidated touch pad that offers attendees a limited number of actions and suggests the features they should use if they are the '*Presenter*' or the '*Speaker in Focus'*.

- **Background is an important factor**. 50% of the survey takers voted in favor of white backdrops without splashes of color or garish decorations.

- **Checking the phone or joining Video Conferences from crowded and noisy places should be avoided**. These actions and settings are detrimental to the productivity of a meeting. They not only affect the individual who has committed the etiquette breach, they also prevent others from participating with full concentration and focus.

Obviously, these simple recommendations will be expanded over time to account for extenuating circumstances and contingencies. But they are a good start, and 2016 see them put into deliberate practice for the first time.

Video Conferencing Best Practices You Shouldn't Overlook:

To get the most out of each Video Conferencing session, the following suggestions should be considered to further ensure productivity.

- **Windows should be avoided**. They do provide natural light, but if the Video Conference is not taking place in a '*built for purpose*' or '*immersive*' setting, it can negatively impact the picture quality.

- **Muting is not rude**. In multi-party calls, this can be a sign of respect for the speakers. Hitting the mute button automatically masks background noises that may leak into the conversation and become a distraction.

- **The formality and courtesy of face to face conversations and human interactions should also be a part of Video Conferencing sessions**. This includes not exiting the meeting without seeking the permission of the other parties or turning one's back to the screen.

- If the Video Conference is supported by a laptop or a smart device, **it is prudent to shut down the applications that are not in use** to conserve bandwidth and CPU power.

- **Keeping a pen and paper at hand is a must** if the session is not being recorded. Most parties make the folly of keeping it all in their head or opening a Word document to note important snippets of the conversation. Somehow both tactics fail. Physically jotting down what is needed is by far the most reliable and effective way to record what is important from the conference.
- **Jumping in and out of Video Conferences is not a constructive practice**. Many participants tend to IM while on call in a bid to multi-task but it:

  - Is noted by peers who feel their time is not being valued
  - Breaks their focus

Conclusion:

Exciting opportunities await businesses that have been using Video Conferencing or are contemplating taking their association with VC a step further. The enterprises that haven't yet introduced Video Conferencing to their employees will find 2016 to be a challenging year, perhaps the last that they can use emails and phone calls as substitutes without affecting their bottom-line.

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