

## Switching on the Collaboration Engine: Conference Bridge and Web Conferencing Technology

Previous phone systems could enable a small conference of maybe 5 people or less. But a single conference bridge can handle as many as 30 call participants, and an organization can add as many bridges as they would like. This creates the potential for an almost unlimited meeting size with participants spread out across many geographic regions. With a full web conferencing platform, an organization can also enable audio, PowerPoint® presentations, video and a full interactive suite of technologies.

With many conference bridges now available through the cloud, the cost of audio conferencing is falling dramatically, with a per connection charge dropping to an average of \$.04-\$.05 per minute.

The most effective conference bridges are software devices that eliminate the need for additional hardware or costly recurring subscription-based conference services. The right technology will be a multi-party conference bridge fully integrated into the desktop Unified Communications client. The conference owner will be able to schedule, manage and launch audio conferences right through the desktop and send invitations out through Outlook®. A good system can integrate all communications functions, including presence status, phone calls, Instant Messaging and visual voicemail. A user can even drag ringing phones, active calls and calls-on-hold right into a conference call.

### Web Conferencing

By integrating web conferencing into a system, a user will be able to launch a multi-party web conference right from their desktop or laptop. An organization can make sales presentations, product demos and collaborate through intuitive interactive tools. Webcam support will enable live video presentations and seminars for "view only attendees" and can be enabled without installing a client or agent on the attendee's computer. The right system should be totally platform and browser independent.

A quality system can support a 250 port voice conference bridge including lecture mode. Remote support and access should also be enabled without cumbersome applications. Files can be uploaded and shared through web conferencing, eliminating the time and file size constraints of email.

By combining web and audio conferencing, a user can set up an audio conference session without distributing a bridge number to invitees or having to dial into a new phone number at the start of each conference. Employees can conduct web conferencing with participants anywhere in the world at a moment's notice via the Internet.

Typical web conferencing solutions can scale up to 20 rooms, and include as many as 100 users — more than enough to meet the needs of a small-to-medium enterprise.



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## What to look for

A good web or audio conferencing solution should not create any significant workload for IT. Firmware should update automatically. The system should be fully customizable and able to integrate with your existing applications and corporate websites.

The latest systems should not be affected by firewall issues, antivirus products or unsupported platforms on the attendee's computers. All attendees should be able to join in 5 seconds or less. Do not compromise with "free" audio conferencing packages that cost much more than expected in long distance charges and poor connection/voice quality.

A proprietary, cloud-based audio conferencing solution will build collaboration across your enterprise at a much lower cost — even when compared to just 5 years ago. Performing the proper diligence during your vendor selection process is the key to realizing these benefits, while alleviating the support burden on your internal IT staff. And the productivity benefits gained will make the entire process worth the effort.

