



ACCUCONFERENCE

5 Ways to Supercharge your Video Conference

Lights! Camera! Action! It may not be a Hollywood set, but directing your first video conference call can still be a bit intimidating. While a few butterflies in the stomach are normal, careful preparation will ensure that your first video conference call is a hit.

Video conferencing is an effective way to meet with colleagues or clients at various distant locations. It's the perfect vehicle for collaborative meetings, a serious tête-à-tête, a new product launch or an educational briefing on a new product, service or system. In this day of high travel costs, video conferencing even provide a cost-effective way to interview potential clients and employees. Unlike teleconferencing, video conferencing allows you to instantly share information visually, including VHS or DVD videos, computer files, PowerPoint presentations, hard copy documents, product packaging, prototypes and more. Video conferencing provides the advantages of face-to-face communication without the arduous travel time or expenses. Given the hectic pace of modern business, video conferencing is a time-saving, resource-efficient and cost-effective way to connect with clients and colleagues across the country and around the world.

Video conferencing allows you to interact more effectively with business colleagues. You not only hear what clients are saying, you can show them what you're talking about and see their reaction. Body language, particularly in meetings with foreign clients, can provide as much or more information than verbal communication.

Equipment check

With the availability of high quality, cost efficient video conferencing services, equipment needs are minimal. For basic video conferencing all you need is a computer and a basic webcam at each meeting location. High definition video conferencing requires a good quality web camera that can provide a 1280 x 720 pixel image at 30 frames per second and a reliable internet carrier with sufficient bandwidth (1.2 megabits). Installation software can be downloaded online and you can be video conferencing in minutes. Large meetings or seminars may require multiple cameras, video monitors, microphones, audio speakers and other specialty equipment.

Set the stage

In selecting a site for your video conference, choose a room that is well lit, quiet and that can comfortably accommodate all participants, as well as support equipment and materials. Before participants arrive, turn on lights. Check camera and monitor angles. Cameras should show the whole face and upper body of participants. Adjust microphone locations and volume. Test the electronic bridge connection that will connect participants from all locations. Set up, load and test all presentation equipment. Consider having a tech support person on stand by should a problem arise.

Prep the props

As for any meeting, an agenda and supporting materials, including sequentially-numbered hard copies of presentation materials, should be distributed to all participants several days before the meeting. For best visibility, orient graphics horizontally; use a large (at least 24 point), bold sans serif font for text; make generous use of margins and white space; and don't crowd text or graphic elements.

Wardrobe

Wear solid neutral colors. Bold, bright colors or complex patterns can confuse the camera, causing the monitor screen to darken, blur or vibrate with distracting visual effects.

Action!

You may notice a slight lag of a second or two while the live video is being transmitted. You will see what took place a second or two previously but what you hear will be real time. The effect can be initially distracting, but most people adjust quickly. Some people have a tendency to forget about the camera and behave as if they were alone. Always look directly into the camera when you speak as if you were conversing face-to-face. Modulate your voice as if the other participants were seated across a conference table. Move and gesture normally. Swaying, rocking, pacing, fidgeting, tapping or any rapid or continuous movement can be annoying to other participants and can cause ghosting or fuzziness in the video feed. Remember that the microphones will pick up and amplify minor sounds such as finger tapping, paper shuffling, fidgeting and side conversations which can be distracting to other participants. Always assume that the microphone is on. Most people can sit patiently for 45 to 60 minutes so schedule video conference calls accordingly.

To make the most of your video conference call, follow these additional tips:

- Before the meeting gets under way, introduce each of the conference participants, including their position, affiliation or reason for attending. You want people to put a name to each face and understand each individual's role in the discussion.
- Immediately establish meeting etiquette. You may not be the only first-timer at the video conference. Ask participants to identify themselves when they comment or ask a question. Ask participants to mute their microphones when they are not speaking to keep extraneous noise to a minimum.
- Maintain control of the meeting. When asking for comments or questions, specify the order to be followed and follow it consistently. Make certain participants at distant sites are equally represented with regard to questions and comments.
- When answering questions, repeat the question first to make certain everyone heard it.
- Avoid interrupting when participants are speaking so that all speakers can be clearly heard.
- Encourage discussion to create interaction between meeting participants.
- Watch for body language and gestures that may indicate that a participant would like to ask a question or make a comment or that they are confused or annoyed. Stop and invite their participation.
- If presenting visuals, give your audience time to read the material twice to ensure assimilation.
- Make sure your microphone is muted at the end of the meeting.