

# Increasing Efficiency through Technology in the Conference Room

By Vinny & Stefanie Bagala

The meeting is about to start, and you have to call your IT department because the projector in the conference room won't sync with your laptop. Midway through the meeting, you realize you don't have access to the files or information needed to finish the meeting and have to reschedule for when you do.

These are common frustrations people experience in many business meetings. Companies all over are wasting precious time and resources because they lack the necessary tools to make meetings more efficient and productive. Fortunately, technology has come a long way in the boardroom. Companies are realizing the benefits of tools such as fixed video displays, computer access and wireless Internet, electronic white boards and video conferencing.

Business consultant David Brown of D. Brown Management firmly believes that to maximize results with clients, technology is needed to save time and be more productive. "I see huge differences in the productivity between companies that have taken time to set up efficient meeting spaces versus those that simply have table-and-chair setups," he says. "Having quick, impromptu access to a meeting space with a fixed projector, networked computer, Internet access, readily accessible power and a good conference phone improves communication with internal teams as well as with outside customers, consultants and vendors. Improved communication always translates into improved business performance."

Here are some details about how technological innovations can improve your meetings by leaps and bounds.

**Fixed video displays.** These are instrumental in letting all participants easily view key charts, presentations and other displays. You will no longer need to huddle around someone's laptop to look at a presentation or play a video. Instead, you can sit back in your seat while you easily view the material. Whether it's a flat panel LCD mounted on the wall or an image projected on a large screen, any presentation becomes much more effective in drawing an audience's attention.

**Wireless Internet access.** This lets meeting attendees hook their laptops up to the Internet during the meeting. Meeting goers can access information from the Web or the local network in an instant, without interrupting the meeting to run to their desks to get the information, making their time in the meeting much more productive. An even simpler setup for a conference room is a dedicated PC that can be used for accessing files from the local network or quickly surfing to a Web page. These PCs can be used for running PowerPoint presentations or conducting internal training. A good 3-in-1 scanner/printer/copier is also a very helpful tool when conducting a meeting.

**Electronic whiteboards.** In most conference rooms you see today, you'll find a dry-erase board covered with a variety of chicken scratch along with a note that reads, "Do not erase." It's someone's job to take notes from the whiteboard and turn them into digital copy. Electronic whiteboards save a lot time and let each user participate to the fullest because they transfer the content on the electronic whiteboard to a local computer as digital files for storage and dissemination. More advanced electronic whiteboards can be interactive, letting users bring up a Web page or access a file with a finger or stylus.

[Meetings]

**Video conferencing.** This lets all meeting attendees be seen and not just heard. Many times with teleconferencing, callers will be doing something else while they stay on the line, not fully participating. They might be checking email, driving in the car, walking down the street...not staying focused. With video conferencing, those attending offsite are able to see you on a screen in the conference room as they're sitting in their remote workspace. This creates a personal connection that's lost through purely verbal communication. Even though you might be time zones apart, you can still have a personal experience. Compared to the cost of travel, lodging and expenses, video conferencing is an affordable alternative that connects companies across limitless boundaries.



A conference room with fixed video and Internet capabilities can help ensure meetings are productive and informative. (Photo courtesy of Summit Electronic Systems)

At the end of the day, all that matters is that the tools you have in your conference room enhance your meetings, save you time and money, and keep the participants engaged and productive. Most of these tools are very cost-effective and bring a huge return on investment. Meetings will no longer be viewed as frustrating and unproductive, but as time to collaborate using the most state-of-the-art tools.

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