

Virtual Workplace

COLLABORATION DRIVES NEW TECHNOLOGY IN VIDEOCONFERENCING

BY JIM BEAUGEZ

Integrators looking for the next trends in videoconferencing should look no further than the consumers of that technology to know what will be in demand in 2015.

In the age of the flexible corporate ecosystem, more than just the C-suite is jockeying for collaboration opportunities. And to make the challenge more exciting, the generation that brought you the selfie now expects those mobile devices to integrate with your AV system.

"A few years ago it was all Cisco, and [today] the reality is most organizations are using islands of mixed technologies," said Adam Kaiser of IVCi. "They're trying to solve interoperability issues between devices and platforms."

Fueling that shift in the videoconferencing market is the bring your own device (BYOD) movement. Organizations are changing to accommodate evolving attitudes about the workplace. In many cases, tech-savvy employees are highly connected and prefer their own communication devices over institutional communication methods. They're also telecommuting and joining videoconferences remotely from their devices.



Mersive's Solstice wirelessly connects laptops and mobile devices to any screen, bringing wireless presentation and collaboration to the meeting room.

Merging these end-user peripherals with existing infrastructure platforms is an inevitable consequence as the tech revolution steamrolls forward. The big questions for integrators now are how to put it all together for consumers, and what role hardware plays in the mix.

"Videoconferencing infrastructure hardware—the pieces that sit in the network, in the datacenters—are being relegated to the grave-

yard, as software-based implementations on very cost-efficient, Intel-based server hardware are taking over," said Håkon Dahle, chief technology officer at Pexip.

"Servers are rapidly becoming more powerful, and enterprises and service providers are embracing new datacenter strategies based on general purpose compute, general purpose storage, and virtualization."

Industry experts like Dahle aren't signaling the end of endpoint hardware as much as anticipating its decline. Legacy and large installations are better suited to hardware-intensive systems due to their output-quality advantage and ability to handle complex meeting room configurations. But accelerating technology and trends like huddle rooms and the virtual workplace make these installations less likely to be plentiful in coming years.

"We doubt the hardware-based endpoints will see rapid growth," he said. "Future growth will be in software-based endpoints on PCs, tablets and mobile devices. These devices are now good enough for personal and office use, and this is where we will

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see the growth."

Hardware provider Vaddio, which started as a camera maker and has since grown into other areas of videoconferencing, is creating peripherals around that BYOD environment.

"Our best products come from our clients," said Tim Henry, VP of Sales at Vaddio. "They wanted to combine audio and video in a USB protocol, which led to our AV bridge. They want the ability to control small rooms all in one camera, speaker or CAT-5—the ability to communicate in one system. You plug them into your computer, and they all work without extra drivers, and you're using your familiar device."

The need for collaborative environments is helping to propel AV technology toward software and cloud services. Industry leaders expect the need for quick, informal collaboration will continue to provide growth to the videoconferencing segment.

From board meetings to conferences



Technical Innovation installed a dual-screen system in this conference room for Wright Medical Technology. The conference room provides the advanced presentation features the company was looking for, including video conferencing and collaboration from room to room and from room to individual employee.

ideal for those situations.

"We see a lot of smaller conference rooms where it's not all the president and VPs doing point-to-point conferencing," said Henry. "We see a host of people trying to educate and collaborate on a small scale with a limited number of people. We see the trend to be increasing in every vertical at an increasing rate. For every conference room, there are 20 huddle rooms being built."

IVCi is also seeing more business in the AV integration sector, with quick, relatively informal collaboration at the forefront.

"We're doing a massive amount of huddle rooms for quick brainstorming sessions," said Kaiser. "There's a great demand for AV, but those sub-1,000 employee customers are seeing there are solutions for them that are not cost prohibitive anymore. We see a lot of potential in the small- to medium-size business, as well."

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Another growing trend in videoconferencing is the adoption of WebRTC-based video technology, a web protocol that makes it possible to communicate through a web browser without using plug-ins.

The major attraction for WebRTC in a collaborative AV environment is that it doesn't require a user to download and install an application before running video, so there is less likelihood of consumer dropout at the "hassle barrier." Organizations can connect in real time with partners or consumers through a simple URL link, making it equally useful in B2B and B2C environments.

It also leaps over the concept of the conference room or even a huddle room, and

makes it possible for users to engage and collaborate from anywhere with an internet connection.

"These apps are so prevalent now," said Kaiser. "Being able to embed rich communications in the app enables easier collaboration, and they can do it in the world they live in all the time and not go to another room. When you put video right where they work, you get more collaboration. You can be in a video call in two seconds and get all the benefits."

"We have a lot of legacy customers who have lots of infrastructure, and a lot of them are seeing usage go up in everyday communication tools, but a lot of these companies don't want to maintain the hardware infrastructure. They want to consume those services in the cloud because there's less to maintain."

Kaiser said that WebRTC technology offers a better quality of experience than the free or freemium services, suggesting that users can continue to expect to get what they pay for in that respect.

"One of our customers, a two-man consulting company, was using Skype, and it was free, but they weren't happy with the quality—the standard complaints," said Kaiser. "We were able to give them a solution that had 10x better quality



With the emergence of software-based group solutions, like Vidyo's, that run on PCs and leverage low-cost, high-quality USB cameras, it is now affordable to video-enable all of these small collaboration spaces or huddle rooms.



Pexip's Infinity is a virtualized scalable meeting platform enabling users to seamlessly collaborate across any video, audio or web conference platform or device.

with the ability to share content that made it much better to collaborate with customers."

But the industry shouldn't eulogize hardware systems just yet. As Kaiser explained, the products and delivery methods integrators deploy should still be rooted in the project's goals, and even WebRTC has a way to go—it's not yet supported by Internet Explorer or Safari browsers.

"While WebRTC is still not a mature technology, it is by far the most promising technology for completely ubiquitous, any-to-any videoconferencing," said Dahle. "Until recently, videoconferencing has been a niche technology, but with WebRTC, any web developer may now add videoconferencing to a web page. The possibilities for integration, customization and new user experiences are endless."

There is currently no one-size-fits-all answer, but luckily, there is a solution for virtually every situation, and hardware certainly has a home.

"We try to leave the conversation with the business use and why is video coming to the forefront," said Kaiser. "Cloud or hardware is an afterthought; it's really about the outcome, whether it's about reducing travel or allowing designers from different companies in three different countries to collaborate. The client need, the business need, drives the solution."

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Is the Huddle Room Here to Stay or a Passing Fad?

I think huddle rooms are here to stay for two very different reasons. First, the cost of real estate has forced many large corporations to move to an open floor plan, with no cubicle walls or dividers, in order to maximize space; huddle rooms offer the ability for staff to have quick, ad hoc meetings without disturbing their co-workers. Second, generational influences are changing meeting culture away from long, formal meetings, which are rigidly scheduled and more monologue oriented, to more frequent but shorter meetings with much higher levels of interactivity and more dialogue.

—Rob Balgley, CEO, Mersive

Huddle rooms have been developing over the past 15 years or so. Having started as a response to the need for quick (less than 20 minutes) small group meeting space in flexible and open office environments, the huddle room has evolved to include technology designed to offer fast access to materials, research and even off-site employees and clients. Research findings support the idea that small group collaboration allows for better problem-solving skills and more diverse and developed solutions. I suspect the huddle room will continue to evolve with the needs and technologies of those using them.

—Gina Sansivero, Director of Educational Sales, FSR

Recently, we've seen a shift in the size and design of corporate meeting spaces. In the past, the focus was on large conference rooms loaded with collaboration equipment, but the problem was a limited number of people had access to the room. Today, the trend is to provide smaller meeting spaces that will offer more people access to collaboration

tools. Products like interactive white boards, portable video conferencing systems and interactive projectors have grown in demand to support these huddle rooms. I see the use of huddle rooms growing in popularity because people attend meetings with various portable devices that all need to be connected and displayed quickly and easily.

—Paul Foschino, Sr. Manager, Visual Communication Group, Ricoh Americas

Huddle rooms are here to stay. Teams are more distributed than ever with a heightened need for distance collaboration. Office spaces are shrinking as more employees are working from home with personal collaboration solutions on their desktop and mobile devices. The result is a need to make better use of small rooms and public spaces for the people collaborating on site. With the emergence of software-based group solutions, like Vidyo's, that run on PCs and leverage low cost, high-quality USB cameras, it is now affordable to video-enable all of these small collaboration spaces or huddle rooms. Enterprises are thinking differently about the makeup of a group solution for huddle rooms or conference spaces and realizing the cost savings and efficiencies of video enabled huddle spaces.

—Mark Noble, VP of Strategic Marketing, Vidyo

A cultural and technological paradigm shift has occurred, and there's no going back. Workers expect to walk into a room and instantly share content from personal devices. Crestron AirMedia was uniquely designed to provide convenience for presenters and maintain network security for IT managers. While the number of meeting spaces increases,

the size of technical support teams remains the same. This makes presentation solutions that directly connect to enterprise-level software for asset management, monitoring and helpdesk essential. The latest 3-Series DMPS communicates with Crestron Fusion without any custom programming, so you can handle the complexities of huddle space technology.

—Tom Barnett, Director of Global Marketing Communications, Crestron

Here to stay. In fact, they have been around for a while, so the "fad" is that more companies are realizing the benefits of adding more huddle rooms rather than having just a few large meeting rooms, which are always booked even if it's for three or four people. The increasing demand for technologies that suit the work flow of a huddle room concept support "here to stay," including Barco ClickShare and small-format, high-resolution displays and projectors.

—Neil Wittering, Product Marketing Manager, Barco

The huddle room is here to stay. Companies are trying to work smarter in today's current economic climate, and huddle rooms give them affordable collaboration spaces that allow users to BYOD. In this instance, anyone can engage with a simple to use system that enhances idea development. According to InfoComm, "Businesses operating smarter since the recession, plus the exponential growth of mobile devices, have led to the current dynamic—AV integrators report that office designs increasingly have huddle spaces included in the architects' blueprints. In other words, the huddle room has quickly become an institution of American office culture—like the water cooler, and Monday morning quarterback."

—Mike Luttrell, Sales Application Engineer, Peerless-AV

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