

Three Goals for Today's Enterprise Video Conferencing Platforms

Meeting a Growing Set of Expectations From
Visual Collaboration Working Teams

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Goal 1: User Satisfaction and Smarter Workflows	3
Goal 2: Maximize Investment on Existing Deployments	4
Goal 3: Measure and Manage Users to Prove ROI	5
Report Sponsor: BlueJeans Network	5
Conclusion	6
About the Author	7
About Let's Do Video	7
About BlueJeans Network	7

Introduction

Business video technology has changed dramatically in the last decade. Today's software video services have become more reliable, flexible, affordable, and support a much higher quality experience than the hardware options of the past. As a result, users' expectations and goals have shifted as well. Based on countless conversations with end users and IT leaders I have learned that they are no longer satisfied if their video equipment merely works, they expect it to help them meet the following three goals.

1. Increase user satisfaction and allow for "smarter" workflows
2. Maximize investment on existing collaboration deployments (the productivity tools, equipment, and services you've already purchased and integrated).
3. Measure and manage the use of collaboration equipment and services to prove ROI

While these goals have always been attractive for working teams, the solutions of the past were too complicated, expensive, and inflexible to meet these goals. The unfortunate result is that it was extremely difficult for organizations to realize the full value of their collaboration investments. Many deployments failed to achieve the necessary adoption, with equipment simply gathering dust. However, we saw the inherent value in video and other visual collaboration tools and did our best to create productive environments and achieve ROI.

Over the years, many organizations just like yours have spent tens, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars on various video conferencing hardware and collaboration tools to meet different needs across the business. The intention was to use these systems to increase collaboration and productivity - but things haven't turned out as planned due to the limitations of the earlier generation of collaboration solutions. Instead, we often found ourselves having to explain the following unsatisfactory results.

- Video equipment sits underutilized, collecting dust because it's too complicated and incompatible with other devices.
- Your IT/AV team is unhappy because supporting multi-vendor deployments is cumbersome and has resulted in increased trouble tickets
- End users are frustrated by the inability to use video collaboration on multiple devices (room systems, laptop, phone, iOS, Windows) - and provide the same experience.
- End users' workflows are slowed down by the failure of their video meeting platform to integrate seamlessly with the collaboration tools they use to get their work done (calendar, messaging).

The good news is that times have changed. We have a new generation of video meeting platforms that have overcome the limitations of the past. These new solutions are significantly easier both for users to work with, and for AV/IT teams to deploy and support. They also provide much higher levels of interoperability to leverage existing collaboration tools. Just as importantly, they may include management and analytic capabilities to help teams better understand their usage and adjust deployments to maximize ROI.

With this in mind, let's take a closer look at the three essential elements of a modern business video meeting platform, and see how these goals are finally achievable.

Goal 1: User Satisfaction and Smarter Workflows

In the past, the tools would come first, and the workflow would follow. This often led to adoption problems and failure to achieve ROI. It only makes sense, as you can't ask people to change their workflow without disrupting that workflow. For example, when business video was only available in limited locations (high profile meeting rooms), it only achieved a certain level of adoption. This was because it required a change to the way we work by asking us to go to meeting rooms to every time we wanted to connect. Now that video is available wherever people work, it is seeing unprecedented growth.

The new flexibility of today's video meeting platforms means we can change the "tools first" dynamic that has stifled adoption for so many years. Now we (analysts, consultants, service providers, and internal IT groups who are focused on supporting working teams) can design collaboration environments around our team's preferred workflows. Rather than asking our teams to change their workflows in order to use the tools, we are integrating the tools in a way that simply enhances and adds efficiency to the way they are already working.



This is no trivial thing. Productivity methodologies have become an essential, and ubiquitous, element of today's working teams. For example, many teams have adopted an "agile" workstyle. While there are many implementations of agile, they all require strict adherence to the process for maximum results. If a new collaboration tool, or the design of a collaboration environment, requires a team to deviate from their agile process, it is counterproductive. Any ROI gained from use of the new collaboration tools can be diminished, or even completely negated, by the disruption to the agile process.

In addition to having the flexibility to match today's business workflows, our collaboration tools and video meeting platforms require a higher level of usability than in the past. We used to simply require that the tools were usable. If our teams could be trained to use a solution without requiring IT handholding, that was acceptable. Today our users' expectations are much higher due to the availability of consumer collaboration tools. This new generation of solutions are not just usable, but intuitive and even fun to use.



One obvious example of this evolution can be found by looking at how we create video meetings. In the past, we would have to use remote controls, and confusing user interfaces, to enter IP address and select call speeds as well as other call parameters. Not surprisingly, many organizations relied on their IT teams to launch and manage calls for their users. Even less surprisingly, this stifled the use and adoption of business video for many years. Today's video meeting platforms allow users to join with a single click. This, and many other usability improvements, don't simply allow users to make calls without IT help. They increase user satisfaction.

Now we have the option of properly integrating today's generation of user friendly collaboration tools, including the video meeting platform, in a way that supports our teams' existing workflows. The result is that the tools themselves will have greater adoption, and generate higher ROI. In addition, when workers actually enjoy using a collaboration solution, you are more likely to see that solution get shared and spread throughout your working teams, resulting in effortless ROI and increased productivity.

Goal 2: Maximize Investment on Existing Deployments

In the past, business collaboration environments were often comprised of “island technologies”. Interoperability between tools from different vendors was shaky at best, and often non-existent. This made it difficult, if not impossible, to completely customize environments to suit our workers. The problem was that we couldn’t simply shop around, and select a suite of various tools from different vendors to comprise our environments. We had to choose a vendor, and get everything from that vendor. If any part of that vendor’s portfolio didn’t mesh well with our workflow, we would adjust the workflow. As discussed above, this approach does not yield optimal results.

Another problem with island technologies is that they could often have a short period of viability in our organizations. As new solutions become available, we would be faced with a choice of ripping and replacing our existing environment, or simply forgoing the new technologies. Ideally, we would like to add new to our environments in a way that increases the value of our existing deployments. One way to achieve this is via solutions with high levels of interoperability. This allows new purchases to work with, and perhaps even enhance, previously deployed collaboration tools.



I have witnessed this dynamic many times when consulting with end-user organizations. One common dynamic is high-quality meeting room system which is rarely used and fails to achieve ROI because it was deployed as an “island technology” and only connects to other meeting rooms. Remote team members on mobile or desktop will call in on the phone, rather than on video, due to the lack of interop between the room systems and mobile/desktop solutions. In some cases, the IT team will put a laptop in the room to allow remote users call in on a cloud video service, while the high-quality room system sits idle.

We could rip and replace these older solutions with software-based room systems. These are meeting room solutions that run cloud video software and easily connect to mobile/desktop clients. However, ripping and replacing does not reflect well on your IT decision makers. These decision makers convinced their higher-ups to approve the spend on the initial deployment. If they can’t prove ROI from their decisions, their jobs could be on the line. This is where the use of a new solution with robust interoperability could not only increase your team’s productivity, but can increase the ROI from your existing deployment.

What I recommend to IT teams with the problem described above is to consider the use of a cloud video solution that has strong interoperability with their legacy meeting room systems. This is a win/win for these teams as now their remote users can call in on video using a modern, user friendly, mobile/desktop app, while your workers in the meeting room enjoy a high-quality experience on the pre-existing meeting room system. Your users get the experience they are looking for, and your IT team gets the ROI on both the new and old tools that they have deployed.

Another situation where interoperability can maximize previous investments is when adding team members through new hires, acquisitions, mergers. These additions can often result in multiple redundant systems. Previously, the solution was to move everyone to the same platform, which often required

abandoning existing deployments and writing off those investments. Today, the availability of interoperability allows us to connect multiple platforms, saving the cost of switching over acquired teams to a common platform.

In addition, we need to keep in mind that a rising tide lifts all boats. If your cloud interop solution is inherently adoptable and causes a rise in use of video, your pre-existing video deployment should see more use as well as more people are “turned on” to using video in the workplace. In other words, just by adding modern collaboration tools to your team’s environment, you can incidentally increase usage and ROI of pre-existing deployments.

Goal 3: Measure and Manage Users to Prove ROI

To fully maximize ROI, we must understand our teams’ usage with enough detail to pinpoint adoption issues and identify the causes. Unfortunately, collaboration is not a “build it and they will come” premise. In many organizations, the only office tool with guaranteed adoption is the coffee machine. With collaboration tools, you can’t simply design the environment, build it, and hope for the best. These solutions must be closely monitored to ensure that your teams are enjoying an optimal experience, and achieving full adoption and ROI.



Building a collaboration environment is analogous to creating a garden. There is a lot of work in the beginning to choose the right mix of flowers and to get everything planted. However, that is only phase one. After that one must continuously monitor every aspect of the garden to ensure that each plant is getting enough water, sunlight, etc. Similarly, a collaboration environment needs constant monitoring to ensure any issues are handled with a minimum impact to your users’ experience.

While the problem-solving aspect of management is crucial, it is only part of the story. Analytics can be used to optimize deployments for greater efficiencies, adoption rates, and ROI. For example, simply knowing which teams are using the tools and which are having slower adoption is valuable information. This data gives you a starting point so you can reach out to your teams to find out what is working and what is not working.

More “in-depth” data can go beyond mere usage stats and tell us not just if our teams are using the environment, but how they are using it. For example, we may learn that our teams are using their video meeting accounts for screen-share only and not using the video. This allows us to further investigate, find out why they aren’t using video, and remedy the issue.

Report Sponsor: BlueJeans Network

This report’s sponsor, [BlueJeans Network](#), is the provider of an enterprise video meeting platform designed around ease of use, interoperability, and manageability. BlueJeans was founded in 2009 as a cloud-based video service to enable people to connect with each other any time, any place and from any device. Since that time, it has continued to develop its [video meeting platform](#), [related services](#), and [Command Center](#) management platform, to address the growing needs of today’s working teams.

Conclusion

It's truly a new era for enterprise collaboration. In the past, the limitations of video meeting platforms prevented us from setting our goals too high. The expectations were simply for the tools to function as advertised. Fortunately, today's more powerful and flexible tools allow more lofty and specific goals such as achieving higher levels of user satisfaction by better supporting our teams' workflows, maximizing investments, and proving their ROI.

Keep in mind, maximizing investment on existing deployments isn't just about ROI. Choosing new technologies that work well with what you already have minimizes the disruption to your working teams. Some people do not like change. If you completely refresh your environment every few years, it can slow things down as people are forced to adjust. It is preferable to simply add new options and functionality through the addition of services with strong interoperability.

In addition, analytics and management capabilities have a huge effect on user satisfaction and ROI. Whether you use third party analytics, or choose a tool with an inherent management suite, it should be a major goal for any collaborative organization. When I brief with end user organizations using these kinds of analytics, their IT teams are excited to share their data and discuss how it is affecting their plans. In other words, analytics don't just provide proof of ROI, they provide a roadmap for increasing ROI even further.

The business video industry has, in a way, become a victim of its own success. By delivering a new breed of high quality, easy to use, video services we have raised the expectations of our users. Similarly, the expectations of our high-level executives have increased as well. They expect higher levels of ROI, and they want proof of it. By meeting the three goals discussed above, we can address these expectations and create truly empowering productivity environments for our working teams.

About the Author

[David Maldow](#) is the Founder and CEO of [Let's Do Video](#) (LDV) and has been covering the visual collaboration industry, and related technologies, for over a decade. His background includes 5 years at Wainhouse Research, where he managed the Video Test Lab and evaluated many of the leading solutions at the time. David has authored hundreds of articles and thought pieces both at Telepresence Options, where he was managing partner for several years, as well as here at Let's Do Video. David often speaks at industry events and webinars as well as hosting the [LDV Video Podcast](#).



About Let's Do Video

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