Creating a Video Collaboration Strategy: Four Mistakes Mid-Market Companies Make and How to Avoid Them

If you are considering a telepresence or video conferencing purchase for your organization, you now have a wider range of options than you did even just a few years ago. The video collaboration industry is changing rapidly. With the proliferation of IP, simplified user interfaces, and the introduction of new form factors, such as business-quality personal video solutions for the desk or laptop, video collaboration is more accessible than ever before.

While greater accessibility and choice favor the buyer, it also makes the journey to the right video collaboration solution more complex. This white paper shares key learnings from Cisco and AVI-SPL’s team of video collaboration integration experts, gained through hundreds of deployments in mid-market companies. It provides checklists and guidance to help you avoid these four common mistakes:

- Limiting strategy to dedicated video conferencing systems
- Underestimating network requirements
- Buying before trying the solution
- Overlooking managed services and support

As an IT leader in a mid-market company, the pressure is on to maximize the return on every technology investment. The information in this guide will help you create a solid video collaboration strategy that generates a strong ROI and contributes to your company’s success.

Mistake 1. Limiting Strategy to Room-Based Video Conferencing Systems

Video collaboration affects the way that business is conducted across an entire organization. With video, you can interview job candidates remotely, enhance telework programs, get real-time feedback from suppliers straight to the manufacturing floor, record training sessions and CEO messages, and much more.

Video collaboration is most commonly associated with rooms that have dedicated video conferencing systems. While these types of systems provide a number of valuable benefits to organizations, the greatest results come from strategies that consider the full scope of video communication solutions that can enable business efficiency.
Today, organizations use video for more than just meetings from conference room to conference room. Video collaboration can be a very personal experience when people at all levels of an organization can choose the solution appropriate for them and participate in video calls with anyone, anywhere. Your end-to-end solution may include some or all of the following endpoint products:

- **Immersive telepresence.** Immersive telepresence creates the most realistic in-person meeting experience and provides an ideal platform for communication and interaction. Meeting participants feel as though they are having a conversation with colleagues right across the table—even though they may be miles or continents apart.

- **Room systems.** These high-quality systems are designed to be used in meeting rooms, boardrooms, auditoriums, and other shared environments. High-definition (HD) multipurpose video collaboration solutions can offer the same clarity of picture and sound as immersive telepresence systems, and they are great for team meetings and collaborating in groups.

- **Desk, personal, or mobile video collaboration solutions.** These systems are designed for personal—or single-person—use and include video voice-over-IP (VoIP) phones and executive telepresence systems optimized for use in the office, workstation, and home office. PC- and Mac-based mobile video applications, such as Cisco TelePresence Movi, enable visual access to mobile workers at home or at the coffee shop.

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**Consider BYOD and UC with your Video Collaboration Strategy**

**BYOD.** Employee preference for personal mobile devices are making mobile-enabled video conferencing practical and expected.

- Do you currently have a bring-your-own-device programs?
- What is your timeframe for making video conferencing accessible from any laptop, tablet, or smartphone?
- Will supporting mobile video create more opportunities in the field?
- Should employees be able to video conference directly with customers?

**Unified Communications.** With unified communications, separate communication tools are integrated into one system so that they can be used together transparently.

- How will you integrate video conferencing with UC and social collaboration?
- Are there new collaboration opportunities that tight integration with UC can create?
Mistake 2. Network Infrastructure Unable to Support the Demands of Video
It is a costly mistake to complete your collaboration strategy and select your video conferencing solution without evaluating your current network first. There are many considerations that will impact your network design. For example, high-end video meetings, such as those over immersive telepresence, can benefit from dedicated, managed networks.

You may choose to run your telepresence and video conferencing traffic over dedicated IP networks or ISDN networks. If you already have an IP network in place for voice, your natural next step may be to deploy video over IP (VoIP). Many companies run video systems in a mixed environment.

The tips and evaluation worksheet in this section will help you ensure that any solution you choose will work with the network partner you choose.

Check Network Availability in Geographic Regions
Not all networks are available worldwide. For example, ISDN is widely available in many countries but is still in the early stages of deployment in some countries and rural areas. The same applies to IP networks. Not all countries or areas are connected to the Internet with the same speed and reliability.

Tip: Be sure to check which networks are available in the geographic areas where your company operates.

Determine True Costs Associated with the Network
Costs will vary based on your choice of network. If considering an ISDN network, remember that you will have local and long distance charges involved. When looking at an IP network, consider the implementation costs and your existing network architecture.

Tip: Account for your costs over the long term for each type of network.

Identify Bandwidth Requirements
The type of video collaboration you deploy will determine your bandwidth requirements. Embedded multipoint functions, high-definition video, and other features will require more bandwidth. You may wish to restrict the bandwidth for certain users or applications, but allow higher bandwidth for your most critical video meetings.

Tip: Choose a solution that either allows you to adjust the bandwidth or one automatically balances the bandwidth based on the application.

Consider the Impact of Unified Communications
If you are operating in a unified communications environment, you need to build networks that will support varying types of communications systems, devices, and applications, ensuring they can integrate. Inadequate bandwidth capacity, processing bottlenecks, or inappropriate network design can compromise mission-critical applications and negatively affect the adoption of video and other communication tools.

Tip: Ensure networks will support varying types of communications systems, devices, and applications.
Mistake 3. Buying before you Try the Solution

The only way to really know if a video collaboration solution will meet your needs is to try it out in your own environment. The vendors you consider should allow you to test their equipment for a period of time. Do not be afraid to test equipment. Use it in a real-life scenario, and do not limit the test just to the IT department; bring in potential end users to get their impressions. Test how the solution meets the following criteria:

Call reliability and quality

- How clear is the image at the bandwidth you will use?
  Image quality is defined by a codec that supports superior motion handling and can handle a monitor refresh rate of 30 frames per second (fps).

- How well can you hear? Is audio synchronized with images?
  The microphone, echo canceller, speakers, and your bandwidth all define the audio experience.

- How often are calls dropped?
  The mean time between failures (MTBF) should be high.

Network Evaluation Checklist

When determining if your existing network can support your video collaboration goals, consider the following questions:

- Who do you plan to call?
- Are the sites you plan to call all internal?
- Do you plan to call other sites not owned by your company?
- Will your IT organization manage your video network from a central location or multiple locations?
- How widely available is the desired network?
- What are the costs associated with the network?
- How reliable is the network? It is important to note that public Internet is not as reliable as private IP networks.
- How much bandwidth will you require?
- Will you use embedded multipoint functions, high-definition video, or other features that require higher bandwidth?
- Are you operating in a unified communications environment?
State-of-the-art technology
- Is there an innovative engineering design that provides the latest in video clarity and functions?
- Is it manufactured under the ISO 9002 certification?
- Is it manufactured with energy efficiency and environmental sustainability in mind?
- Is the design of the form factor innovative and appealing?

Ease of use
- Are the menu prompts, phone books, and user interface clear and intuitive enough for anyone in your organization to follow?
- Is it easy to install, maintain, and service?
- Does it offer a flexible managed service program that lets you choose your network?

Integration
- Is there one-click integration with other communication tools?
- Is it standards-based for interoperability with third-party video units?
- Can it be smoothly integrated with other workplace tools?
- Do all video systems—from immersive telepresence and desktop solutions to infrastructure—work together transparently?

Value
- Are systems optimized for both high and low bandwidths to help you balance cost with functions?
- Can you upgrade software to add on features as technology develops and your adoption grows?
- Do the features and functions meet your needs at a competitive price?

Standards and compatibility
- Is the solution standards-based and interoperable with video equipment from any manufacturer?
  
  If you are adding new infrastructure, management software, or additional systems to expand an existing network, you will be able to communicate smoothly only if the solution you choose is standards-based. But beware; it is important that you understand how a system will perform when it is connected to equipment manufactured by another video conferencing company.

Testing the solution and creating a pilot program will also help you improve user adoption levels. A recent study by the Info-Tech Research Group found that organization that had strong pilot tests were most satisfied with team collaboration and meeting productivity.
Mistake 4. Overlooking Managed Services and Support
Include support and training costs in your video collaboration strategy—and budget. This consideration is particularly important for mid-market companies that may not have the expertise or resources to support the solution internally. In these cases, finding a vendor that can provide managed services options that fit your budget and provides the level of support you need, is an important step.

Managed services provide a cost-effective, risk-reduced alternative to on-premise deployments. They can also significantly reduce the capital expense previously required for video solutions, as well as reducing the need for in-house resources to manage the system.

Managed services can be used to:

- Monitor, manage, and support video and telepresence equipment, 24/7
- Provide a complete suite of tools to schedule meetings and monitor video system health
- Produce usage and performance reports.

Invest in Training
According to a Cisco global survey, one of the primary barriers to end user adoption of video collaboration is “lack of experience.” “Lack of awareness of benefits” was listed as the fourth most significant potential obstacle to adoption of video collaboration technology.

Providing enough training to ensure end users are familiar and comfortable with the new technology will improve user adoption rates and help your organization achieve the benefits that video collaboration can deliver.

Selecting a Vendor
There is no one video collaboration solution that is right for all organizations. When drawing up a short list of vendors, evaluate the following characteristics:

- A sound financial profile and a good business model
- A strong company history, ethical business practices, professional reputation
- Proven and responsive customer service
- Cost-effective maintenance, support, and training programs
- Progressive research and development
- A global presence for one-stop-shop implementation wherever you may use video
- Knowledgeable staff that can provide best practices for video usage in your industry
- A commitment to deploying standards-based, non proprietary solutions so you can take best advantage of your investments inside and outside of your organization
- Integration with other unified communications tools
About AVI-SPL
AVI-SPL has a team of experts with the experience needed to meet the most technically advanced needs of our clients. We can help you design, build, and support the systems and environments that enable your video communication and collaboration. Our engineers are certified to ensure they have the skills and knowledge necessary to manage projects of all scopes.

AVI-SPL works with Cisco to provide solutions for different markets, including healthcare, education, hospitality, and many more. From integration and fabrication through installation, documentation, training, and support, the team at AVI-SPL is equipped to be your partner every step of the way.

We’re ready to help you better understand how video collaboration can fit into your organization. To learn more about video collaboration solutions for midmarket companies, contact us at (866) 559-8197 or visit www.avispl.com.

About Cisco
Cisco is a worldwide manufacturer of video collaboration and video-sharing solutions. Cisco’s network-centric platform is changing the nature of work and the way we live. AVI-SPL works with Cisco to provide solutions for different markets, including healthcare (Moffitt Cancer Center), education (Rialto Unified School District), hospitality (Fleming’s Steakhouse), and many more. Learn more about Cisco on avispl.com.