

How Businesses Can Get the Most Out of Conferencing and Collaboration Tools

White Paper

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Introduction

Conferencing technologies are ideally suited to enhance the way businesses operate, as well as how people communicate today. These technologies offer ways to decrease costs and increase productivity, give employees greater flexibility in their worklife by providing customizable mobility solutions, and enhance communications inside and between companies, as well as with their business partners, vendors and customers. They also offer new, innovative ways for businesses to reach customers anywhere, anytime.

Conferencing solutions can be as simple as a pre-scheduled dial-in telephone call among several co-workers, or as sophisticated as a Web-based collaborative conference in which a presenter can give live slide-show presentations to thousands of people simultaneously. Web-conferencing also allows application sharing, enabling people to work together on the same documents via the Internet. New videoconferencing technologies such as videoconferencing over IP and Web-based reservations have brought down the costs of videoconferencing, while offering dramatic new benefits.

Conferencing technologies are ideally suited for today’s mobile workforce and lifestyles which require more flexibility than ever. They are also ideally suited for a number of industry-specific applications. For example, telemedicine allows doctors to give consultations, share files and offer advice at great distances so that people in rural communities can get a higher level of healthcare they otherwise would not be able to obtain. Conferencing also

allows for distance learning in support of educational programs and institutions, and for other applications such as taking legal depositions to assist lawyers whose offices and clients are geographically dispersed.

In this white paper, we will look at 1) why today's business climate favors conferencing; 2) the current trends in conferencing; 3) the specific benefits conferencing allows; 4) innovative, industry-specific conferencing applications; 5) the underlying technologies that make conferencing possible; and 6) how to choose a conferencing provider and get started in conferencing. We will conclude by seeing how Sprint is an ideal conferencing provider because of its cutting-edge conferencing technology, expert staff, world-class network, extensive experience in providing end-to-end conferencing solutions, and its flexible suite of communications and transport offerings.

Why Today's Business Climate Favors Conferencing

The lifeblood of business is personal contact—the human voice, the human face, and real-time interaction. E-mail may have changed how people conduct business in some ways, but it has not altered a very basic fact of business life—personal contact is vital. The need for discussion, debate, collaboration, hearing the intonation of a person's voice, seeing someone's facial expressions, marking up documents, and seeing each other's comments will never go away. In fact, due to the complexity of today's business challenges, collaboration and personal contact is more important than ever before.

But personal contact, in today's business climate, has become increasingly difficult to maintain. Corporate travel budgets have come under increasing scrutiny and are often greatly reduced, travel itself has become more difficult and time-consuming because of new security measures, and some people are reluctant to travel in general because of safety concerns.

At the same time, many people are increasingly mobile. Telecommuting and telework is on the rise, and as a result people may work at home, on the road or in small satellite offices, rather than in a main corporate office. The line between work and home has become blurred as well so people are often required to conduct business during time that had previously been defined as "off-hours." Many professionals continue to travel, but need to be in direct contact with others in various locations.

All these needs combine to make conferencing a perfect solution for today's business climate. It allows people to have personal contact and collaborate with others anywhere and at any time. Whether it be from a home office, a hotel room, a teleworking satellite office, or even from the sidelines at a child's soccer game, people can now have personal contact with others, collaborate with them near and far, and still have the personal touch via technology so important to building successful business relationships. Conferencing can reduce time to market, reach a global audience and offer convenient, secure access for a dispersed workforce.

How Technology Trends in Audio/Video Conferencing Can Help Businesses Today

When many people think about conferencing, they may think only of audioconferences via the telephone. However, much has changed in conferencing in the past several years. New technologies, including Internet-based solutions, high-speed connectivity and advanced hardware and software have combined to create a new generation of audio/video and Web conferencing.

Following are some of the newest trends in conferencing technology:

- **On-demand and Web-based audioconferencing.** Audioconferencing has been a standard tool for many businesses for a number of years but technological innovations continue to improve the service. On-demand audioconferencing enables users to have meetings on the fly without reservations and with the added convenience of permanent dial-in numbers and access codes. On-demand audioconferencing is also less expensive because it removes the human element of reservation agents and conference attendants but still allows for access to help if needed. Audioconferences can be controlled from the desktop, by allowing users to view participants, click on individuals to mute them, and even assign accounting codes to specific conferences. Users can also administer and audioconferencing account over the Internet, set up new users, view real-time reports, and in the near future, pay bills online. In the future, IP-based audioconferencing will become more viable as voice-over-IP technologies are adopted. The trend is clearly to move multiple applications towards a single flexible network for efficiency and enhanced functionality.
- **IP and Web-based videoconferencing.** Videoconferencing over IP is emerging as a cost-effective alternative to ISDN and other switched digital services for conferencing transport. It allows secure videoconferencing with other locations over the public IP network—i.e., the Internet—without having to invest in expensive upgrades, since many videosystems already conform to the H.323 ITU standard for videoconferencing over IP networks. It can lead to substantial cost-savings, since per-minute usage charges can be eliminated, and the savings can be quite substantial for overseas connections. Easy-to-use Web-based videoconferencing applications are also being developed that will allow users to launch multi-site videoconferences, monitor end points, administer accounts and get real-time reporting - all from the desktop.
- **Web-based conferencing.** Web-based conferencing is the newest kind of conferencing technology to emerge, is the fastest growing, and the one that allows for the creation of the most innovative kinds of conferencing services. In this kind of conferencing, participants use a computer and a Web browser. While there are many different types of conferences the Web makes possible, one of the most used is presentations given over the Web. Typically, a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation is given. Text-based chat, question-and-answer sessions, group polling and group Web surfing can be used in presentations. Web-based presentations can also include streaming media presentations. They can include Web-based collaboration as well. With these types of data conferencing services, people can participate in more ways than merely speaking with or seeing each other—they can also exchange documents, edit them together and interactively compile and share information. Edits and other changes are made in real-time.

- **Instant messaging.** The increasing need for immediate, unstructured communication presents an opportunity for ad hoc solutions. As a result, instant messaging is becoming a popular business tool. Originally a favorite of consumer and teen audiences, instant messaging is gaining popularity as a value-added tool for the business world. To alleviate concerns regarding the security of transmissions, messages are encrypted so that only the participants can read them. Instant messaging can be used simultaneously with other types of conferencing, making it a particularly useful accompaniment to Web-based and audioconferencing.

The Unique Value of Conferencing

Conferencing and its newest technologies offer unique value in today's business climate. They enhance communication and productivity while reducing the cost of doing business, help people work smarter and more productively, build strong business relationships via integrated communications technology, and enhance productivity and efficiency for specific business needs.

Here are some of the most important ways in which conferencing solutions help businesses:

- **Cost savings.** Travel budgets can be significantly reduced and more effectively managed by using videoconferencing and data conferencing.
- **Increases in sales.** Smaller companies can be at a disadvantage compared to larger competitors because of their reduced sales staffs and condensed travel and marketing budgets. The ability to conduct online presentations with a simultaneous audioconference can be a great equalizer—from one location, a sales person can give presentations to many people across the country and world and provide a corporate presence on a smaller scale.
- **Expanded reach.** Today's corporations are geographically dispersed across many cities, time zones, and even continents. That environment makes it exceedingly difficult to manage effective and efficient company-wide meetings. Videoconferencing enables company-wide meetings to be held at multiple locations, facilitating the eye and voice contact critical for sharing ideas and information. Videoconferences can be held for annual meetings, shareholder and investor relations events, project management and planning sessions—anywhere and anytime information and ideas need to be shared. The ability to communicate with employees contributes to a more informed, focused, loyal and committed workforce.
- **Productivity increases.** Collaborating at a distance can be very difficult, but in today's fast-changing business climate, distance collaboration is vital. With collaboration tools, groups can work together on the same documents as if they were in the same room—geographic boundaries and limitations are blurred and true teamwork can occur.

- **Building stronger relationships.** A critical key to business success is building relationships with partners, vendors, customers, as well as employees. The wide range of conferencing solutions—from simple instant messaging to interactive web-conferencing—makes it easy to build and maintain those relationships.

Innovative Industry-Specific Conferencing Applications

Conferencing can be of benefit to a variety of companies and industries. Some of the most notable uses are for telemedicine, distance learning, and taking legal depositions. In this section we will explore each in greater detail.

Telemedicine

In telemedicine, medical professionals in urban and rural areas can provide consultations and recommend treatment by sharing files, charts, X-rays, and other records via conferencing with patients and other medical staff. People living in rural areas often do not have access to doctors or specialists, and telemedicine is frequently used to deliver healthcare to these areas. For example, the Maine Telemedicine Network uses videoconferencing equipment to give rural patients access to a variety of specialty medical care including psychiatric, dermatology, and neurological services. Telemedicine also allows information to be transmitted directly from patients' homes to doctors' offices, so that health issues can be more closely monitored while reducing patient stress and reducing the costs associated with seeking and providing quality healthcare.

Distance Learning

Distance learning uses the power of conferencing to leverage the expertise of teachers, specialists, and corporate trainers so that they can teach from long distances, and lets students benefit from virtual on-site visits to places they could not otherwise travel. Using videoconferencing, experts can visit a classroom without having to physically be there, extending the benefits of their knowledge to the widest number of students possible. Distance learning allows teachers, professors and librarians to collaborate and exchange educational materials remotely. The same kinds of benefits can be gained by corporations that offer training programs and seminars—participants do not have to travel in order to be trained, and the trainers themselves do not have to travel in order to do the training. As a result, businesses save money in travel and personnel costs, reduce travel time, and can more efficiently train a workforce dispersed among many different geographic locations.

Legal Depositions

It can be very costly to schedule legal depositions when the person or people to be deposed are located in cities or towns distant from law firms and other parties involved in legal proceedings. Scheduling and travel conflicts often make it difficult for all the parties to be in the same city at the same time. Videoconferencing can assist lawyers whose offices and clients are geographically dispersed, by allowing depositions to be taken no matter where the different parties are located. Public video rooms can be utilized for individuals without access to video equipment, and because videoconferencing can be encrypted and made secure, there need be no worry about the loss of confidentiality during the proceedings.

How to Match the Conference Type to Your Needs

Businesses face many choices when deciding which conferencing solutions will work most effectively for them. Following are the main kinds of conferences available, and advice on when each should be used.

Assisted Conferencing

This is a pre-scheduled audioconference which allows attendance by as little as a few, or up to hundreds of participants. Assisted conferences offer a variety of features ideally suited to situations in which meetings are planned in advance. Assisted conferences are monitored by a conference coordinator who can facilitate roll calls, Q&A sessions and announcements. Other features include conference recording, transcriptions and on-demand replay; security so that the conference remains private; advance notification via fax or phone; dial-in toll calls or dial-in toll-free calls; and modes that allow for lectures or two-way communications. Assisted conferencing is best suited for large groups, and for when a high degree of interaction or collaboration is not required.

Automated Conferencing

Automated audioconferences are best suited for smaller groups and are the ideal solution for when conferences need to be scheduled on the fly. They allow participants to meet whenever they want, without making reservations, but can also be scheduled weeks in advance. Automated conferences offer fewer added features than assisted conferencing, but have the benefit of being able to be quickly scheduled on an as-needed basis. Typically, they offer modes that allow for lectures or two-way communications; dial-in toll calls or dial-in toll-free calls; roll calls; and security features. This kind of conferencing is most effective when conferences do not need to be scheduled in advance, when a large number of people do not need to attend, and when a low-cost option is preferred.

Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing allows for virtual face-to-face meetings at a distance with colleagues and others around the world. It requires that compatible videoconferencing equipment be available at both ends of the conference. If the equipment is not available at a business's offices, many videoconferencing providers offer public rooms that can be used on an as-needed or regularly scheduled basis. Often, videoconferencing allows for multiple, split-screen displays so that conferences can encompass several different locations simultaneously. Videoconferencing is ideal for times when face-to-face interaction is vital, but when participants cannot physically be at the same location.

Web Conferencing

Online presentations use the latest in Web technology to allow slide presentations to be given in real-time using Microsoft PowerPoint for up to hundreds of participants simultaneously. It can include interactions between the presenter and participants, and is combined with audioconferencing capabilities so that the slide presentation can be narrated as it is being given. Online presentations can also include text-based chat and live question-and-answer sessions done on-screen. Security is provided so that the presentations can stay private and guided Web tours can be

part of the presentation. As with audioconferencing, web conferences can be scheduled in advance or done on the fly and even recorded for playback over the Internet. Live, online polls can be conducted as part of the presentation, as a way to gain instant feedback or carry out market research. Online presentations are well-suited for sales presentations and distance learning, or for any other purpose for which live presentations are the best solution. Web conferencing also allows participants to work collaboratively in real-time by sharing documents and using whiteboard applications over the Web, and may be combined with the power of online presentations. Whiteboard applications allow participants to mark up documents live onscreen, and have all other participants in the conference see the comments as they are being made. Each of the participants, in turn, can add comments to the markup, and the result is the same kind of collaboration as if participants were working together in the same room. Data conferencing works best when people in a workgroup are separated by distance, but need to work directly on documents together. They are also ideal for brainstorming sessions, and for sessions in which final changes to documents need to be made and agreed upon by a widely dispersed group of people.

Instant Messaging

Instant messaging has become a popular business tool for exchanging messages on an ad hoc basis over the Internet. Messages are encrypted so that only the participants can read them. Instant messaging is best suited to times when people need to exchange brief bursts of information quickly. It can be used by itself, or with other types of conferencing, making it a particularly useful accompaniment to Web-based and data conferencing, so that while participating in a meeting, one can ask another participant a question about the topic being discussed. For example, during a conference about quarterly budgeting, one participant can send an instant message to another asking questions such as “The speaker just mentioned gross revenue of \$8.75 million, but isn’t our forecast going to be higher than that amount?”

How Conferencing Works

At first glance, conferencing may seem like a simple matter: One sits in a room with videoconferencing equipment, and can talk live and face-to-face with participants across the continent or world, or one sits at a computer and participates in live slide presentations and collaborative sessions.

But conferencing is not as simple as it looks. Behind the scenes, innovative technology supports these and other conferencing applications. In this section, we will examine the underlying technologies which make conferencing possible.

Understanding Videoconferencing over IP

Videoconferencing over IP uses Internet technologies that can deliver data at substantially lower cost than can traditional videoconferencing technologies, which typically use ISDN lines for conference transport. With videoconferencing over IP, video images and audio are first captured by a video camera and microphone, as in traditional videoconferencing applications. But the way that video and audio is delivered and received differs from traditional conferencing, because the technology makes use of Internet-based protocols and technologies to allow

secure videoconferencing with other locations over the public IP network. After images and audio are captured by videoconferencing equipment, they are converted to data packets, which can be sent over the Internet via TCP/IP protocols in the same way that other IP packets are sent. The IP packets make their way through a business's corporate network or intranet, and are then transmitted via routers over the public Internet or a specific, high-performance IP backbone. On the receiving end, the packets come in to the corporate network or intranet from the public Internet or high-speed IP backbone, and are then converted by the receiving videoconferencing equipment back into video images and audio. Special bridging and other communications technologies may be used so that the data can travel through corporate firewalls, and can be sent and received among multiple IP and ISDN sites.

Videoconferencing equipment needs to adhere to the H.323 ITU standard in order to take advantage of videoconferencing over IP. Most videoconferencing systems manufactured today are IP-enabled and conform to the standard and so expensive upgrades to existing equipment is not necessary.

Understanding Web-Based Conferencing

The newest kinds of conferencing technologies—Web-based conferences—also use Internet technologies and protocols such as TCP/IP to deliver their unique benefits. These conferencing technologies do not require any special hardware, and work using standard, off-the-shelf browsers such as Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator. Special software does not need to be downloaded and installed, and IT departments do not need to get involved in conference setup, maintenance or troubleshooting. Because no special hardware is required for Web-based conferences, they are cost-effective and low-maintenance conferencing solutions. Web-based conferences typically allow Microsoft PowerPoint presentations to be given over the Internet, and participants need to have PowerPoint or a PowerPoint viewer installed on their computers. The conferences are frequently combined with audioconferences. When they are, the audio is usually delivered in the traditional manner, over telephone lines, so participants will need a telephone as well as to a computer with Internet access.

The exact technology used in Web-based conferencing will vary according to which provider offers the conferencing, and which particular kind of conferencing has been chosen. Often, though, Java is used because it offers compatibility across the widest variety of operating systems. The software used for Web conferencing often works outside of corporate intranets so that there are no problems with firewalls and proxy servers blocking participants. Private security codes protect the conferences against fraud and unauthorized use.

How to Put Conferencing to Work and Select a Service Provider

For many kinds of conferencing, no special equipment is needed, and so getting started is a simple matter of making a telephone call to a conferencing provider or visiting a provider's Web site to sign up for a conference. Many conferences can be set up on an as-needed basis, and do not require long-term service contracts or special equipment. For example, audioconferences require only that participants have access to telephones, and sophisticated Web-based conferencing requires only that participants have computers, standard Web browsers and Internet access. Videoconferencing equipment is required for videoconferences, but virtually anyone can participate

because of the availability of public video rooms where equipment can be rented, and of inexpensive desktop units available through conferencing providers. If a business uses public video rooms frequently enough, it will ultimately make economic sense to buy videoconferencing equipment and use a conferencing provider to supply network services and manage the conferences.

Most companies are by now familiar with simple audioconferencing, but may be unfamiliar with newer technologies such as Web-based conferencing. Companies that have yet to participate in these types of conferences should try them on a trial basis, in order to gain a better understanding of the technologies and the benefits and features they offer. In general, it will be best to have a small internal group participate in trial conferences, and then roll out those trials to larger internal groups. Once the conferencing technology is mastered internally, it can safely be used with external customers and partners.

The key to reaping the substantial benefits of conferencing technologies is to choose the right conferencing service provider. A conference is ultimately only as effective as its provider, and so companies need to take care in choosing the one most suited to their needs. When choosing a provider, companies should consider these factors:

- **Look for a provider that offers a wide range of conferences.** No single type of conference can meet all of a business's needs. Even if a business only uses assisted conferencing today, it most likely will need other types of conferencing in the future, and so should look for a provider that has a full spectrum of offerings. A conference provider should offer the widest range of solutions possible, from simple audioconferencing to full-blown collaborative conferencing. The provider should also be committed to investigating new technologies, and make them available when they are mature enough to be reliable.
- **Find a provider with full end-to-end solutions.** Does the provider only sell the equipment for the conference, but do nothing else? Does it merely re-sell services from other companies? Ideally, businesses should look for providers that offer full end-to-end solutions, including providing the hardware, managing and servicing the conferences, and owning and managing the network and infrastructure for providing conferences.
- **Seek out a provider that has been in the business a substantial amount of time.** A provider that has been in the business for a substantial number of years is likely to be in business tomorrow. Well-known companies that have that been in business for years have proven their reliability over time, and are more likely to be able to adapt to changes in conferencing technologies, and will be able to provide new kinds of technologies in the future.
- **Look for the extras.** Are the conferences bare-bones and offer just the minimum features acceptable, or are there value-added services along with them? Can the provider help the business in other ways, not just with conferencing solutions?
- **Technical support is key.** What happens if something goes wrong with the conference—will support be there? Is there a knowledgeable staff available to help set up equipment and services? Is the provider large

enough to handle any kind of technical support issues? Does it have a large enough technical support staff so that it can fix any conferencing problems immediately?

- **Cost should not be the deciding factor.** Cut-rate prices often bring cut-rate quality. Poor audio and video quality, connection problems, dropped service and other technical problems can destroy the effectiveness of conferencing. Trying to cut corners to save money in conferencing costs can ultimately adversely affect a company's bottom line.

Why Use Sprint as a Conferencing Provider?

There are many conferencing providers from which businesses can choose. But Sprint stands out by offering a unique set of benefits that combine the most feature-rich set of powerful conferencing tools, a world-class delivery network, expert staff, extensive experience gained in more than 20 years of providing conferencing services, and a flexible suite of communications and network offerings that can build strong business relationships via integrated communications technology.

Sprint has an extremely reliable network onto which to build conferencing services and solutions, including a Tier 1 OC-192 IP backbone, which can deliver data at the rate of 10 gigabits per second, that can avoid network congestion. It is a high-quality network for delivering audio, video, and data. Sprint has built an industry-leading, all-digital fiber-optic network and an award-winning IP backbone for exceptional conferencing.

The backbone carries over one-third of the world's Internet traffic. In *Network* magazine's 2000 American Carrier Survey of over 1,000 network professionals, the reliability of Sprint's data networks was recognized as among the best in the industry. Sprint's long distance network had the fewest FCC-reportable outages of the top three major competitors for the sixth straight year. Sprint serves over 93% of the 800 largest telecom users in the United States.

Sprint offers much more than the network itself. It has a long history of providing innovative solutions to businesses. Besides more than 20 years of conferencing experience, Sprint has hosted more than 10 million audioconferences to date. It was the first to market and the best in market with its full-featured videoconferencing over IP solution. Sprint is an industry leader in customer service and support and operates one of the largest public video room networks, with over 500 locations in 40 countries, including 155 Kinko's locations worldwide.

In addition to its comprehensive conferencing solutions, Sprint also provides a wide variety of other communications and network offerings. Businesses gain access to Sprint's entire suite of services and tools when they sign up for conferencing, including its managed network services—and Sprint was the first carrier to be awarded Cisco's Gold Certification status for its managed network solutions. Customers get a single point of contact for all of Sprint services, including conferencing, so that Sprint's substantial resources can be brought to bear on solving business problems.

For businesses seeking sustainable advantage through communications solutions, Sprint is the integrated networking provider that can deliver the most economic value, network future-proofing and customized solutions through one of

the world's most intelligent networks, people and partners. Its conferencing collaboration solutions are wealth-enablers for today's businesses by providing value-added customizable mobility solutions to enhance communication and productivity while reducing the cost of doing business.

Sprint solutions enhance a business's competitive edge by helping companies work smarter and more productively, and build strong business relationships via integrated communications technology and a solid network foundation. Its collaborative conferencing solutions are reliable, easy-to-use, mobile cost- and time-efficient communications tools that are customizable to enhance productivity and efficiency wherever and whenever needed for specific business needs.

Sprint Conferencing Options

Sprint offers a wide range of conferencing options that can help any company work smarter and more productively. Following are Sprint's Collaboration Solutions:

- **Sprint Attended Conferencing.** This is an assisted, pre-scheduled audioconference for a few or hundreds of participants. A conference coordinator monitors the call and facilitates features such as lecture mode, announcements, and roll calls. Automated polling; subconferencing so that people can break into smaller audioconferences; security features; advance notification via telephone or fax; and conference recording, transcription and on-demand digital replay are also available. Sprint also sells high-quality, affordable Polycom conferencing phones for a group conferencing environment. Sprint Attended Conferencing is ideal for large conferences and for conferences that require special features, and can combine dial-in toll, dial-in toll-free, or dial-out by a Sprint meeting coordinator.
- **Sprint Personal Conferencing.** This automated type of conference allows businesses to schedule conferences on the fly without having to make reservations, but businesses also have the option of scheduling conferences weeks in advance. It allows participants to meet whenever they want, without reservations, for as many as 30 people worldwide. It has a lecture-mode option, offers subconferencing, supports roll calls, has dial-in/dial-out capability and has security features. Sprint also offers the Online Audio Conferencing Control Center, a Web-based application that allows people to control audioconferences and administer accounts right from their desk. They can monitor participants online, point and click to mute individuals, or assign accounting codes to specific conferences. Administrators can view real-time reports, add or remove employees, even allow end users to set up their own profiles. As with Sprint Attended Conferencing, Sprint makes available high-quality, affordable Polycom conferencing phones for a group conferencing environment. Agent assistance is available upon request.
- **Sprint Videoconferencing.** This allows for virtual face-to-face meetings, and can be done over ISDN lines or via IP. It can be combined with file sharing and whiteboard capabilities so that people can collaborate while videoconferencing. Screens can be split into four, six or nine parts so that many different rooms can be seen simultaneously. Videoconferences can be scheduled using a Web-based reservation system. Sprint can provide all the tools needed for videoconferencing, including transport, equipment, multipoint bridging and gateway connections, conference management, and public video rooms for companies that do not have

their own equipment. Affordable plug-and-play Polycom videoconferencing systems are available through Sprint.

- **Sprint Online Presenter.** This leverages the latest capabilities of the Web to allow a presenter to give a real-time, interactive slide show for up to 500 people, using Microsoft PowerPoint presentations. It can be combined with audioconferencing to include sound as well as slide show capabilities. Sprint Online Presenter includes online polling as well as text chat and live onscreen question-and-answer sessions. Guided Web tours can also be conducted and private security codes are used for privacy. Live technical support is available to ensure that conferences go smoothly. Sprint Online Presenter allows for private labeling so that the conference can carry the brand of the company doing the presentation. No special equipment is needed; participants only need to have a computer with a Web browser, Internet access, Microsoft PowerPoint and a separate phone line for an audio link.

Conclusion

Conferencing technologies offer businesses ways to decrease costs and increase productivity, allow employees greater flexibility in their worklives by providing customizable mobility solutions, and enhance communications inside and between companies, as well as with their business partners, vendors and customers. They also offer new, innovative ways for businesses to reach customers anywhere, anytime.

Conferencing solutions can be tailored to business and individual needs, and can be as simple as a pre-scheduled audioconference for a small working group, or as sophisticated as a Web conference in which live slide-show presentations are given to thousands of people simultaneously. The costs of conferencing have been brought down dramatically by the use of new technologies such as videoconferencing over IP and Web-based reservations - and the new technologies also offer new benefits as well.

A conference is ultimately only as effective as the conference provider, and so it is vital that businesses take care in choosing the proper one. They should look for a provider that offers the widest possible spectrum of conferencing offerings, and that provides complete end-to-end solutions. The provider should be dependable, innovative, and experienced. They should provide a high level of technical support and have a high-speed, reliable network.

Sprint is the ideal provider of conferencing solutions. It offers a comprehensive, feature-rich set of conferencing capabilities and has provided conferencing services for more than 20 years. Sprint also provides a wide variety of other communications and network offerings so businesses gain access to the entire Sprint suite of services when they sign up for conferencing. Customers get a single point of contact for all of Sprint services, including conferencing, so that Sprint's numerous resources can be brought to bear on solving business problems.

Sprint's conferencing collaboration solutions build strong business relationships via integrated communications technology and enhance productivity and efficiency wherever and whenever needed for specific business needs.

Glossary

Collaborative Conferencing - Conferencing in which participants can exchange documents in real time, and can work together on the same documents on their computers screens by seeing the comments that others make.

Distance Learning - Education conducted via conferencing technologies, using online presentations, videoconferencing, and collaborative conferencing.

Firewall - A hardware/software combination that protects a company's network from cyberattacks.

H.323 - The standard that allows videoconferencing equipment to make use of videoconferencing over IP technology.

Intranet - A corporate computer network based on Internet technologies.

IP - An acronym for Internet Protocol, the basic protocol that handles the way that data is sent over the Internet.

Instant Messaging - Unstructured communication done in an ad hoc manner, allowing participants to communicate in real time via text chat over the Internet.

ISDN - An acronym for Integrated Services Digital Network. It is a standard that allows for sending voice and data over special ISDN telephone lines at high speeds, typically 64 Kbps or 128 Kbps.

Sprint Attended Conferencing - A pre-scheduled audioconference in which up to hundreds of people can participate, and which is ideal for large conferences or conferences that require special features.

Sprint Online Presenter - A Web-based data conference which allows a presenter to give live slide shows to up to 500 participants, and which allows for visual interactions over the Web.

Sprint Personal Conferencing - A conference that can be scheduled on the fly or in advance for up to 30 participants.

Sprint Videoconferencing - Videoconferencing that can be done via ISDN or IP, and that uses a Web-based reservation system.

Telecommuting - Working at home rather than in the office, using a computer and an Internet connection. Telecommuters can use a variety of conferencing technologies to stay in closer touch with co-workers at the office.

Telemedicine - Medical care that uses conferencing technologies. Using conferencing, doctors can provide consultations and treatments to people at great distances.

Videoconferencing over IP - Videoconferencing using the Internet's IP communications protocol. Videoconferencing over IP offers cost-savings over traditional videoconferencing. With it, per-minute costs can be eliminated.

Web-based Conferencing - Conferencing that is done via the Web. It allows for slide presentations and offers a variety of ways in which people can collaborate with one another.