ENABLING BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES WITH
ONLINE MEETINGS AND VIDEOCONFERENCING

Every organization has people on staff that enable others to do their jobs. These professionals hold key operational roles within companies, particularly small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), because without them everything might grind to a halt. They are critical links between the goals of the organization and the employees who can help achieve those objectives.

Professionals in this category can include any number of job descriptions. But they are primarily company owners, other senior executives, administrators, supervisors, and managers who oversee the overall business strategy of the organization, IT, human resources (HR), purchasing, and sales operations.

These individuals are grappling with a number of challenges in today's work environment, including an increasingly dispersed and mobile workforce, the need for greater productivity among that workforce, rising user demands for higher performance and collaboration, pressure to keep costs under control, the ability to easily set up and run technology solutions, and so forth.

One of the biggest downsides is the challenge of achieving work/life balance, according to a survey conducted by IDG Research Services in December 2015. The

report, sponsored by Cisco WebEx, found that 44% of the respondents who are responsible for delivering resources to co-workers cited work/life balance as a top challenge of in-person meetings. The time spent getting from point A to point B is time away from families, hobbies, and other life experiences.

This white paper explores the value of the latest online meeting and conferencing solutions and how they can address the challenges professionals are confronting with regard to in-person meetings.

Fulfilling Business Needs

People who enable others to do their jobs need to be in contact with colleagues. In many cases, this involves in person meetings. For example, an IT manager might gather everyone together to announce a new computing platform or cloud service the organization will deploy. A project leader might host a small group gathering to provide updates that can help keep the project moving along smoothly.

Based on the data from the IDG Research survey, professionals who help others to do their jobs can benefit from meetings in a number of important ways from a personal standpoint.

The most commonly mentioned benefit is that meetings help professionals create and develop more business opportunities for themselves. That was cited by more than half (56%) of the respondents. In addition, meetings allow professionals to achieve important goals (42%), improve their personal productivity (42%), and help enable the workforce (28%).
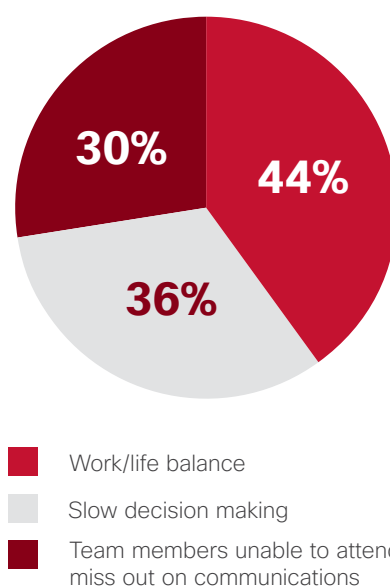
Survey respondents also report several business benefits from meeting. These include stronger customer relationships (56%), increased productivity (48%), improved customer service (34%), growth in the customer base (32%), and operational efficiency (32%).

The Downside of In-Person Meetings

In some cases, however, in-person meetings are not practical for a variety of reasons, not the least of which are the time and expense involved. This is especially true if the workforce is dispersed or if those conducting the meetings are crunched for time. Smaller companies in particular are especially limited in terms of travel resources, making in-person meetings more difficult.

Top Three Challenges when Meeting Face to Face vs. Online

- 🟥 Work/life balance
- ⬜ Slow decision making
- 🟥 Team members unable to attend, miss out on communications

Professionals who rely heavily on in-person meetings often need to overcome a number of obstacles, including reduced productivity and costs of traveling to out-of-office meetings. This is especially true for leaner companies that have limited travel budgets and resource constraints. In this busy work environment, who has time to be on the road traveling to client or remote office meetings on a regular basis? It's also a hassle on productivity of those who work at home and have to spend time on the road visiting the home office for staff meetings.

Also high on the list of in-person meeting challenges is slow decision making, which was mentioned by more than one third (36%) of the survey respondents. Slightly fewer (34%) cited the challenge of team members being unable to attend in-person meetings, and as a result, missing out on communications.

In-person meetings can actually hamper creativity. "On-site meetings have more of a hierarchal structured feel to it," says Nathan Barber, digital analyst at seoWorks, a provider of search engine services. "This vertical up-and-down type of conversation hampers brainstorming ideas and creativity because the presentation and data is usually coming from one source."

With the emergence of advanced online meeting and videoconferencing solutions, professionals now have a viable and, in some cases, preferable alternative to in-person meetings. With these platforms, it is now possible to reach a large or small group as part of the process of fulfilling business-related needs for employees.

Clearly, the use of these platforms is on the rise. The global web conferencing market, which includes software-as-a-service (SaaS) and on-premise, grew by 10% in 2015 to reach $2.41 billion, according to research from Frost & Sullivan. The overall market is seeing accelerated
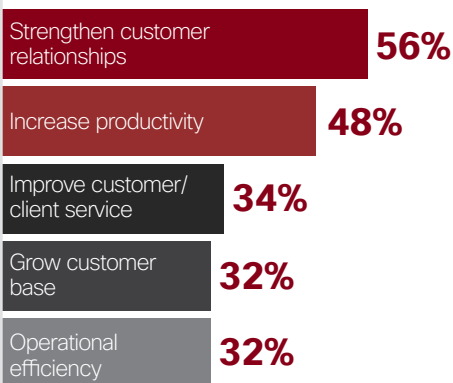
demand driven by simplification, lower-prices, and migration from stand-alone audio to web and video conferencing, the firm says.

These solutions allow users to address their audiences at set times without the need for travel. In some cases, online meetings can replace in-person meetings entirely, given that they allow presenters to share varied content to support their message. This content can include documents, presentations, graphics and other material that are part of the effort of helping people accomplish their tasks.

Besides the obvious benefit of allowing people such as HR managers to reach their audiences quickly and conveniently, these solutions also allow professionals to effectively collaborate with subject matter experts throughout the organization— regardless of where they are located.

Top Business Benefits for Meeting with Other People

Benefit	
Strengthen customer relationships	56%
Increase productivity	48%
Improve customer/client service	34%
Grow customer base	32%
Operational efficiency	32%

Online meetings in particular can yield a number of benefits. For one thing, there's more of an opportunity for people to express themselves, which can in turn help enable business opportunities. "During online meetings, the structure is more horizontal and open," says Barber. "I have noticed that there is less of the intimidation factor to speak up when conversing online. We are able to have a more open conversation, which sparks ideas."

Gains in productivity because of reduced travel time is another benefit. "As online meeting technologies became more ubiquitous, we quickly reaped its value, trading travel time for productivity," says Scott Teger, vice president of operations at 36 Labs, a marketing acceleration and lead generation company.

With a reduced need for travel for meetings, professionals can use the time for more productive endeavors. "It was not unusual in the past for firms to fly in people for a two-hour meeting," says Ben Rothke, senior eGRC consultant at Nettitude Group, a provider of cyber security testing and other security services. "By not having to travel to a meeting site, it's feasible to be on calls for eight hours a day."

Online meetings "allow us to connect with customers while running diagnostics, doing maintenance and repair, or setting up new installations," says Tim Mullahy, managing director of Liberty Center One, a company that offers data center co-location and hosting services. "It speeds up implementation and reduces the need for follow up calls and emails."

Enabling professionals on average use two different online meeting and video conferencing solutions on a regular basis. Compatibility with different clients or colleagues who use other solutions is the top reason (88%), followed by the fact that certain solutions work better depending on the devices they are using to access the solution (54%).

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> Ben Rothke, Nettitude Group

Those professionals currently using some type of online meeting solution also cite challenges. The most commonly reported is lack of systems reliability (36%), followed by team members being unable to attend meetings, slow decision making, and the politics surrounding decision making.

What are the top obstacles when collaborating online or via video conferencing? Nearly half of the respondents (48%) put technology challenges at the head of the list. Other obstacles include keeping participants engaged and attentive (42%), getting meetings started on time (40%), finding reliable network connections (35%), and getting participants to commit to meetings and show up on time for the meetings (24%).

Finding the Best Online Meetings Solution

Most of the enabling professionals surveyed by IDG (58%) report that they are likely to use capabilities of online meeting and video conferencing solutions that allow them to meet with one or two other people at the same time.

Other capabilities of a meetings solution that they might use include meeting with up to 100 people

(62%); group chat, video calls and virtual work rooms (50%); and being able to train and teach others online, including break-out rooms (38%).

Companies looking for online meeting and video conferencing solutions and vendors should look for certain key features and capabilities. Here are some important considerations:

▪ **Ease of use:** How easy is it to use the solution, and how easy is it to set up the platform for users? If it's too complex to deploy and use, it won't deliver the same value.

▪ **Viewing:** Does the solution offer features such as video conferencing with full screen, multiple feed, or side-by-side with screen sharing viewing modes ?

▪ **Content sharing:** Can users share content on their screens or applications, sketch ideas on a virtual whiteboard, and record meetings?

▪ **Scalability:** How easily does the platform scale in order to meet growing numbers of users within the organization? Does it support a global user base?

▪ **Mobility:** The solution should be designed for mobility and be capable of working well with smartphones, tablets, and other mobile devices, as well as multiple platforms.

As for finding the right vendor of online meeting and videoconferencing solutions, organizations should look at factors such as how much experience the vendor has in the communications and collaboration market, how well it's regarded in the industry and among the research community, and what level of technical support the company provides.

Summary and Conclusion: Delivering the Goods

Those professionals who are responsible for helping other people inside and outside their organization to get what they need are not only assisting them in achieving their personal goals. They are also helping them meet the overall goals of the organization.

"I'm 100 times more 'revenue' productive because I don't have to travel," says Jeff Frankel, vice president of marketing and principal at docStar, a content management solution provider.

In a highly competitive global market, how well executives, managers, supervisors and others make it possible for people to do their jobs can mean the difference between success and failure, or business growth and business decline.

These professionals can use the latest online meeting and videoconferencing platforms to more effectively and easily communicate and collaborate with colleagues, even if they are located in another part of the world. With these systems, they can more readily find out what others in the organization need to help do their jobs.

"Without the ability to have online meetings, we'd never have been able to tap into and hire some of the great folks across the globe I get to deal with every single day," says Nathan Wenzler, executive director of security at Thycotic, a provider of information security products. "That's really allowed us to thrive."

The company has made more and more use of online meeting tools to facilitate not just weekly staff meetings or brainstorming sessions for upcoming product releases, but

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to keep connected for corporate events and parties, town hall meetings, informal lunch meetings, and even the occasional employee game night, Wenzler says. He says all this communication has been critical to maintaining the company's internal culture.

Professionals such as managers and supervisors can also use these solutions to improve their own productivity and career growth, by tapping into expertise throughout their organization as well as on the outside, without the need for costly travel.

With these online meeting offerings, executives, managers, supervisors, and others can meet with anyone online to present, share, and collaborate on ideas. They can come as close as possible to being present with their audiences without actually being physically present.This ultimately helps them deliver the resources that people need, which can lead to significant benefits to the organization.▪