

## **What is videoconferencing?**

Video conferencing is a method by which people in different locations communicate in real time with two or more people at different locations via video. This ability to see the remote participants as well as being able to hear them has many benefits over audio-conferencing.

Video conferencing is now widely used by all industry sectors. Multinational companies use it to communicate with international branch offices, whilst smaller companies use videoconferencing to enable them to work with clients and suppliers in different countries.

The equipment required for video conferencing is simple to operate. On screen menus enable you to enter the number you want to call or select it from an address book. Gone are the days where videoconferencing required specialist technicians - now everyone in your office can be shown how to place calls with a 10 minute training session.

Video conferencing should not be considered in 'black and white' terms - there will always be a need to travel to meet clients or partners especially during the important early stages when relationships are being built. Where videoconferencing wins out is being able to maintain those relationships easily and cost effectively.

Modern [video conference](#) systems enable users to share documents and computer images with the remote (far end) party. When videoconferencing is used in this manner it becomes part of a collaboration solution.

Video conferencing is not only used internationally, many legal firms and consultants use videoconference systems to avoid billing clients travel time and to be able to carry out more client meetings in any given time period.

Many-to-many communication: this is the most complex form of video conferencing and is mostly associated with room based video conferencing technology. In this case several parties (more than 2) are involved in the conference, and all can be seen and heard.

## **Why use video conferencing?**

A telephone call or e-mail is not always the best way to communicate with another person. Interactive meetings can help to generate ideas, and enable people to read and react to others' sensitivities.

Video conference communication and meetings are often much shorter in total as no travel is involved. A meeting that may take you away from work for four hours (due to travel) may take only one or two hours using a video conference, you can communicate more regularly with people in other districts or countries, which would usually be costly or impossible if you had to travel. Using [video conferencing](#) saves money as it can lower your expenses - there is no need for all the costs involved with travelling, such as meals and tickets.

You can video conference with many more people than would fit into a single meeting room because each party will be using their own facilities, video conferencing allows for collaboration by document sharing. Many people in different areas can work on the same project and make contributions.

Many institutions can receive the same broadcast simultaneously and thus a much greater level of participation can be gained. For example, a lecture being broadcast to students at many different educational institutions.

## **How do I use videoconferencing?**

Videoconferencing can be extremely easy to use. The most recent developments have been with 4 digit dialling opposed to entering in IP Addresses to connect to the far end. This

process would often be perceived by non technical users of the system as overly technical and would lead to a frustrating and clumsy user experience.

We are all used to entering phone numbers in to mobile phones or fax machines where there is an on screen display of the number being dialled. Video conferencing is similar but with a TV as the onscreen display and a video image of the participants at the far end. Placing a call is easy, although there are advanced features available on most videoconferencing systems, these do not need to be used if not necessary.

### **What equipment do I need?**

Video conferencing systems & equipment vary from entry-level systems where a videoconferencing unit (codec) is placed on top of a TV monitor, through to advanced 'installed' systems in boardrooms and meeting rooms. The latter require careful system design and expert installation. CCOMM have been designing and building complex but easy to use main board room and meeting room installations since 1996.

Apart from the videoconferencing hardware a carrier is required for the communication between the near-end and far-end systems. This carrier can be ISDN digital telephone lines or IP based computer networks. Generally when organisations use video conferencing to speak to branch or international offices then IP (h.323) is used. When speaking to outside organisations it is most common to use ISDN (h.320).

*Peter Mann is an expert in the field of [video conferencing](#) systems and video conferencing equipment, more information can be found at <http://www.ccomm.co.uk>*