

Title:

Four-Dollar Gas and Video Conferencing

Word Count:

565

Summary:

Increasing transportation, dining and lodging costs are changing the way we conduct business.

Keywords:

Video Conferencing

Article Body:

There was a time when traveling was fun and affordable. With four-dollar-plus per gallon gas that's no longer the case. Add to that the appallingly weak dollar, and it's no surprise that prices are up across the board in the travel and hotel industries, no matter what the official inflation figures say. Business must go on, of course, and fortunately there are numerous new technologies that allow us to conduct business without the cost of travel. Video conferencing is one of them, and it makes ever more sense.

I remember times earlier on in my career when the company I worked for pretty much expected employees to drive to regional offices and clients if they were less than 300 miles or so away. Even with a gas guzzler, the 600-mile roundtrip cost less than \$50 in gas, and if you decided to stay over, it was another \$30 or so for a decent motel. That same roundtrip would now run over \$150 in gas even with better gas mileage, and lower tier chain motels now routinely charge \$60 to 80 per night. Go upscale a bit and it's \$150 per night, \$10 for a glass of wine, and \$50 for dinner. If you pick up the tab for dinner with clients, it can really add up. No wonder most companies are far more conservative in approving business travel.

Now I am definitely not saying personal contact isn't important. Shaking hands, sharing a meal, or doing a round of Golf remain great ways to build trust, establish relationships, and close deals. But it is no longer the only way to do business, and in this day and age it's become an increasingly costly way of doing business. Today, there are so many other ways to connect and stay in touch without losing time away from the office and spending a king's ransom in the process.

All in all, it's a matter of picking the right productivity tools and staying

clear of traps. Cell phones are wonderful ways of staying in touch at all times, but if we become slaves to them, productivity goes down the drain (and let's not even talk of Blackberry addiction!). Email remains a terrific means of communication, but unless you manage your address(es) carefully you either spend hours sifting through junk mail or risk losing important messages in all the various spam filters that sit between you and whoever you communicate with. Instant messaging is a great way to quickly get answers or resolve issues, but not if you let conversations drag on or let yourself get interrupted by buddies with too much time on their hands.

Then there is video conferencing, a tool that combines the warmth and immediacy of personal contact with the efficiency of electronic communication. You see the person on the other end, interaction is in real time, and yet you can do it all on your own computer or in a meeting room. A well-run video conference provides virtually all the benefits of personal meetings at a small fraction of the cost. What's more, video conferencing technology is now such that you can make presentations, sales pitches, conduct seminars, or have one-on-ones with spreadsheets and multimedia while seeing and interacting with your business partners or clients in real time.

With today's transportation and lodging costs it makes less and less sense to travel needlessly. Simply schedule a video conference, save, and get on with business.