



Virtual Communication

A computer lets you make more mistakes faster than any invention in human history - with the possible exceptions of handguns and tequila.

—Mitch Radcliffe

Virtual communication such as conference calls or videoconferencing can be highly effective tools to utilize in business to help a distributed team communicate and work more effectively together. With team members often scattered across various locations, sometimes in different countries, virtual communication can often be the cheapest and simplest way to bring the various players in a group together.



What type of virtual communication do you utilize during an average day at your job?

When conducting a meeting, demonstration, training or any other communication in a virtual environment, there are certain constraints that accompany web and telephone connections that may make delivering an effective presentation more challenging. Without opportunities for face-to-face interactions between people, it can often take longer for the members of a team to build trust. The success and effectiveness of virtual teams depend on a variety of factors: the type of project being developed, the specific people involved and how the team itself is managed.

As you begin to plan your virtual communication, make sure that you prepare properly. This will increase the likelihood that your meeting will be successful and you will achieve the results you hoped to accomplish.



According to a recent study, during an average meeting, _____ % of the meeting time is unproductive, spent discussing non-agenda items.



Pre-Meeting Preparation (Video Conference or Conference Call):

1. **Establish an agenda.** Establish a clear agenda for the meeting ahead of time. Make sure that all points you want to discuss are included and the appropriate amount of time has been allotted to accomplish that.
2. **Decide on meeting duration.** Determine how long it will take to cover the various points in the agenda, also leaving time for questions and discussion as well.
3. **Identify who should attend.** Make sure you only invite people that absolutely need to attend. This will help you avoid making people feel that their time is being wasted. Keep the participant count as small as possible. Remember, the larger the group, the harder it will be to manage.
4. **Give all participants instructions to access the meeting.** This means sending out such things as dial in numbers and pass-codes ahead of time to avoid technical glitches.
5. **Distribute the agenda.** Send out a clear agenda and all pertinent supporting material to meeting participants prior to your virtual meeting. Also, it is helpful to send out reminders as the meeting date gets closer.
6. **Test your equipment.** Acquaint yourself with the tools that you will be using to help you control and enhance your meeting. The more tools you will be using, the more time you need to spend practicing with them.
7. **Set goals for the meeting.** Make sure you have clearly identified and communicated the purpose of the meeting as well as the goals and objectives you hope to achieve.
8. **Assign a note taker and a timekeeper.** Choose a person to watch the clock for you to ensure that your meeting stays on time and on track. Also, have someone take notes to capture information and document all decisions that are being made.
9. **Take into account time zones when scheduling your meeting.** Be conscious of the various locations and time zones of each person attending the meeting and choose the start and stop times for your meeting accordingly.
10. **Make arrangements to videotape or audiotape the meeting.** By recording the meeting, you can easily make it available to any team members who could not attend in real time.



Conference Calls

The conference call can be an excellent tool in business for remote work. There are many benefits to conference calls, such as low cost and easy set-up. However, before you schedule a conference call, make sure it truly is the most appropriate communication tool for your specific purpose. If your goals can be accomplished with a simple e-mail or a smaller face-to-face meeting, a conference call may not be necessary.

Tips for running effective conference calls:

1. **Choose someone to lead the call.** Every meeting needs a leader, so identify the person who will serve as facilitator for the meeting. Assign specific roles and responsibilities if more than one person will be presenting information during the call.
2. **Stick to your agenda.** Make sure that time is not wasted during the call discussing non-agenda items. Stick to the points and topics that you are there to discuss.
3. **Limit background noise.** Make sure that participants are calling from a quiet space and limiting multi-tasking during the call. Encourage everyone to utilize the mute button when they are not speaking.
4. **Establish protocol.** Identify who will be presenting information during the meeting and also who will be leading the call. Cover any housekeeping rules right at the start. Ask that only one person speak at a time so that all participants can be heard.
5. **Introduce participants.** At the beginning of the meeting, the person leading the call should introduce everyone in attendance, both by name and by role.
6. **Solicit and encourage participation.** Set the expectation at the start of the call that feedback is welcome and the asking of questions is encouraged. Strive to make the meeting a dialogue and not a monologue.
7. **Leave time for questions.** Make sure you leave enough time toward the end of the call to answer any pertinent questions that may have come up as a result of the information covered.
8. **Ask participants to identify themselves by name.** Since it is not always easy to identify each person by voice when there are many participants on a conference call, encourage people to state their names before speaking.
9. **Determine next steps.** Conference calls, like any other meeting, cannot be productive and successful unless decisions are made and action items are identified.
10. **Assign action items.** Once action items have been identified, it is important to assign tasks to specific people. This makes participants responsible for these and accountable if they do not get done.



Video Conferencing

Videoconferencing is a telecommunication technology that allows individuals or groups in various locations to interact simultaneously via video and audio transmissions. This video-based technology has become an increasingly popular form of business communication, allowing companies to conveniently operate at the same time, from anywhere on the globe.

Tips for effective video conferencing:

1. **Test your equipment ahead of time.** As with any other technology, it is important to familiarize yourself with all equipment that will be utilized during the meeting.
2. **Speak slowly and clearly.** When speaking on video, it is important to utilize clear articulation and good volume to make sure that the other parties can hear you. Take your time when speaking and check in frequently with participants to make sure you are being understood.
3. **Dress for success.** Dress as you would for any other meeting. Avoid clothing that is too bright or has busy patterns that may be distracting on camera.
4. **Speak directly into the camera.** By looking at the camera, you will appear as if you are speaking directly to the team members watching you on video.
5. **Have a contingency plan.** Technology can be unpredictable so make sure you have a back-up plan if things go wrong with your video equipment or Internet connection. Make hard copies of your slides so you are ready to present without them.
6. **Limit movement.** Try to stay as stationary as possible during your videoconference. Utilize gestures, facial expressions and vocal variety to keep your audience engaged and interested.
7. **Don't leave the room unless absolutely necessary.** Try to stay focused on your meeting agenda and avoid leaving the room until the meeting is completed. This will help you avoid "dead air" and losing the attention of the participants as they wait for you to return and the meeting to resume.
8. **Try not to interrupt or speak over people.** While you don't want to let individuals monopolize the meeting time or speak for long periods, you also want to be careful not to cut people off or interrupt them, unless they are being consistently long-winded or hogging the spotlight.



9. **When not speaking into a microphone, turn it off.** This will help to limit feedback or echoing that can be distracting to an audience. Also, microphones can pick up even the smallest sounds (such as the rustling of papers) so be aware of what sounds are getting picked up and heard by your audience.
10. **Use proper framing.** Make sure that the web camera is capturing you at an appropriate angle so that you can be properly seen. Leave at least 10% headroom in the frame to avoid crowding and make sure your background appears neutral and presentable. Upward lighting is best; try to avoid window glare.



EXERCISE: Virtual Meetings