

Key Points When Considering a Videoconferencing Platform/Manufacturer

By Stephen M. Leaden, President, Leaden Associates, Inc.
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There are key points to consider when looking for a videoconferencing system. As independent Telecommunications and IT consultants, part of what we do is to evaluate various products and systems regularly for mid-to-large enterprise clients, from 500 to over 30,000 employees. At a high level evaluation elements include costs, technology and features, and service:

Costs

Costs – both one time capital and ongoing support costs need to be addressed for a 5-7 year Total Cost of Ownership/TCO model:

- ▶ Capital Costs – including hardware and professional installation
 - Hardware may include videoconferencing equipment, bridging, whiteboarding tools, and even videoconferencing furniture
- ▶ Ongoing Costs – ongoing costs can include, but not limited to:
 - Maintenance contracts – from the videoconferencing manufacturer and/or reseller/VAR – these costs commonly “kick in” at day 90 post-install (post warranty)
 - Software subscription costs – for IP-based, software-based systems, software subscription or subscription/upgrades are required
 - Bandwidth costs – Most Wide Area Networks carrying data can also carry video and voice traffic - both require prioritization in order to provide for a functional, smooth user experience. You will need to include additional bandwidth for video and Quality of Service to prioritize traffic. Videoconferencing can also run on legacy dial-up ISDN circuits – in this case consider basic monthly line cost plus usage costs.
- ▶ Telepresence large room-based video conferencing, small-to-medium room based video conferencing, and desktop conferencing – the requirements for these will vary by room size, number of people in a room, and the specific use for videoconferencing
- Multi-point bridging – used for connecting more than two parties and maintaining video and voice quality
- ISDN-to-IP gateways – used to ensure seamless connection between video systems connected via ISDN-to-IP
- HD streaming, recording, publishing – some manufacturers now offer HD video streaming (one-to-many connection, recording and publishing)
- Video management software and network analysis tools
- Ancillary tools, including document sharing, white boarding – for visually sharing documents and whiteboards
- Options for collaboration – video systems now utilize IM/chat and presence tools
- ▶ Vendor interoperability with other systems – measure the effectiveness of interoperability of the newly proposed system with any legacy systems already being utilized.
- ▶ Ease of use, quality of videoconferencing/meeting experience – most important is ease of use and the quality of the videoconferencing experience. Videoconferencing systems used the most are those that are most easy to use. Further, systems that facilitate a meeting “experience” and not just a video bridge are those that will be used most often and will provide the greatest value to your organization.

Technology and Features

Technology and Features are another evaluation category – included are:

- ▶ Manufacturer product breadth – consider the breadth of the product and systems offered, including:

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Service is perhaps the most difficult to evaluate – ask other enterprise customers about their experience with the videoconferencing systems purchased and the frequency of service or trouble reported. Beyond this you can ask other questions, including:

- ▶ Manufacturer and local vendor support – what are the support levels provided by the manufacturer and VAR selling you the equipment? What are the Service Level Agreements/SLAs associated with the vendor’s maintenance agreement?
- ▶ Local vendor credentials, number of certified technical personnel – what are the certifications or other credentials of the videoconferencing company proposing the work? What are the number of certified technical personnel that have the ability to install professionally and service the account?
- ▶ Vendor customer base and geography – Ask the manufacturer about the number of systems installed and across what geography
- ▶ References – the manufacturer and vendor should provide you with references that are similar in size and scope to the purchase you are considering

Other Considerations

Other considerations when considering videoconferencing include:

- ▶ How many sites would you like to implement day one, 6 months, 12 months, and 18 months
- ▶ How much bandwidth will you need? Short term, medium term? Tie this bandwidth to the carrier’s contract and minimum annual commitments to manage recurring costs per mile and per MB

Final Thoughts

So when considering a videoconferencing system, use the above points as part of your selection process. For multi-site environments, a Request For Proposal and a formal evaluation process is best when considering price/performance, technology and ease of use factors, and services offered. Leveraging a formal procurement process to include all sites for videoconferencing (short and medium term) and types of applications will help get you to the best manufacturer, best price/performance, and best user experience (and videoconferencing use) for sure.

Stephen Leaden is President of Leaden Associates, Inc., an independent Telecommunications and IT consulting firm in business 20 years. Steve is a frequent speaker at national trade shows and contributor for UCStrategies.com (weekly podcast) and The Voice Report. Steve is also a principal with TelecomUCTraining.com, a successor to BCR Training which provides independent Telecom training--he teaches two courses: Cost Control of Wired and Wireless Networks, Best Practices and Optimizing Enterprise Networks. Steve is Past president of the Society of Telecommunications Consultants, a national association that requires ethics and objectivity as a prerequisite for membership. Steve can be reached at (845) 496-6677 or via e-mail at sleaden@leaden.com.