

Agfa Gevaert: 6 years of Web conferencing

Better collaboration, lower communication costs from a user-friendly solution

With staff taking part in 5000 desktop Web conferences a month, including 500 with integrated voice, Agfa Gevaert is certainly making good use of the possibilities.

Web conferencing has been used in the company to save costs and improve communication for over six years. In his presentation, Bart Van Hertbruggen explains the challenges the company has met in providing the best and easiest service, while keeping budgets to a minimum.



Bart Van Hertbruggen, Manager Telecom Center, Agfa ICS first presented this case story at the BELTUG X-change via Web conferencing, January 14, 2010

CHALLENGES

Lower costs at no risk; but complexity raises expenses

When Agfa ICS first implemented video and voice conferencing six years ago, the objective was simple: cut costs. "We are a very international company, and travel expenses were high", explains Bart. "We had all the infrastructure in place so we only needed the usage contract. There was no financial risk, and we could easily back out if it didn't work for us". Agfa chose Cisco WebEX for Web conferencing, and used it exclusively for several months. "We noticed the audio expenses were very high, which we hadn't considered. So we decided to use a second provider for audio.

The solution worked well. "It made collaboration easier: people work together more, and more easily". But the issue of audio expenses was not entirely resolved. "To benefit from the lower audio costs during web conferences, the user had to start each system separately. For large conferences, and staff like secretaries who used the systems frequently, it was worthwhile. But for people who used the system occasionally, it was too much trouble. So smaller conferences usually used the more expensive WebEX audio".

"If you don't use Web conferencing, get it! It's easy to use and set up. If you already use it, monitor your audio costs: they can be high, and you may not even realise it."

Bart Van Hertbruggen, Manager Telecom Center, Agfa ICS



Agfa Gevaert has three autonomous business groups: Graphics, HealthCare and Specialty Products. Half of its sales are in Europe; but it also has a strong presence in North America and Asia (except Japan).

AGFA ICS is the company's ICT Global Shared Service; it operates a global network serving all three business groups.

Agfa ICS's headquarters are in Mortsels, Belgium. Around the world, it has 330 internal and 140 external professionals.

SOLUTIONS

One click: integrating diverse audio & video

To solve this continuing problem, in 2009 Agfa signed a new contract with WebEX, integrating the audio provider. "People now automatically launch the WebEX with the audio, with just one click". The company sent emails out to all Web conference users explaining the new environment.

To further cut costs, Agfa ICS has separate solutions for on-line learning and internal conferences. In the future, the company is looking into experimenting with its own system: "We have the infrastructure already; we just need to set it up".

LESSONS LEARNT

Few disadvantages, but keep an eye on hidden costs

For Bart, Web conferencing offers definite benefits, with few disadvantages. "It not only saved money, it changed our culture, by improving collaboration".

He has specific advice for others: "If you don't use Web conferencing, get it! It's easy to use and set up. If you already use it, monitor your audio costs: they can be a lot higher than the video costs, and you may not even realise it."

And finally, for companies considering building their own system, "Build it around the Calendar function. You want to be able to create a conference in the Calendar, and have everything happen automatically: booking the conference room, inviting the participants, etc."