



Worldwide collaboration by design

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John Bartolomi
Director of IT Services
HOK

Cisco TelePresence™ from BT Conferencing helps global architect empower its worldwide workforce

Client

Founded in 1955, HOK is a global provider of architectural planning, design, and delivery solutions. Today it is one of the world's largest, most diverse, and respected such practices with more than 2,000 professionals linked across a network of 24 offices on four continents. As a world leader in design concepts that protect the natural environment and enrich people's lives, HOK has enjoyed six consecutive years in the American Institute of Architects' Top 10 Green Projects List.

conserving initiatives, that policy requires a minimum 10 per cent overall reduction in business travel.

John Bartolomi, Director of IT Services at HOK, explains: “We were pretty good at collaborating already, but our people were still spending too much time and money moving to and from meetings. We'd tried ordinary video conferencing products but encountered problems ranging from complexity and poor quality, to more prosaic issues such as fiddly remote controls on which it was all too easy to press the wrong button.”

Challenge

A truly global organisation, HOK effectively leverages its highly skilled people irrespective of where they may be located. For example, the creative team working on a major project such as an airport or a civic building could have members in HOK offices virtually anywhere in the world.

When HOK considers a major technology investment it first works with manufacturers to gain a fundamental understanding of the technology on offer. So it was that Cisco TelePresence™ was selected. With TelePresence, Cisco Systems has combined high definition video and high quality spatial audio that sustain the experience of sitting around the same table. The experience is so immediate and so real that participants quickly suspend disbelief that they're not actually all right there in the one room. John Bartolomi confirms: “The Cisco product combines, I believe, the best video image and spatial sound quality on the market with absolute simplicity of operation. It's as easy as dialling a four-digit extension number and up pop the parties on the other side.”

HOK had to figure out how that agile business model – already highly successful – could be lifted to a new level. Equally importantly, HOK has a formal green policy that requires the company to reduce its effect upon the environment, with specific targets for carbon reduction by 2010. Alongside other energy

BT Conferencing differentiators

- In-depth understanding of the business and technical aspects of conferencing and collaboration technologies
- The simplicity of operation of Cisco TelePresence, together with its market leading video image and spatial sound quality
- Willingness to treat the entire project as a single entity, encompassing the products and services of other suppliers
- Value added services such as project management, integration, and user training, together with readiness to customise services to meet clients' needs

A BT Conferencing case study

HOK

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Director of IT Services
HOK

However, the highly involved nature of HOK projects prompted the choice of PolyVision Thunder™ technology to complement the Cisco TelePresence solution. Thunder replaces traditional paper flipcharts with dynamic digital images, allowing the creation of a wall of projected images that flows freely between remote collaborative groups.

Solution

With the solution fully scoped, HOK set about selecting an implementation partner. John Bartolomi recalls: “We came down to a shortlist of two. BT Conferencing proved itself to be far and away more responsive and more educated about TelePresence during the proposal process.”

Seven sites – London, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, Toronto, St Louis, and Washington DC – were installed by BT Conferencing in the first TelePresence deployment phase. Integrating Cisco TelePresence with PolyVision Thunder required custom XML development by Cloud Systems, enabling control of both applications from a single Cisco IP Phone. John Bartolomi notes: “The goal was to make it feel like one system from the users’ perspective.”

BT Conferencing managed the activities of all suppliers involved in the HOK TelePresence project including Fusion Storm (for integration with an existing Cisco IP Telephony deployment), Cloud Systems

Offices worldwide

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(for custom XML programming), and One Workplace (who supplied the Thunder application and furnished the specialised virtual meeting rooms required). In addition, BT Conferencing installed and configured the central TelePresence hardware and software in the HOK data centre in St Louis. User training saw seamless sessions, with One Workplace explaining Thunder while BT Conferencing covered TelePresence.

“BT Conferencing assumed co-ordination responsibility for everything, including solution elements in which they had no real financial interest,” says John Bartolomi. “By treating the whole project as a single entity they assured a headache-free experience for HOK.”

In terms of scheduling and management facilities – a critical success factor in any TelePresence implementation – HOK chose Engage Meeting Manager from BT Conferencing. This is a web-hosted tool that allows users to manage and schedule conferences and resources, as well as download system reliability and usage reports. Although alternatives were available, including Cisco’s own TelePresence Remote Management Service, HOK had most confidence in the BT Conferencing solution.

HOK also chose to utilise BT’s One Care Preferred concierge service, which simplifies the technology and provides 24*7*365 support. John Bartolomi brings this to life: “The concierge is a fantastic customer experience. It provides a personalised first point of contact for everything in the meeting room, not just TelePresence, and it’s staffed by people who understand the details of our installations.”

To enable this, BT Conferencing had its concierge team Thunder-trained by PolyVision so that the highest level of support could be provided to HOK. Furthermore, at their fingertips they have all the contact information they need – both inside and outside HOK – to get problems resolved in the shortest possible time. High occupancy rates drive best value from TelePresence and, with the help of BT Conferencing, HOK was able to tailor the system to provide for example, built-in start and stop time flexibility.

Value

With all seven first phase sites just now operational it’s too early to provide hard data on the business and environmental benefits that HOK is realising. However, John Bartolomi is in no doubt about the likely outcome. “I believe that with TelePresence a 20 per cent overall reduction in business travel is within reach,” he says, “potentially doubling the achievement required against our green policy targets.” Furthermore he estimates that return on investment (ROI) is as fast as 24 months, including the value recouped from eliminating travelling time, better decision-making, employee retention, and efficiency gains.

Not that HOK is in any way relying upon estimates. In fact, the Engage Meeting Manager sign-on processes have been designed to automatically capture quantification data – direct from virtual meeting attendees – to calculate ongoing return on investment and environmental dividends.

In the eyes of its customers, TelePresence will make HOK even more efficient and responsive than it now is. Important though this is, the business benefits to HOK extend still further. John Bartolomi bases his optimism on the enthusiastic reception from all communities within the company. “Every business line in HOK has a different reason why they love TelePresence,” he says. “Marketing people love the fact that they can develop campaigns face-to-face. Project teams love the way they can collaborate and contribute on design aspects in real time. HR people love the ability to interview and sift potential employees at a distance. My IT people love more effective team meetings. The list just goes on and on.”

With teams now connected in the US, Canada, and London, HOK has plans in place to implement TelePresence at six more global sites (Hong Kong, Atlanta Dallas, Tampa, New York and Chicago). The company also looks forward to the time when it will be possible to extend TelePresence virtual meetings beyond the firewall to include partners and customers.

For more information visit: www.btconferencing.com