



Remote Meetings in the Digital Workplace

Remote meetings are here to stay

Sometimes, many times, speaking live is the best way to get something done. Email, IM, project management tools and persistent collaboration channels all have their place in today's digital workplace, but sometimes there's just no substitute for real voices in live conversations.

While it's hard to beat meeting in person when circumstances permit, this often isn't practical in today's corporate reality of internationalization, mobility, flexible working, demand for ever greater productivity, or simply keeping travel costs in check. And so, whether you're delivering a pitch, negotiating a multi-party deal, making everyday decisions or simply connecting with your colleagues around the world, meeting remotely has become a mainstay of doing important, day-to-day business. And that's unlikely to change any time soon.

But they seem to be off the pace

Today's digital workplace is unrecognizable from a decade ago. The rise of the internet has led to a proliferation of cloud collaboration tools, some, of course, better than others. People – and by no means always IT people – are understandably choosing the best tool for the job in hand. Winners are emerging that are recognized for their best-in-class user experiences.

By contrast, remote meetings are decidedly *recognizable* from a decade ago. The silent majority are still just 'dialing in' to audio-only conference calls and putting up with all too familiar frustrations: continually asking who just joined, distracting background noise, or trying to figure out why guests can't view their screen, to name just a few.

All about the experience

The emergence of best-in-class winners is entirely rational. Those who are focused on doing something really well are naturally likely to win out over those who are concerned with a broader scope and are forced to make one-size-fits-all compromises. A 100-meter specialist is likely to out-sprint a decathlete. And convergence in the digital workplace just isn't the same as convergence in the physical workplace. Mobile device convergence made sense; we only have so many pockets. But optimizing digital apps on that mobile device is entirely different. Adding the marginal app is trivial if that app happens to be particularly good at something.

So, why has a best-in-class experience for day-to-day remote meetings proven more elusive than in certain other enterprise collaboration categories? The issue lies in product scope. Remote meetings in the enterprise are just too different by use case. Specialist users – company trainers, for example – tend to embrace the laundry list of features offered by the major industry software products. If that means going to training sessions to feel comfortable, then so be it. They can no longer do their jobs without these feature-loaded tools.

By contrast, the silent majority shies away from the complexity of all these specialist features and has neither the time nor inclination to attend training sessions. It's not just that the features don't add value; more than that, they detract from the value. Not wanting to risk looking foolish in front of clients or senior colleagues, they resort to the safety of the devil they know – dial-in audio and all its associated frustrations.

The key to changing the game in important, day-to-day meetings has been to recognize this silent majority. Having done so, you can build a premium experience just for them – an experience that is intuitive, that anticipates their needs and guides them through the activity in a streamlined way, without requiring training. And let's not forget, they are the majority after all, so well worth the investment.

Playing nicely with others

Quite understandably, consumers in the digital workplace are choosing the best tools for the job in hand. But this has created a knock-on challenge: these tools of choice don't necessarily work well together to give an equally great federated experience. If the wider enterprise goal is a 'unified communications' experience – a pretty clear and sensible aspiration in the enterprise – then such federation is critical.

And so to the less obvious part of being best-in-class...it's no longer enough to deliver a premium experience for the activity in question. That premium experience also has to integrate effectively with other different premium experiences. The highest flyers in the digital workplace are, and will be, best-in-class both at doing what they do and at playing nicely with others.

Conclusion

The need for real voices having live conversations will always exist in business. People are still doing business with people, and some things are simply best resolved by talking as a group.

However, far from leading the way in the digital workplace, day-to-day remote meetings are seen as well off the pace. They're widely perceived a commodity, where price is the primary buying factor. But this is premature. Just as in other parts of the digital workplace, there are now products that have obsessed over a premium user experience for day-to-day remote meetings. And given their prevalence and importance in daily business – not to mention the long-standing user dissatisfaction – what a high value category to improve.

