Your conferencing RFP is wrong. Here's why.

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First off, you're not alone.

While audio conferencing has been around for over twenty years, the introduction of web-based products like WebEx and GoToMeeting, along with voice-over-IP (VOIP) and video, has made selecting the right conferencing provider for your business a challenging task. Not only do you have to determine exactly what your users need (and will actually use), but you have to consider how that conferencing service will integrate into your broader communications and collaboration suite, how you'll support it, and of course, how much it will all cost.

All too often, companies send out requests for proposal (RFPs) that don't fully align with the requirements they outlined during their initial exploratory discussions with vendors. This might be because technical considerations arose that they weren't aware of or didn't mention at the time, 'new' feature requirements snuck on to the list after further discussion with an executive or line of business head, or they simply felt the RFP from the last round of vendor reviews will 'get the job done' and they don't have time to reinvent the wheel.

But, there are a few common mistakes that most companies make on their conferencing RFPs that could improve the responses they get and help them better evaluate prospective vendors.

So, if overhauling your conferencing RFP from top to bottom isn't in the cards, here are three things you can change to ensure you find the best technology for your company:

You're focused on specialist users... and forgetting everybody else.

Without a doubt, this is the mistake companies make most often and probably the biggest contributor to 'scope-creep' in a conferencing RFP.

When it comes to conferencing, specialist users are the people in your organization who likely have job-specific requirements for a conferencing tool that go beyond regular, day-to-day remote meetings. They could be trainers who need webinar and Q&A functionality, or investor relations teams who need to support thousands of people on quarterly earnings calls. It might even be the IT team who need remote desktop access to take over and fault find on users' machines. It's easy to treat these users as the primary 'customers' for conferencing – they have a vested interest in the service they're using and specific, tangible requirements – but the truth is, specialists aren't likely to make up the majority of your user base.

Then there is everyone else. The mainstream majority of conferencing users who, in more cases than not, need to hold regular remote meetings either with their distributed teams or with external partners, providers or clients. These users tend to require audio conferencing (and many probably still dial in to their calls!), and may want more visual collaboration options like screen sharing. These users are typically looking for a seamless meeting experience and a tool that is first and foremost easy to use.

When conferencing RFPs focus on specialist users rather than the majority use case, they are usually overburdened with requirements for features and capabilities that most people in the company won't ever use. These may include the features mentioned above, and might also include more common requests like video or VOIP. It's not that you can't find a capable tool that will meet most, if not all, of your requirements (in fact, web conferencing vendors make it a point to add bells and whistles to their products), it's just that once you do, it's likely to be a fairly complex tool that very few people will actually use.

It's important to understand the real-life conferencing use cases specific to your organization before committing any requirements to your RFP. And don't assume that you need a one-size-fits-all conferencing tool to get the job done. In fact, most larger companies usually require at least two different conferencing tools, if not more.

You put pricing above all else.

For better or worse, conferencing technology has been pegged as a commodity. And in recent years, there has been a race to the bottom on pricing, especially around audio conferencing. This is because most people are still dialing in to conference calls and one dial-in number and access code is just like any other. The general consensus seems to be that conferencing is basically all the same technology, just packaged and sold by different providers.

However, this mindset can lead to missed opportunity when selecting your next conferencing provider. While cost is a critical factor in any technology decision – and it's important to understand all the ways that conferencing, in particular, can cost you money – the tide is shifting. The emergence of fit-for-purpose, SaaS-based technologies throughout the collaboration space means that employees are now able to choose best-of-breed tools that work for them, and that forward-looking companies are putting more of a premium on user experience, not just price. The same is true, even in conferencing.

Rather than expect (or create) a pricing battle between your prospective providers, start by evaluating each technology on how they address user experience and your company's primary use case, then see whether you can get a better product for your current investment.

You haven't asked about security.

Most companies have their bases covered when it comes to evaluating how software vendors will address important things like handling sensitive data and disaster recovery. But, when it comes to product-level security, it's rare to see an RFP for conferencing that prioritizes security as a top criteria for selection.

For businesses whose employees conduct confidential meetings via remote meetings, security is a critical element they can't afford to overlook during the RFP process. Conferencing services vary greatly in terms of the level of security they offer, so it's important for prospective buyers to not only understand what is provided, but whether it will fit their own company's standards for security and compliance.

Take for instance traditional audio conferencing services that rely solely on dial-in. Despite allocating dial-in numbers and unique access codes to most users, traditional dial-in conferencing is the least secure form of conferencing available. With dial-in, it is impossible for users to know for certain who is on their call. Not only can malicious actors easily track down credentials and join calls unnoticed, it's incredibly common for a user's credentials to get passed around both inside and outside of the organization and persist for years on end.

It's also important to understand your users when evaluating security capabilities in conferencing. For instance, a security feature like 'roll call' might seem sensible for companies who rarely have calls with more than a few people, but in organizations that regularly host meetings with multiple parties, roll call may become cumbersome or altogether impossible to use. Even web conferencing tools that have added security (by providing visibility of attendees) may not be the right fit for your organization if your users find the tool too complex to use in the first place. However, regardless the product you choose, you should consider requiring a secure alternative to dial-in in your RFP.

Managing an RFP process can be time-intensive and doesn't always run to plan. But, by spending some extra time upfront to review and refine your criteria, you can not only make the vendor selection process easier, but can also ensure you get the right product for your users and your business.

About LoopUp

LoopUp (LSE AIM: LOOP) is a premium remote meetings solution that makes it easier to collaborate in real time. Streamlined and intuitive, LoopUp anticipates the needs of business users, while delivering the quality, security and reliability required in the enterprise. LoopUp integrates with the common tools you use every day, like Outlook, and doesn't offer features you don't need or require training. Over 2000 enterprises worldwide, including Travelex, Kia Motors America, Planet Hollywood, National Geographic, and Subaru, trust LoopUp with their remote meetings.