

Video Conferencing fosters Teamwork "Order to Cash"

Today, video conferences are a must-have for international enterprises. However, a standardised and manufacturer-independent solution is still rarely deployed in companies. Assisted by Devoteam Group, the BMW Group has implemented such a system.

When a company takes internationalisation seriously, there is no getting around video conferencing. It makes a difference whether a conversation takes place just over the phone or the conversation partners can see each other. Thus, reactions to suggestions, offers or decisions can be perceived through body language and facial expressions of the other participants.

In brief, the participants have the feeling of being vividly involved in a conversation. Moreover, the authenticity of a video conference creates a personal closeness which is important, especially when the conversation partners have never seen each other before, but are to work closely together.

These so-called soft factors are of great importance, even if they can't easily be expressed in numbers. In other words, in a purely monetary cost-benefit analysis they are not considered. There is, however, a measurable savings potential in travel expenses.

Communications via picture does not implicitly reduce the travel activities of the employees, but avoids a further increase of travel expenses in the course of the internationalisation of a company.

Though the benefits are obvious, this does not mean that the employees will actually use only this type of communication.

"Video conferencing will only be used if it is as easy as telephony and if the conversation works smoothly", explains Jürgen Martin, Corporate Vice President at Devoteam Group.

Connecting Rooms and Desktops

A further difficulty exists with the local solutions. Most of the companies have heterogeneous manufacturer-dependent technology landscapes that are not connected with each other. This is true for rooms that have video conferencing installed as well as for desktop video conferencing.

Thus, the main goal of the cooperation between the BMW Group and Devoteam Group was to allow a unique, standardised and manufacturer-independent usage and realisation of video conferences – ensuring maximum user-friendliness. At the same time, a high availability and functionality that can be centrally managed should be guaranteed.

"Until the implementation of IP based services such as Voice over IP (VoIP), video conferencing has for years been ISDN based", says Dr. Heinz-Werner Schülting, Director of the FTC Business Unit at Devoteam Group. "In the course of the IP migration, video conferencing should also be adapted to this standard protocol." This would, however, lead to considerable technical challenges, because in contrast to ISDN, there is no global unique call number for IP. Thus, an IP based video conferencing system is not automatically integrated in a worldwide call number plan. Moreover, the IP address is dynamically allocated for mobile video conferencing devices.



Video conferencing: Just select the desired conversation partner from the address book and the connection will be established.

New Communications Solution for the Automotive Industry

Manufacturer Independence

The answer to this problem was the creation of a unique call number plan, based on E.164 Addressing, a standard of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for naming conventions in IP environments.

By consolidating end user identities and technical identities of the devices, irrespective of the deployed products, Devoteam Group could achieve a manufacturer-independent solution. This guarantees investment security and allows for a further integration of systems of different manufacturers.

The standardised, manufacturer-independent database can be accessed via a global service portal. The creation of a portal has another huge benefit: Service and support can be globally managed. By means of a LDAP directory, static and dynamic communication data are stored. Thus, it is possible to immediately see who is communicating with whom and by means of which medium.

Service per Portal

A crucial aspect is that malfunctions, problems or errors can be identified and resolved quickly. An error must be eliminated within ten minutes. Otherwise, the user acceptance for the medium will decrease.

This is why the support and the high quality of video conferences are decisive factors for user satisfaction.

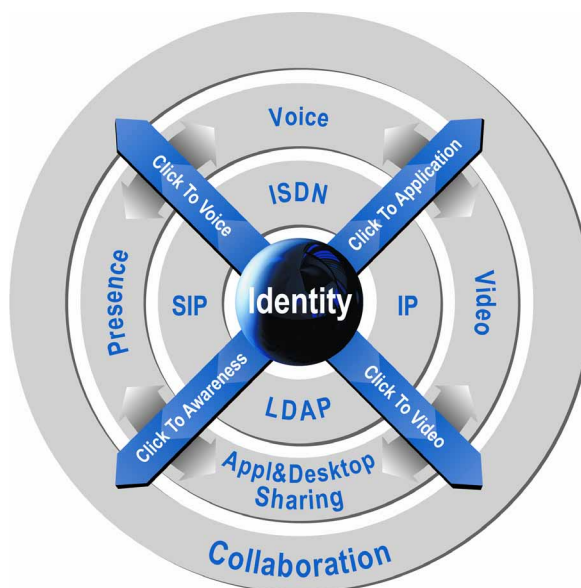
About Devoteam

Devoteam is a leading IT consulting group in Europe and was created in 1995. Combining consulting and technical solutions offers enables Devoteam to provide its customers with independent advisory services and effective solutions that meet their industrial objectives. Headquartered in Levallois-Perret (Paris, France), the Group counts more than 4,500 employees in 23 countries. Devoteam achieved in 2008 a turnover of 460M Euro.

In January 2009 Devoteam Danet was integrated into Devoteam. The company offers business and IT consulting, IT solutions and IT services – especially in the sectors automotive industry, financial services, telecommunications & medias and transport & logistics. Devoteam Danet counts 390 employees and achieved in 2008 a turnover of 42.5 M Euro in Germany.

Technology Landscape for Video Conferencing

When consolidating the heterogeneous technology landscape for video conferencing, the integration into already existing systems was of importance. The starting point was the fact that the communication is not terminal related such as for ISDN, but user related, which finally enabled the linking of video conferencing with identity management.



Thus, the call does not inevitably take place via an ISDN number or IP address, but via the E.164 number or e.g. via the e-mail address. By means of a further ITU-T standard H.350, it was possible to connect all people of the identity management with the technical objects of the devices, based on a global database (LDAP). In this way, a database of information which is bundled in a single portal for all participating parties (e.g. for video conferencing participants, employees in operation or service centres, cost centre managers) has been created. The following user scenario is possible: A new user logs on to the portal and submits an application for video conferencing at his desktop. Once his request has been approved and the required applications have been transferred to the desktop computer, he can start communicating with other participants or other video conference rooms via video.