

Tech Talk: An IT investment that will save you money

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In these tough economic times, every penny spent needs to be justified.

Information technology investments are no exception.

One of many IT investments that may be able to bring tangible savings to your bottom line is video conferencing.

Video conferencing systems used to be reserved for major corporations that could afford the high cost of the dedicated video cameras and display monitors that were required, as well as expensive high bandwidth or Internet bandwidth that would support the video traffic.

The advancement of the basic camera technology, not to mention the associated software, display technologies and low-cost bandwidth have changed this dramatically.

Today, companies of all sizes can implement cost-effective video conferencing solutions that may save them thousands of dollars in travel-related costs.

Flat panel display monitors have become very affordable and the video quality, especially in high-definition models, is perfect for video conferencing. Crisp and clear video, combined with equally clear audio, may be transmitted over standard Internet connections.

You may even use a form of video conferencing on your personal computer, in the form of a Web cam and the numerous online services like Skype, which offer the ability to easily video conference with one or more people between multiple computers.

In fact, it may be argued services like Skype forced video conferencing into the mainstream and pushed the large manufacturers to answer the threat from upstart services like this, by making their technologies more affordable and usable.

Many organizations are using the built-in video capabilities in products like Skype and various instant messaging software to carry on one-on-one meetings between individuals in different locations.

Productivity gains are significant, as coworkers are able to collaborate more interactively across wide distances.

Many software applications available for video conferencing also include screen and file sharing capabilities, allowing you to take the video experience to a higher level.

In addition to being able to talk with and see people you are working with at the remote location, you may also, simultaneously, share your computer screen or work on a shared document interactively. The benefits are obvious.

If you haven't investigated video conferencing, you may want to do so. It's easy to start small and test the viability of this technology for your business.

An individual Web cam of reasonable quality costs far less than \$100 and many of the software applications are free, at least in limited form.

If you bought any notebook or netbook portable computers lately, they may very well have a camera built into the screen, looking at you every day just waiting to be used. Test it out between a few people and see if it delivers a tangible benefit. If it does, you may want to explore extending this to other individuals or even equip full conference rooms to support multi-person meetings.

As the technology continues to spread and standards take hold in the market, you will be able to initiate video based meetings with customers, partners and others. It's a great technology that has taken advantage of various technology developments to bring the cost down and make it a viable solution for companies of all sizes.

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