Save Time,
Save Money,
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Smart Videoconferencing

New Habits for Virtual Meetings

Be Your Best on Camera

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An Excerpt From

Smart Videoconferencing: New Habits for Virtual Meetings

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Introduction

In its simplest terms, videoconferencing involves individuals sitting in front of video cameras, talking with and viewing each other on monitors, much as they might if they were in the same room together. They may also look at or work on electronic documents during their videoconference. The medium is real-time interactive, and far-end participants can both hear and see each other. The compelling reason for holding a videoconference is to intensify human interaction without having to travel.

We recently met the marketing director of a major manufacturer of videoconferencing systems. We shared personal stories, got to know each other as much as is possible in an initial meeting, covered our agenda, set tasks for both sides to complete, and established a time for our next meeting. We laughed, enjoyed ourselves, and commented on how good we all looked. The only unusual feature of the meeting was that the authors were in Las Vegas, Nevada, while the marketing director was in Reston, Virginia.

However, if you talk with seasoned business professionals about videoconferencing, you will not always hear of such successful virtual meetings. Jill Addams, an executive coach, is frequently asked to help clients who have paid a price for assuming their current in-person meeting habits will work with videoconferences. Jill describes a top-level manager with years of business experience who lost a significant job opportunity because he thought that his in-person meeting skills would be adequate to showcase his talents in a videoconference.

This highly skilled businessman interviewed with a company that uses videoconferencing extensively with international virtual

teams. He was told that VC skills would be a critical part of his job description. He was also told that he would be asked to participate in an actual videoconference as a part of his job interview process. "How different can VC be from a regular meeting?" he told Jill. He did not prepare for the unique challenges of VC, violated most of the principles of effective on-camera work, and failed the interview miserably.

A few years ago, the type of situation described by Jill would not have occurred. But now we are in a new world where videoconferencing is becoming a communication device commonly used by organizations—large and small. Managers working with virtual teams are *expected* to know how to effectively use the medium.

Consider concierge Anna Morris of the Westin Hotel in Santa Clara, California. Most would think that a concierge would have to conduct work in person, but Anna works via videoconference from her home, saving her a lengthy daily commute. A large monitor is set up in the lobby of the Westin, where Anna "virtually" assists hotel guests. In her home, Anna sits in front of parallel videoconferencing equipment and a backdrop resembling the Westin lobby. She does everything a regular concierge does—answering questions, calling for restaurant reservations, and faxing driving directions. Anna insists the guests pay closer attention to her on video than they ever did when she worked on-site.[2]

Businesspeople today use videoconferences for a multitude of purposes, including

- Holding monthly marketing meetings in companies with multiple locations
- Holding regular meetings for virtual teams, especially international teams
- Narrowing down a field of candidates for a position
- Holding annual board meetings required by law
- Showing product samples sourced in distant locations to local offices
- Introducing new employees to field offices

- Training staff and customers interactively
- Holding shareholder meetings (in those states where this is legal)
- Conducting regular discussions of monthly financial figures at multiple sites
- Demonstrating products to customers
- Staging multisite conferences so attendees in different parts of the world can simultaneously see and interact with the speakers

In the future, VC will use miniature cameras mounted on a variety of products, including mobile telephones, automobiles, PDAs (personal data assistants), and even watches.

Data Collaboration and Web Conferencing

A lot of people today use interactive technology to collaborate on data. Data collaboration allows people in remote locations (or even down the hall from each other) to electronically share documents on a computer monitor—even making changes or notations to the document at the same time. Data collaboration can be a part of a videoconference meeting. However, most people who use data collaboration never use cameras. Obviously, this type of virtual meeting is less expensive. It is appropriate to think of data collaboration as a distinct application of videoconferencing that does not require the use of a camera.

Web conferencing refers to a set of software applications (e.g., WebEx, PlaceWare, and Paltalk) that use Web technology to host meetings or presentations. With such Web conferences, the camera feed is only unidirectional, though voice and written communication can go in both directions.

For example, one stock market expert simultaneously watches a live real-time Webcast of the Nasdaq Stock Exchange with day traders around the United States who use his software. On another monitor, the expert makes verbal and written comments about what is happening in the market in order to educate his users. Participants in the session ask questions and comment—into microphones attached to their computers—so everyone hears everyone else. These particular

Web conference sessions do not use cameras to transmit human images.

Data collaboration can be much more elaborate than the above example, and VC can play a role. Consider a group of consultants, well equipped with video cameras, who are working on a proposal that requires immediate feedback and input from colleagues located in a different city. Because both groups need to see the document simultaneously, a telephone call or e-mail would be less effective. The lead consultant checks to see who is available and pushes a button to connect to the sister office. Once connected, both groups can see each other while they are focused on their electronic proposal. The image will be small, however, because their monitors will primarily be occupied with data.

When the two groups want to brainstorm ideas or draw diagrams, they use a white board visible to both parties. If they need input in the middle of their session from another colleague, who lives in Japan, they can connect to his cellular telephone through their computer and bring him into the meeting via voice. Toward the end of their meeting, the consultants may want to update a senior exective about their project's progress and "see" her reaction. The executive happens to be traveling. They contact her; she sets up her laptop computer, plugs a small inexpensive camera into her computer's USB (universal serial bus) port, and joins the virtual meeting for ten minutes. While the primary purpose of the meeting was data collaboration, videoconferencing made nonverbal information available and also added the dimension of human connectivity to the meeting.

Data collaboration and Web conferencing demands are entirely different from those of videoconference meetings where people primarily want to see each other while talking with each other. When people use data in videoconferences, they use PowerPoint, Excel, or Web demonstrations primarily to illustrate points they are making. Incidentally, Webcasting is different from data collaboration and Web conferencing in that there is usually no communication exchange at all—people watch a video presentation that is streamed over the Internet.

Data collaboration is document focused and tends to be more casual. People generally do it at their desks from their computer mon-

itors; they typically do not use a meeting room. While dual-monitor systems make it possible to keep visual contact with a remote site on one monitor (using the second monitor for document viewing), it is much more common in data collaboration to use a single computer monitor. In such cases, people who share data see each other only at the start of their meetings—if at all—since the documents they share will occupy most or all of the space on their monitors.

Even the brief viewing that may occur in a data conference, however, could very well have two lasting effects on the whole field of videoconferencing. First, people will become increasingly comfortable with the "looking at each other" aspects of virtual communication. This will, in turn, make data conferences feel incomplete unless people have a live, albeit brief, opportunity to see each other as part of the communication exchange. In the future, people will likely complain about telephone calls or data conferences that involve data transmission only, saying, "You know, we should have videoconferenced so we could see each other."

Videoconferencing Technology

Because videoconferencing means different things to different people, a book on the subject potentially has a lot of ground to cover—which in part helps to explain why many videoconferencing books are very thick. *Smart Videoconferencing* definitely does not cover every aspect of the topic. We include a VC glossary to cover basic technology terms, but we do not cover technical aspects of VC in detail. We also do not cover how to data collaborate. Our focus is on *how to present yourself.*

Many excellent books, articles, and white papers (a bibliography is attached) cover everything you will ever want to know about VC technology. It is our belief, however, that, beyond acquiring a working vocabulary, most users of VC, like most users of the telephone, are not that interested in how it works—but in whether it works. What you need is a grounding in the "how to use it" aspects of the technology. For example, you need to know how to turn your equipment on, how to fix basic problems, including how to reboot or restart, and how the whole system works together.

Most manufacturers of videoconferencing equipment provide excellent technical training. Usually you can ask the manufacturer's technicians to conduct a practice virtual meeting with you. The company's goal is for you to feel comfortable with its equipment and experience first hand what the equipment can do. We definitely recommend using services like this. This type of practice session allows you to learn the fundamentals of your system so you can concentrate on your presentation when you get ready to hold your first virtual meeting.

Finally, from a technical point of view, you also need to understand that in order to have a good videoconference exchange, you need (1) top-notch equipment, (2) adequate bandwidth to transmit video, data, and audio information, and (3) equivalent equipment and bandwidth at the receiving end.

Break any one of these links, and, from a technical point of view, you will have a less than optimal videoconference experience. If you have sophisticated equipment but your remote site does not, do not count on a great virtual meeting. In the same way, if you have invested heavily in elaborate equipment but have inadequate bandwidth to transmit data, you will not have the stellar results that are possible.

Looking good on camera and participating effectively in virtual meetings is imperative in today's world for whatever reason you hold your virtual meeting or how extensive your equipment is. Our tips and strategies will help you develop good habits for looking your best at the most demanding levels of videoconferencing. Nonetheless, even if you only send your image to one other remote site so you and a colleague can "glance at" each other before you begin to collaborate on an electronic document, the practices in this book will help you look good on camera and provide you with ideas to improve your day-to-day virtual meetings.

PART 1

What's It All About?

1

Videoconferencing: A Twenty-First Century Business Tool

For many, it was the highlight of the 1964 World's Fair in New York City. People waited in the heat in long lines at the AT&T Pavilion to talk with—and see at the same time—a stranger from another fair location. The Bell Labs' Picturephone was, more or less, successfully demonstrated to the public. People were excited. Many were convinced—or told—the future had arrived.

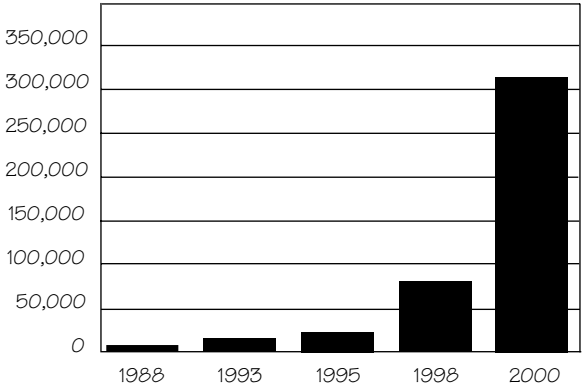
Videoconferencing had actually been around for decades. It was first demonstrated by Bell Labs technicians who displayed a crude link between Washington, D.C. and New York City in the 1920s. Those in the know hoped this visionary medium would soon realize its potential. It did not. Even after the 1964 World's Fair excitement, videoconferencing failed to have broad usage for another thirty years.

Now at the beginning of the twenty-first century, VC technology has dramatically improved, and bandwidth continues to be more affordable. Futurist and columnist for BizJournals.com, Terry Brock, sees even bigger changes on the horizon: "Telephone lines will go the way of the dinosaur. All communication will eventually go over the Internet, and we will definitely see videoconferencing ease-of-use that equals personal computing today."[3]

Affordable bandwidth is fueling the demand to be able to see people while talking with them over long distances. Forecasts from the two leading research firms in this field suggest that the worldwide market for virtual services and videoconferencing systems is growing dramatically. Wainhouse Research predicts that worldwide tele-, video-, and Webconferencing *services* will grow from $2.8 billion in 2000 to $9.8 billion by 2006.[4] Researcher Roopam Jain at Frost and Sullivan projects that worldwide revenues from the sales of group

and desktop systems for videoconferencing will grow from $574.3 million to $1.54 billion by 2006.[5]

The demand for VC services is being felt around the world. Videoconferencing systems were first offered in Japan in 1984. Demand for them has grown rapidly ever since, even in a country where time spent together in person is considered essential. In 1988, 250 systems were installed; in 1993, 3000; in 1995, 8800; in 1998, 80,000; and in 2000, 320,000.[6] When charted, the impressive growth curve looks like this:



If these figures hold true, they imply that videoconference equipment and systems will become as common as fax machines. Businesses will be forced to use the technology or look as outdated as companies without fax machines did in the late 1980s.

We attribute this heightened need and interest in videoconferencing to four trends that are turning videoconferencing into a necessary communication tool for business instead of merely a clever way to meet someone virtually. Furthermore, the convergence of these four trends is spurring predictions that upwards of 50 percent of meetings in the next decade will involve some type of video transmission.[7]

Trend 1: Videoconferencing Technology and Quality Will Continue to Improve While Costs Drop

From its first—and failed—commercial application by Bell Labs in 1964, videoconferencing technology has come a long way. Bob

Schiffman, of Kelley Communications in Las Vegas, proudly demonstrates the latest equipment available from Tandberg, considered to be the Rolls Royce of the industry. It is very high quality, and Bob will tell you it is reasonably priced. Tandberg produces a dual-monitor system that can connect to as many as ten remote sites, affording simultaneous video and data presentations. Bob says that software upgrades have significantly enhanced both the speed and quality of Tandberg's product line. In fact, all VC equipment is getting better, and prices have dramatically fallen.

Consider what has happened in VC technology in just the last few years. The majority of VC systems now have "touch-button" capability so they immediately connect to other systems. Prior to this capacity, people had to take several steps in order to connect. Users can now spontaneously add someone to their virtual meetings; they can surf the Web in the middle of their interactions; and they can stream video for all participants to view.

Desktop systems are available that can connect through USB ports, with "plug and play" capacity; that is, the computer will not have to be restarted after connecting. Prior to this development, connecting through one's desktop involved considerable technical expertise and time. As a result of the convenience of plug and play, the phenomenon of personal videoconferencing has dramatically increased.

Recent technology has also significantly increased the quality and "realness" of video images. For example, "3-D" videoconferencing, offered by Dallas-based Teleportec, now takes "virtual reality" to a new level. Teleportec has a product that projects images onto a thick sheet of glass embedded with light-reflecting particles. Users report that the images have a three-dimensional, or holographic, quality that make them more lifelike than a television screen, creating the sense that viewers are in the presence of a live human.

As higher quality videoconferencing equipment is achieved,along with lower prices, the number of users will increase and VC will continue to be easily and unremarkably integrated into the communication devices that managers, supervisors, and frontline workers use daily to conduct business. Videoconferencing is no longer just a means for senior executives to show off their latest electronic tools—

as it has been for some companies. For example, Polycom, the largest manufacturer of videoconferencing equipment, sells powerful and affordable equipment with as close to television quality that can be installed in four offices for less than $25,000.

Videoconferencing technology, using a wireless approach (which is currently available and growing in use), will allow users to view and participate inexpensively in conferences, meetings, and press conferences via the Internet from—a remote office, a car, while on a business trip to Shanghai or a vacation, or from a home office—almost anywhere. That is the vision. Furthermore, videoconferencing over the Internet will significantly leverage the investments companies have already made in their information technology (IT) infrastructures.

Trend 2: Controlling Costs and Saving Time Will Become More Critical in the Competitive Global Economy

Compared to the cost of sending a team any distance at all, the price of high-quality videoconferences has become very attractive. In fact, some companies are requiring their staff to explain—before scheduling a trip—why a videoconference would not work as well as an in-person meeting. Eighty-eight percent of a group of travel managers surveyed by the National Business Travel Association in late 2001 reported they will increase their use of VC to control travel costs. Compare that percentage to the one in a similar survey by the same association made six months earlier, when just 33 percent said they would use more VC to reduce their travel budgets.[8]

To companies that schedule several meetings each year and whose operations are in multiple locations, vendors of VC systems argue that the cost of the highest-end VC equipment can be earned back in a matter of two years or less. Admittedly, the manufacturers and distributors of VC equipment make a lot of strong statements so it is difficult to determine just how accurate such claims might be. For example, one industry spokesperson stated that just one use of a videoconferencing system could equal the cost of bringing people together!

Live video events, linked by satellite, that match television broadcast standards are expensive—but they are able to reach thousands of people. Prices for satellite conferences range from $5,000 to more than $175,000 per setup. Even prices at this level, however, represent substantial savings when compared to travel and housing costs for thousands of people. These video events can also reach huge audiences in multiple cities who otherwise would not attend. Major conferences of this type can now also be conducted over ISDN (integrated services digital network) lines with substantially lower costs. Janelle recently spoke to an audience in Ljubljana, Slovenia, while four ISDN lines beautifully carried her entire six-hour workshop to another group assembled in Skopia, Macedonia, who watched her on a gigantic screen. During that entire period, connection to the remote site was lost only once and was quickly reestablished.

A major selling point of VC technology for many companies is not so much cost savings as time savings. Because videoconferences tend to be more structured, meeting time may be more efficiently spent compared to meeting in person. When a product helps organizations complete work significantly faster than before, cost is automatically less important and the product is almost guaranteed to become widely used.

The authors, all frequent flyers, regularly overhear businesspeople moan about productive time and family time lost to travel. For example, on a flight from Los Angeles to Seattle, Lewis Barlow heard a salesman from Rhinotek Computer Products calculating that with flying time, check-in, security, and travel to and from the airport, the trip ate up a full eight hours—all for a half-hour meeting.

And every "road warrior" has his or her own disaster stories of wasted time. Darr Fedderson, a well-respected business executive, laments, "When I worked as the national accounts manager for Rustoleum Paint, a colleague and I flew from Portland to Texas, with a plane change in Denver. When we arrived at Garden Ridge's office, the key decision maker was absent because of a family emergency that took place while we were traveling." Fedderson and his colleague had to make the same trip the following week. If a videoconference had been scheduled and canceled, the time wasted would have been minimal.

We have flown across the United States (losing a day in the process) and stayed overnight to participate in an hour-long sales meeting the following morning—in a jet-lagged state of mind. We then spent an equal amount of time returning home. Granted, these can be necessary and very lucrative meetings, but that is a heavy investment of time in order to participate in a one-hour meeting, and not all of these meetings need to be conducted in person.

Time and costs can be saved in other ways—only limited by one's imagination. People who locate products for distributors around the world can connect with customers via VC and show their products immediately instead of shipping samples. Individuals can show, buy, and sell used automobiles to distant buyers via videoconferences. Decisions can be made more quickly, and products get to stores and customers faster. This means time can be saved and productivity is increased.

Trend 3: Businesspeople Will Develop More Flexibility in Their Use of Communication Technologies

Long-distance communication has expanded dramatically since smoke signals and carrier pigeons. Now most competent businesspeople know how and when to use e-mail, faxes, PDF (portable document format) and graphic files, hard-copy letters, mass mailings, voice mail, cellular telephones, and person-to-person meetings. Most salespeople, for example, know when to pick up the telephone and talk with a customer, when to send an e-mail, and when a personal visit is necessary.

Videoconferencing enables businesspeople to contact more clients and colleagues in a shorter period of time. For example, a manager might be aware of two or three important meetings in locations across a wide geographical area that the manager could add value to by attending. Videoconferencing would make these multiple meetings in multiple locations possible in one day.

Videoconferencing also allows people to communicate with each other in a way that is perceived to be more connected than a simple

telephone call. For example, the authors attempted to sell our consulting services to a software company. We knew that just talking over the telephone would not lead to the kind of business relationship we wanted. At the same time, we knew we did not have a good enough relationship with the company to request an in-person meeting. We proposed a meeting using VC. The human resources (HR) director agreed. Being able to see each other on-screen allows people to become more familiar and comfortable with each other, leading to business that would probably never happen without the use of VC as one of the tools in the communication arsenal.

As more people become comfortable with videoconferencing and know how to maximize their time in virtual environments, requests for videoconferences instead of in-person meetings will become commonplace. Salespeople will not *automatically* be expected to travel thousands of miles in order to have a chance at getting an order. In our own training and consulting business, we now hear with increasing frequency from our large corporate clients, "Shall we videoconference about that?"

Business customers are becoming more guarded with their time as their workloads increase. Various studies already show that many customers prefer immediate access to their vendors over in-person contact. In other words, they will accept a videoconference in place of an in-person meeting—if they can schedule it right away.

Research conducted by a major consulting firm shows that, since 1970, business customers have shifted dramatically in what they say is necessary to complete a deal. Being able to have face-to-face contact with a company representative was the number one factor that companies specified in 1970. By 1990, however, this factor dropped dramatically—to eighth place![9]

Companies need to evaluate the impact of videoconferencing on their customer relationships. Videoconferencing may give organizations, even small ones, a new and less time-consuming more reasonably priced way of reaching out to memorably touch their customers. Any kind of meeting that allows people to see each other, even if it is not in person, can be a strong pull for repeat business.

Trend 4: Protecting the Environment and Conserving Resources Will Become Even More Important Considerations

Although environmentalism is now a minor factor pushing the demand for VC, it appears to be a growing one and is already important for environmentally conscious organizations. A majority of the population now believes that global warming is more than speculation and is concerned about it. In addition, an increasing percentage of people have a heightened sensitivity to their own impact on the environment. They will choose alternatives in order to avoid adding more pollutants to the environment.

Even if they are not avid conservationists, many organizations try not to waste precious fuel sources and pollute the atmosphere. Companies today recycle paper, aluminum cans, and bottles. They have accepted the ban on smoking indoors. And they often reason that a videoconference is less damaging to the environment than moving dozens of people around in airplanes and cars.

When socially conscious individuals see the strong links between saving time and costs and helping to protect the environment, this trend will be one more consideration that is factored into the decision whether to hold a person-to-person meeting or to schedule a videoconference.

Videoconferencing at the Tipping Point

These four trends are creating a "tipping point," to use the term popularized in the book by the same name.[10] A tipping point, as described by author Malcolm Gladwell, is a phenomenon that occurs when a critical mass is achieved. When a social practice has "tipped," it actually drives its own expansion. Because videoconferencing is on the brink of this critical mass point, businesspeople, need to be ready for a complete integration of VC into their lives.

While it is tempting to focus on the technology of videoconferencing, we will better leverage our time spent in virtual meetings if we take a people-centered approach to this newest communication equipment and focus on the new habits needed to take advantage of it.

2

Why New Habits Are Needed

We have come a long way from simply being excited about seeing people who are far away while talking with them to turning the technology into a necessary business communication tool.

Without developing the best habits, however, it is possible—even likely—we will completely misuse this visual medium, look awful, and be perceived in a negative way. And because videoconferences are easily recorded, any mishaps can be watched hundreds of times.

Jay Koenigsberg, founder and CEO of Vexcorp, Inc., a private IP (Internet protocol) network of videoconference services, has set up a network of branch locations across the United States. Jay points out, "The videoconferencing experience is either good or bad. There are no in-betweens."[11] In addition to providing centralized scheduling, and top-notch easy-to-use VC equipment, Vexcorp adds value by paying attention to what Koenigsberg calls the "total videoconference experience." Vexcorp has experimented with paint colors on his studio walls and settled on a deep blue that is best projected across the public Internet. Chairs do not rock or swivel. Lighting is soft. All of the locations have their city site listed with the Vexcorp logo. This enables participants to easily identify the location of each speaker. These are small details, but they matter. Koenigsberg describes one of his competitors who set up a VC studio in a strip mall next to a Virginia beach. Everyone could see people walking by in bathing suits through the glass window positioned directly in the camera's view.

Unique Aspects of Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing shares one salient characteristic with public relations, television broadcasting, and public speaking: good habits increase a person's effectiveness in front of an audience. And developing these habits to a point where you do not have to think about them can make the difference between success or failure.

Historians have noted that military officers tend to fight current wars as if they were still engaged in their previous battles. Likewise, most of us use the latest technology as if it were a mere extension of a previous medium. If we assume that videoconferences are merely regular meetings transmitted by video, we will be like those military generals who failed to appreciate the full applications of tanks and airplanes in warfare. We will underutilize VC and fail to appreciate the damage a poorly run video meeting can do to individuals and teams.

We all know that people have many bad face-to-face meeting habits. They waste time. They do not take advantage of the opportunities that a group of people can create in real space together. In face-to-face meetings, people interrupt each other; that can create chaos in a videoconference. People display negative body language—body language that will be amplified in a videoconference and recorded on tape for repeated viewing. People come unprepared to regular meetings, a practice that is more visible during a videoconference. The mere introduction of a camera makes any videoconference meeting more formal than an in-person meeting. Any problems that exist with regular meetings will be highlighted with VC. In addition, an entirely new set of problems will occur. As a result, more discipline is required to make virtual meetings effective.

Videoconferences also require structure especially when multiple sites are involved. If decision making in your organization primarily occurs during side conversations or in the hallways at meeting breaks, do not expect that to happen in videoconferences. Videoconferences may speed up decision making, but this can work against you because speed can result in the failure of all parties to accept the decision and therefore actually slow down implementation.

While several people can see each other during a videoconference, only one person at a time can hold forth or people will end up electronically talking over each other. In addition, if the system has a voice-activated camera that focuses on the speaker, interruptions can create chaotic movement as the camera jumps from one person to the next. When someone stops talking, a three-second delay may occur before the next person's remarks are activated. This slows the broadcast down. As a result, people need to follow a fairly orderly process or visual and auditory elements can be disruptive. To minimize the interruption problem, some videoconferences assign a person to control the switcher (an electronic device that allows only one person to be broadcast at a time).

People talking over each other commonly happens during any type of meeting. We are able to mentally sort out this very human style of communication when we are all in the same room together. The challenge is to manage this style virtually across multiple and distant sites.

Most in-person meetings also do not get recorded; a videoconference is easily captured. When together, people can readily see who else is in a room; one cannot assume that everyone in the room is visible on camera during a videoconference.

People and their organizations need to view videoconferences as a unique form of communication. Aspects of VC need to be determined by the culture of the organization, the sophistication of the equipment available, and the reasons why the virtual meeting has been scheduled in place of an in-person meeting.

Videoconferencing is not as reliable a form of communication as the telephone, at least at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The telephone nearly always works—even for teleconferences set up at multiple sites. However, it is not uncommon for VC sessions to be disconnected or run into other technical problems. Fortunately, once a conference is disconnected, it is fairly easy to start it up again. Virtual meetings require patience, which most of us do not possess, accustomed as we are to the stability of wired telephone connections.

Demonstrations of desktop VC equipment at videoconferencing shows almost always look better than real usage. We have heard the

complaint, "Try connecting it to a *real* network," from everyone except people who sell the technology. VC experts also emphasize that low-end (in other words, more affordable) technology simply does not match the consumer's expectations of VC's capacity.

While we cannot specifically predict how VC will eventually develop, we will point you in the right direction as you use the medium. We will help you think about and begin to develop habits that may make the difference between advancing your career and putting the brakes on it. It is probably a good idea to get off on the right foot with new habits—when you are on camera!

You're on Television—Act Like It

In many ways, videoconferencing is similar to much of today's broadcast journalism. CNBC financial shows, with their informality, resemble what an in-house conference might look like. And CNN's *Town Meeting* show, complete with e-mails sent in for a moderator to respond to, are close to what we can expect many in-house videoconference events to be like in the future.

While we may excuse business virtual meetings that are not quite up to CNN standards, we still have high expectations for anything that is on video. Virtual meetings that look as if someone put a stationary video camera in front of a group of people and set the lens at wide angle will be unacceptable. People who could not attend the meeting and are expected to watch such a video record will be very unhappy—and very bored.

This resemblance to television scares many people about VC. They feel exposed and they do not know how to match television standards. After all, others—who are not in the room with them—are watching them and possibly making negative side comments! By comparison, people on television business channels have had years of experience in developing habits to look professional. Television broadcasters know how to keep the viewers' interest; they shift frames, run multiple pictures simultaneously, and talk in sound bites. Videoconferences are interactive—unlike television programs. They use conversation to work ideas, consider pros and cons, and gain support. They do not engage in these activities to entertain or

attract a larger audience. While content is extremely critical in a business virtual meeting, it is easy to overlook the fact that the way the content "looks" can be equally important.

In one sense, being on television is easier than participating in a videoconference. Because broadcast cameras keep shifting frames and focus, no one is on camera all the time. However, in a videoconference when the camera lens is set at wide angle to include a group of people seated around the table, no one is ever off camera. In face-to-face meetings, we have the opportunity to scratch our heads, yawn, or stretch while colleagues focus on the person who is speaking. In a television studio interview, you are also blessed with commercial breaks. Videoconferencing, when you are *never* out of view, can be exhausting.

When tape recorders were introduced to the public, people squealed, "I don't sound like that!" when they first heard their voices played back to them. Today most of us are quite used to the sound of our voices on tape. Now you can hear people say the same thing, in effect, when they watch themselves on video: "I don't look like that" or "I hate my hair" or "That shirt looks horrible" or "Do I really look like that?" It's going to take us a while to become comfortable with seeing our images regularly projected back to us. And some of us may never like it!

Eventually, businesspeople have more or less learned how to adjust to all types of electronic communication gadgetry even though they certainly do not use all the tools to their maximum. Each type of new communication medium both generates and requires different habits. Voice mail, for example, required new habits—and some people still resist it and leave low-quality or unusable messages. Some of us excel at one medium over another, but we are all expected to have a minimal level of expertise with all means of communication and not to squeal like a teenager as we resist the medium.

Consider what would happen if you refused to use e-mail because you have difficulty writing your thoughts coherently in a rapid-message format. Although some senior-level executives get away with this because they have staff support, if they were just beginning their careers today they would never make it to the executive suite without using e-mail.

Some people do not like communicating by telephone, but in business you have no choice but to learn good telephone skills. Likewise, it does little good to complain about voice mail. You are going to run into it, so you need to know how to leave a succinct, appropriate message. Disliking cellular telephones is no excuse not to use them today. And if you refuse to deal with telephone "menus," you will never be able to get through to most organizations.

You had better have some degree of computer literacy in today's world as well. A decade ago some people would proudly raise their hands when asked who did not use a computer. Today, almost everyone (except for the very elderly) is too embarrassed to acknowledge an inability to use computer technology. You are expected to know how to download or upload documents, send graphic images, work a spreadsheet, and understand hundreds of acronyms.

VC is placing the same demands on businesspeople. A few years ago, few people would raise their hands in assent when asked whether they had ever participated in a videoconference. Now almost everyone indicates they have participated in a videoconference of some sort—or at least they are too embarrassed to acknowledge they have not.

FIGURE 2.1 VIDEOCONFERENCES COMPARED TO IN-PERSON MEETINGS

Videoconferences	*In-Person Meetings*
They are considered special events with a high level of excitement.	They are commonplace and frequently have a bad reputation.
Businesspeople need new habits.	Businesspeople can use old habits.
They are made possible by equipment.	Occur when people show up.
Tardiness and late starts are more noticeable.	People coming and going is usual.
You are always on camera unless your system switches the camera to different sites or people.	You face less personal scrutiny.
The benchmark is television.	No real benchmark exists except your organization's current meetings.
Tighter control of time because other people may be scheduled to use the equipment.	Tight control of ending times is not required.
Interruptions across sites create confusion.	Participants can easily interrupt each other.
They are easily recorded.	Recording requires effort and is noticeable.
They can be abruptly disconnected.	Human bandwidth does not normally disconnect!
Eating looks bad.	Eating is commonplace.
Managing the technology is critical.	The technology that must be managed is limited.
It is more difficult for everyone to speak.	It is easier for everyone to comment.
Negative facial expressions and body language are amplified.	Body language is part of total body communication.
Participants cannot necessarily see everyone.	Participants can easily see everyone in the room.
Side or hallway conversations are not easily conducted.	Side and hallway conversations are part of the total communication package.
You do not know what the other person is seeing.	You know what each other sees.

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FIGURE 2.1 VIDEOCONFERENCES COMPARED TO IN-PERSON MEETINGS, *continued*

Videoconferences	*In-Person Meetings*
You only see what the camera focuses on.	You see the whole space in the meeting room.
Clothing patterns and colors make a difference.	The human eye can handle any color and pattern.
Sounds are amplified.	Many sounds get lost.
More people at multiple sites can be accommodated.	Meeting rooms have space limitations.
People can disappear from a meeting if they never talk and the camera is voice activated.	Everyone in a meeting can be seen, whether talking or not.
You need to learn to use some equipment.	You do not need to learn to use any equipment.
Side conversations will cause chaos if you do not have mute buttons and use them.	A softly spoken side conversation will not be disruptive.
Lots of bandwidth is needed to use video displays.	A VCR can easily be used.
More electronic applications are possible.	Fewer electronic applications are possible.
You can easily bring people from a great distance.	Bringing people is costly and time-consuming.
They require greater discipline and structure.	They require less discipline and structure.

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