Organising a videoconference

Planning Ahead

When organising a VC (Videoconference) users need to remember meetings are often time constrained. There are a number of reasons for this:

- endpoints need to be booked, meaning that times have to be defined and may be restricted by heavy use
- if the service is popular rooms could be scarce
- video meetings can be more tiring than their face-to-face equivalents and some people find it hard to concentrate for longer than an hour

VC meetings which are well organised and controlled make the best use of the available time and are therefore more successful. The need for a chair person can depend on the size of the meeting or its content. Meetings with 3 participants can be informal but when numbers grow, formality becomes increasingly necessary. If the meeting agenda has a lot of ground to cover or has a complex subject matter, the chairperson plays a vital role in keeping participants on topic.

A proper chairperson and high degree of organisation are beneficial as they ensure:

- participants speak to the point and not at length
- relevance of discussion
- coverage of all points on an agenda
- crisp and highly productive meetings

Chairing & Facilitating

Two roles are key to the success of larger meetings:

Chairperson: The person who controls the interactions between all sites during the meeting and ensures the meeting starts and ends on time. The chairperson may also want to control what is seen by participants if presentatitions are to be given.

Facilitator: The person at each site who books the room, distributes materials and makes sure the equipment is set up and put away properly. The Chairperson may also be the facilitator at their own site. It is the job of the facilitator to liaise with opposite numbers at the other sites to arrange the timing of the meeting.

The most successful meetings and sessions are led by an experienced video-meeting chairperson or facilitator. The next section describes the attributes and responsibilities of these roles in more detail.

Agenda

An agenda should contain a list of all the topics that can realistically be covered in the time available. This and any associated documents should be agreed with participants then distributed to the remote sites well before the meeting. A video meeting without an agenda makes it extremely difficult to take minutes and to keep discussions under control but attendees may also be left feeling unsure whether the VC accomplished anything or not.

Preparation of Visual Aids

If visual aids are going to be used during the meeting, if possible fax, email or publish on a website copies of everything to be use ahead of time. If attendees have a copy of the documentation and their video feed is poor, they will still be able to participate. Remember, if users are intending to use a document camera they should be aware that graphics, such as charts, transmit much better than text. Also, tables may be difficult to read because of the distortion in the video signals. Prepared documents should use large type and have fairly wide margins. Work on the principle of 'one idea per page' and use large letters (e.g. 36 point fonts). Colours should not be over-used and should preferably be saturated. The same basic guidelines apply when using a PC directly to present material in a video meeting.