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video conferencing solutions

Cloud or on-premise:

choosing the right way to deploy videoconferencing for your organisation

2 Background
2 Why choose cloud?
3 Why choose on-premise?
5 5 questions to ask when considering VC
5 Who does it best?
8 Video conferencing in action – Shepherd Centre case study

Videoconferencing offers an impressive value proposition: improved collaboration between geographically separated workers, while also cutting travel costs, increasing productivity and connecting people. However, the choice between the two primary deployment options — on-premise or cloud-based — is not always an obvious one. Both options have benefits and best use cases, as discussed in this paper.

Why choose the cloud?

There's no doubt about it. Technology providers are moving to the cloud in droves such is the popularity of SaaS models. In a typical VC cloud-based scenario, a customer will lease videoconferencing software from a cloud provider as a pay-as-you-go service. This provider will host the videoconferencing appliances and servers in their own data centres, and deliver a fully hosted and managed solution. Generally, the only hardware that customers have on-site are the devices to capture video data (cameras, microphones, room-based videoconferencing systems). Such a set-up provides several advantages to customers.

Since there's no need to purchase costly hardware, cloud-based videoconferencing is significantly cheaper up front than an on-premise solution. This allows organisations to consider videoconferencing solely as an operating expenditure. This is useful for organisations or departments with a low capital budget, but some operating funds to spend. It also means videoconferencing is lower risk — if you fork out many hundreds of thousands (or potentially more) of dollars on the hardware, then find the system you bought doesn't suit your needs, you'll have a lot of expensive kit in a storeroom that's not providing value.

A cloud service is also significantly easier to manage and administrate than an on-premise solution, since the service provider is doing all the hard work for you. Initial set-up, ongoing configuration and tech support are taken care of by your service provider, meaning you don't need to allocate staff to (or hire new people for) managing videoconferencing kit. IT workers can instead focus on supporting your other systems,

or new projects. For some organisations, a reduced requirement for staff translates into cost savings. Other organisations simply don't have the staff or funds to spare to support an on-premise video solution, so a cloud option really opens doors for them.

A cloud solution is also faster to deploy and easier to scale. An on-premise solution can take weeks to deploy, but a cloud-based system can be ready to go as soon as you've connected up your video equipment. If you eventually decide to give more staff access to your videoconferencing solution, a call to your cloud provider can set this up within a day. And should you find you have more licences than you need, you can easily reduce your required users and save some operating dollars. An on-premise solution can't provide that sort of flexibility.

Why choose on-premise?

While the cloud may be a newer delivery model, with a variety of benefits, there are still instances where an on-premise solution is appropriate. In an on-premise scenario, an organisation will purchase videoconferencing hardware up front, deploy it in their own office or data centre, and manage the solution themselves. The specifics can vary but the broad strokes are the same: a large up-front capital expenditure is involved, the hardware is hosted somewhere owned by the customer and the customer must organise management of the kit.

Since the customer takes ownership of the administration of the equipment, an on-premise solution can provide greater control over — and insight into — the system. On-premises solutions can therefore be attractive for organisations that are required to keep a

close eye on every aspect of their IT. Some are required to by law, others by industry regulations, and sometimes senior management just doesn't want a third party to have any contact with the company's data. In these circumstances, an on-premise solution allows a customer to control every aspect of the solution, and the data that it carries. This higher level of control also means the customer has a greater ability to customise the solution to their liking. Some organisations — particularly if they are larger and have unique requirements — may want their videoconferencing system to be set to a very specific configuration. In this circumstance, it may be easier to have direct access to the equipment and all its potential, rather than request a cloud provider make changes to their pre-built and pre-configured solution.

There is also an argument for an on-premise video solution if there is already a significant investment in local or wide area networks built for internal communications. Cloud solutions typically bypass this type of set-up and communicate over the public internet; depending on internet capacity, some users may need to revisit their internet bandwidth capabilities.

Conclusion

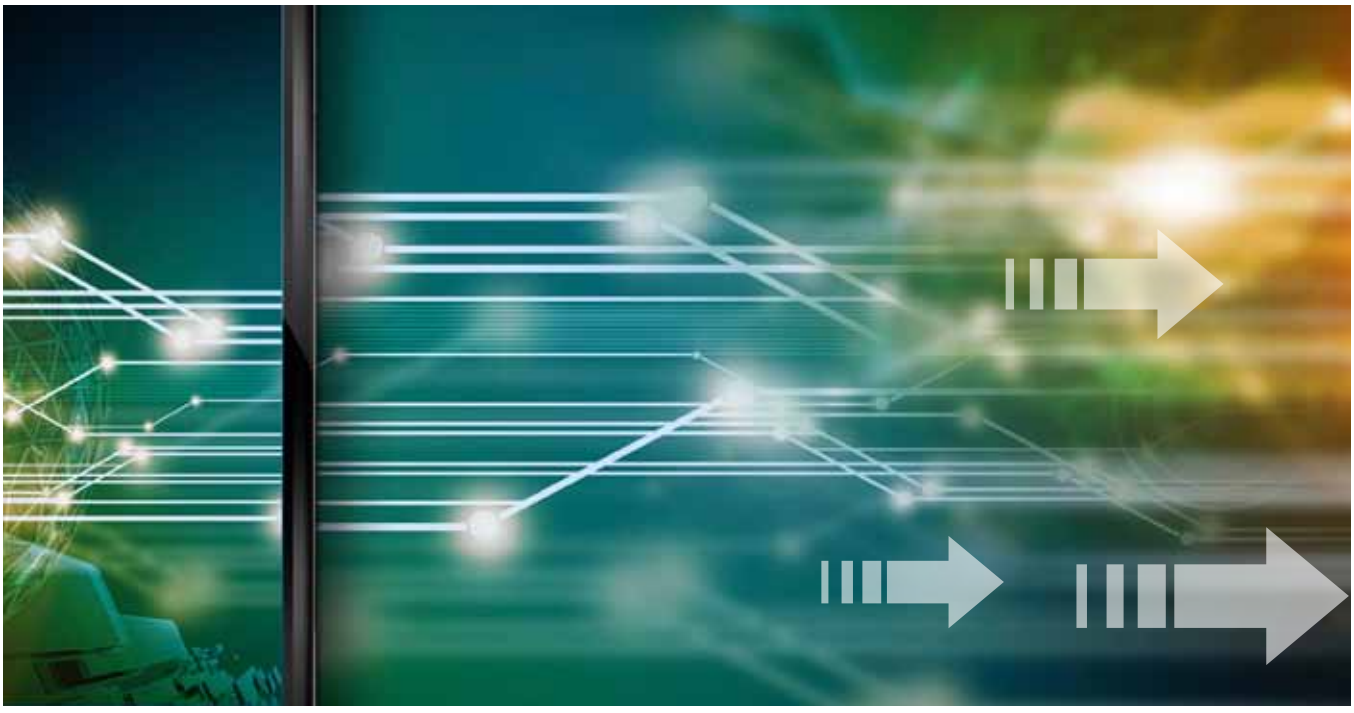
Whichever way you deploy videoconferencing, you're enabling a variety of productivity benefits and opening up the ability to save on travel costs. But making the right choice when it comes to deployment model will allow you to maximise the value videoconferencing offers.

Cloud-based videoconferencing is best for organisations that:

- Want to avoid big up-front costs
- Can't or don't want to dedicate staff to managing videoconferencing systems
- Want a solution quickly
- Want the ability to scale users up and down easily

An on-premise videoconferencing solution is suitable for organisations that:

- Have very stringent control requirements
- Want a granular level of customisation



Five questions to ask a cloud provider:

1. Do software updates happen automatically?
2. Does your system encrypt data in transit?
3. Do you offer room video systems that automatically configure themselves?
4. Do you have an easily accessible knowledge base for customers?
5. Do you offer both web-based support and phone support?

Who does it best?

> Cloud providers

FEATURES	Lifesize Cloud	Skype	Web conferencing (eg, GoToMeeting, WebEx)	Polycom Real Presence	Starleaf	Blue Jeans
Screen share	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Call escalation	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	×
Scheduled meetings	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓
Instant video calls	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	×
Multiway calls	Up to 40	Up to 25	Up to 25	Up to 30	Unknown	Up to 100
Integration with room-based VC	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓
Multidevice functionality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shared directory	✓	×	×	✓	✓	×
Video recording capability	✓	×	✓	×	×	✓
Network traversal	✓	×	Limited	✓	✓	✓
Secure	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓
Price	$$	Free	$$	$$$	$$	$

> On-premise solutions

Boardroom solution

FEATURES	Lifesize (Icon 600)	Lifesize (Icon 800)	Cisco (SX20 Quick Set)	Cisco (SX80 Quick Set)	Polycom (RealPresence Group 500)	Polycom (Group 700)
Integration – cloud solutions	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓
Shared directories	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓
Interoperability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-configured	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Zoom capability	10x	10x	5x, 8x or 12x	4x or 10x	4x or 12x	4x or 12x
Resolution	Up to 1080p	Up to 1080p	Up to 1080p	Up to 1080p	Up to 1080p	Up to 1080p
Frame rate	Up to 60fps	Up to 60fps	Up to 60fps	Up to 60fps	Up to 60fps	Up to 60fps
HDMI input	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Price	$$	$$$	$$$	$$$$ or $$$$	$$$ or $$$$	$$$$

Huddle room

FEATURES	Lifesize (Flex)	Lifesize (Icon 400)	Cisco (SX10)	Polycom RPG 310	Starleaf (GT Mini 3330)	Vidyo (Vidyo-Room HD 50/100/220)
Integration – cloud platforms	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
Shared directories	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×
Interoperability	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
Pre-configured	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×
Zoom capability	6x	6x	5x	4x	Unknown	Requires third-party camera
Resolution	Up to 1080p	Up to 1080p	Up to 1080p	Up to 1080p	Up to 1080p	Requires third-party camera
Frame rate	30fps@1080p 60fps@720p	30fps	30fps	Up to 60fps	Up to 60fps	Requires third-party camera
HDMI input	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Price	$	$$	$$	$$	$	N/A

Videoconferencing in action

Summary

The Shepherd Centre has replaced its old-fashioned teleconferencing system with a cloud-based videoconferencing system, achieving better staff interaction and improved quality of conversation. The system has also led to sizeable cost savings, and is helping to ease travel demands on the families of its clients.

The challenge

The Shepherd Centre is a charity aimed at improving the listening and speaking abilities of children with hearing loss. The organisation employs 60 people in five facilities across NSW and the ACT.

The charity wanted to introduce videoconferencing to improve communications between offices, to cut down staff travel time and expense, and to replace cumbersome teleconferences of up to 40 people. The organisation also wanted to improve the reach and the scope of the centre's services for deaf and hearing-impaired children.

CEO Jim Hungerford explained: "This was an area of significant interest to us. A lot of our work involves the children's families. Sometimes, it's not practical for those families to come into our centre so we had already been exploring the use of Skype for telemedicine, but we wanted to improve on this.

"I knew that our first need was for traditional videoconferencing and that we required a system that was user friendly, easy to set up and easy to turn on. We are a bunch of clinicians, not 'techies'. It had to be idiot-proof," Hungerford said.

The solution

Shepherd Centre initially deployed a videoconferencing solution comprising Lifesize Express 220 Series and Team 220 solutions, with 14 endpoints across the organisation's offices.

In the second phase of the rollout, Shepherd Centre engaged a Lifesize business partner to extend the scope of the system. It was determined that Lifesize Cloud would suit the desktop, mobile and bridging requirements, while Lifesize UVC Video Centre would be best for recording requirements.

Lifesize's business partner managed cloud implementation across all offices, including the upgrading of existing systems and deployment of new systems for additional rooms. They provide Shepherd Centre with UVC Video Centre as a managed service, meaning Shepherd can use that system's capabilities without having to worry about the hardware overhead, storage or management of the system.

The results

By replacing its teleconferencing system with the new videoconferencing system, the Shepherd Centre has enabled better staff interaction and improved quality of conversation.

"With the National Disability Insurance Scheme about to launch in Canberra, there have been lots of discussions to ensure we are ready. With the videoconferencing equipment, we can chat as though face to face. It's made life much easier," Hungerford said.

The system has also led to sizeable cost savings. Despite a 50% increase in activity across the organisation, videoconferencing has enabled the centre to maintain travel costs at the same level as 2013.

The system allows audiologists to fine-tune clients' bionic ears or Cochlear implants remotely, easing the burden of travel on clients.

"We can have an audiologist in Sydney and a child in Canberra. This has been a fantastic move because it's more convenient for clinicians and for the families. And with fewer logistics to juggle, treatment can occur faster," Hungerford said.

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