

Boosting equity by blurring the lines between virtual and in-person meetings



With 66% of U.S. employees now working remotely part-time (average of 6 days per month), the construct of traditional business meetings has fundamentally changed forever.¹

What this all means is that companies, now more than ever, need to employ new technologies to support their at-home/in-office staff, especially for business meetings. Otherwise, productivity will suffer. This technology goes beyond video walls and now includes at-home cameras and microphones, panoramic views, auto-zooming, intelligent video direction, and more.

50% of executives attend 6-15 meetings per week while half of managers attend more than 16.²

Today's meeting room technologies have come a long way from what we were used to seeing, even five years ago. Now, with high-definition cameras and microphones (in the office and at home), AI powered auto-zoom and people counter technology, business meetings are starting to blur the lines between the virtual and the physical. This is critical today as organizations struggle with creating an equitable work environment for all employees. The last thing a company wants to do is alienate remote workers or be seen as favoring onsite staff.

DETECTING PHYSICAL EXPRESSIONS PROMOTES EQUITY

When remote staff can see and hear everything going on in a business meeting similarly to onsite attendees, the playing field (so to speak) is leveled, and both types of participants have the opportunity to get the most out of the group discussion.

Seeing a meeting participant's facial expressions (whether they are in-office or at-home) is crucial for effective communication — so much of what we read and communicate is nonverbal. And

it's important to note that new technologies not only enable remote staff to experience everything happening in the meeting room but also allows in-person attendees to clearly experience the contributions of at-home or remote parties. It's no longer enough to barely make out the crackling voice of an at-home employee without seeing their facial expressions and body language, which can help articulate true meaning of what they are saying. These deficiencies are now largely mitigated.

Regardless of the physical location of the specific meeting participant, a simple shake of the head or subtly raised eyebrow can tell the true story when someone is speaking or reacting. With typical meeting room technology, it can be difficult for in-room participants to see the face of every remote attendee accurately and clearly, and vice versa.

Fortunately, new technologies are mitigating these meeting challenges. Intelligent video conference management systems and large, high resolution video screens are making their way into today's meeting rooms. Comprising multiple, integrated 180° field-of-view cameras and on-device AI-powered auto zoom, these solutions are bridging the gap between physical and virtual meeting participants.

Simply put, every part of the meeting room is now detectable and broadcast to all participants (even white boards located off to the side) and the same goes for remote participants' face while speaking.

These advanced meeting facilitation systems automatically detect who is speaking and then zoom in on that person's face. Attendees in the meeting room can look on-screen and see a closeup of the speaker's face if they wish for a closer, clearer view of the speaker — even when they are in the same room. At-home attendees will have a similar experience. Remote workers can now utilize ultra-HD personal video cameras sitting atop their computer. These professional-grade, personal cameras feature AI-enabled image enhancement and picture-in-picture technology (one focused on the speaker and one focused on the white board, e.g.).

1 "25 Trending Remote Work Statistics [2023]: Facts, Trends, and Projections", Jun. 13, 2023, Zippia.

2 "Do you Know the Average Time Spent in Meetings?", Feb. 28, 2023, Fellow.

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“It was Albert Mehrabian, a researcher of body language, who first broke down the components of a face-to-face conversation. He found that communication is 55% nonverbal, 38% vocal, and 7% words [only](#).”³

When someone in the meeting is speaking, their computer/tablet screen will zoom right in on the speaker so they too can see their facial expressions in full view — this works both if the speaker is in the meeting room or if they are a remote attendee. This helps clarify focus and shows who is speaking, as talking over one another and dealing with lag can delay and stymie communication for such e-meetings. Once the speaking stops, or if multiple people are speaking simultaneously, the system will automatically refocus on the entire group.

Real-time whiteboard technology live streams and enhances the picture of any white board in the room, enabling onsite participants and remote attendees to both accurately view it. How many times have you sat in a meeting but could not see the full whiteboard? Same goes for at-home participation. It is virtually impossible to see that little whiteboard with a single camera presiding over the full meeting. This new technology can even capture the white board in real time and reconfigure the picture, so it doesn't appear elongated or angled to distant or remote viewers.

SOUND

About a third of communication that is non-verbal comes from tone of voice. Consider the sentence, “Oh I'd love to go to the park.” Read it genuinely in your head — it sounds eager and excited. Now read it again as sarcastic — it feels harsher and sardonic. This expresses the importance of clearly hearing speakers' voices, inflections and even utterances.

Meeting rooms are now equipped with full duplex speakerphones, which enable equal bi-directional communication for easier meeting flows and conversation. These systems include multiple professional-grade microphones and precision voice detection. Intelligent algorithms and beamforming technology automatically identify and remove residual echo, static noise, and vibration to fill the room with premium, high-definition sound and crystal-clear voices.

Remote attendees can also use a high-definition stereo headset to stream the best audio quality to their remote location. They will clearly hear every speaker in the meeting and even any rumblings off to the side — if they wish to capture that, too. Active Noise Cancellation (ANC) headsets, powered by advanced digital chipsets, are designed for incredible noise cancellation to filter out those barking dogs or loud background noises.

With most employees working from multiple locations every week, workers and employers require technology to support mobility, flexibility and reliability—with the confidence that they work seamlessly with their existing collaboration platforms. Make sure that your audio and video technology does exactly that, so you can ensure all participants are seen and heard equally.

³ “How Much of Communication is Nonverbal”, 2023, Albert Mehrabian cited by University of Texas Permian Basin.