

Software-based video conferencing expands the technology's reach

By [Stefan Mayer](#)

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The rapid expansion of the market for software-based video conferencing and telepresence solutions have not yet (and will most probably never) replace the need for dedicated, room-based solutions among mid-sized and large South African organisations.



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The rise of PBX-based video conferencing and telepresence infrastructure, as well as cloud solutions such as Microsoft's Lync, has expanded the reach of the technology rather replacing hardware-based solutions. The software-based video conferencing market is the major driver of growth in the unified communications space.

Over the past five years, we have seen the rise of commoditised, software-based solutions in the unified communications space. In our experience, these solutions are expanding the total market for video conferencing and telepresence rather than replacing legacy solutions. The appeal of PBX-based systems and cloud solutions is easy to understand. They make it easier for mobile workers to take part in video conferences from their smartphones, tablets or notebooks, are simple to deploy, and do not require large-scale infrastructure investment to support them.

Flexibility makes sense

With Wi-Fi widely available, good 3G/LTE penetration, and improvements to video compression technology the user experience for mobile video is improving in leaps and bounds. In a mobile world, the flexibility of software solutions makes sense. They extend video from the boardroom to the extended workforce, using devices and tools that employees are already carrying with them wherever they go. This promotes more effective collaboration at an affordable cost.

It is, however, important to note the place of this solution in the market. These solutions can be integrated to support and complement dedicated hardware boardroom setups. Many companies already have made extensive investments in dedicated hardware for room-based video conferencing and telepresence. Many enterprises still prefer a hardware appliance to software solutions for reasons of quality, performance, ease of use and reliability.

For many customers, a room system is more ideal because it allows them to use a fast fibre line and high-quality audiovisual equipment to host video meetings without the scratchy sound and blurry, pixelated video you might experience on a mobile connection.

Natural interaction

High-end telepresence offers virtual high-definition communication that is the next best thing to meeting face to face. Its directional audio and crystal-clear, life-size video makes it feel like meeting participants are in the same room. This promotes natural interaction and collaboration.

At the same time, a growing number of remote and mobile users mean that companies need hybrid video conferencing deployments that meet their needs. Room-based solutions are only a part of the market today. They are ideal for conference calls where people from different fixed locations need to meet - for example, the Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg offices. They are also great for companies that don't have many remote or mobile workers.

Integration is one of the major challenges companies will face as the shift to software-based video conferencing accelerates. They will require help ensuring that the solutions they buy are compatible as well as a high-level of expertise to set up and manage the audiovisual equipment, network, and software installations.

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