

21st Century Show and Tell



**By Ilene Manahan,
Contributing Writer**

Were the clothier Robert Hall here to promote the value of videoconferencing today, the late retailer's pop jingle, "When the values go up, up, up...and prices go down, down, down," would apply perfectly, especially with the final rhymed reasons for the retailer's success: "high quality" and "economy". Fred Frisco, CTS, executive vice president of Avectus, based in Lebanon, which provides audiovisual and videoconferencing design and installation services, estimates videoconferencing services and usage today cost a tenth what they did 10 years ago, yet offer 10 times the quality. "Ten years ago, a majority of companies couldn't afford the technology or couldn't justify the capital expense," Frisco says.

Further, the high costs and time required for travel, and scheduling constraints that make it difficult to

get everyone necessary for meetings into a single room have added to the interest in videoconferencing. "Some companies still like to fly people out for certain person-to-person meetings where they might get a better feeling for a person's body language," Frisco says, "but the quality of the technology has progressed to where videoconferencing is being accepted as first class for business purposes. Multi-located participants 'virtually' feel they are in the same room."

Thanks to its advanced technology and cost-effectiveness, videoconferencing has become a mainstream and practical communication medium for even small companies. Today it can be accessed effectively on laptops, as well as in sophisticated videoconferencing rooms for corporate meetings, training and distance learning, remote interviews and other human resources

applications, sales and workers' telecommuting from home or while on the road.

For all these reasons, videoconferencing is considered the fastest growing teleconferencing sector and is forecast to be a \$2.6 billion industry by 2010.

New Jersey's pre-eminence in the telecommunications industry has resulted in a number of leading edge videoconferencing firms flourishing here, each serving a target market.

BT Conferencing

BT Conferencing, a subsidiary of

"Videoconferencing is the next best thing to meeting in-person," asserts Jeff Prestel, head of BT Conferencing's video business unit. Historically, he points out, customers found videoconferencing too costly, too hard to use and unreliable. "Those issues have been addressed, making videoconferencing a mainstream communication vehicle that companies are comfortable with and are using regularly."

BT Conferencing offers a "services" approach to videoconferencing, Prestel explains. Once a client has the necessary hardware

Conferencing also can provide streamed videoconferencing and web-casting to anyone with a PC and an Internet browser for internal meetings and communications with suppliers and customers, whether in real-time or for archived viewing.

BT Conferencing recently combined its One Source service approach to videoconferencing with Cisco's technological approach, Cisco TelePresence, to create an "immersive" audio and video environment that delivers the feeling of everyone being in the same room.

All a company needs to use BT Conferencing's services is videoconferencing equipment at each location connected to a company's virtual private network (VPN) or to the Internet Protocol (IP) or Integrated Services Digital (ISDN) public network.

Set-up of an immersive room could cost as much as \$300,000 (though lower cost rooms are possible), Prestel says, while a desktop unit with a computer monitor, camera and codec to enable individual videoconferencing would cost about \$5,000. The concierge service for two sites would cost about 65 cents a minute plus \$175 per hour compared with 25 cents per minute for a self-service conference.

Avectus

Based in Lebanon, Avectus is a full-service, "value-added" audiovisual and videoconferencing integration company that maintains a comprehensive portfolio of technically-advanced audiovisual, videoconferencing and multimedia design, equipment and installation services to meet clients' specific meeting needs. To achieve that goal, Avectus provides needs analysis, engineering, proposal approval, implementation, training and preventative maintenance.

Avectus has installed custom-



BT Conferencing, with locations in Edison and Nutley, has combined its One Source services approach to videoconferencing with Cisco's TelePresence technology to create an immersive audio/visual environment.

British Telecommunications plc (BT), one of the world's leading providers of communications solutions and services, was established more than 25 years ago and is a leading global provider of audio, video and web collaboration services. With about 400 employees at its Edison offices and Nutley network facility, BT Conferencing provides videoconferencing solutions and hardware for meetings and distance learning – primarily to large- and mid-sized public and private customers including companies, government agencies and schools and universities.

and software, BT Conferencing can customize its comprehensive One Source services to meet the client's needs. Options range from BT Conferencing's end-to-end "concierge service (often selected for senior executives who need to use videoconferencing, but don't want to have to touch the technology) to the company's more economical "self-service" (available for meeting managers who can operate their own videoconferencing equipment, a remote and web-based application to launch and manage their point-to-point or multi-point conferences). BT

ized videoconferencing facilities for major New Jersey companies, including Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals in Wayne. With its parent company, located in Leverkusen, Germany, requiring face-to-face communication with its U.S. subsidiary, Bayer HealthCare embraces videoconferencing and considers it a critical communication tool in its everyday business. Avectus' videoconferencing installation includes custom integrated equipment from leading conferencing manufacturers such as Tandberg and ClearOne Communications.

Additionally, Avectus integrated auxiliary equipment which enhanced the complete videoconferencing experience, enabling the technology to become more of a personal experience. Custom programmed Crestron touch-screen control interfaces simplify the operation of a highly complex and technical system by automating multiple functions with the press of a button on an easy-to-use graphical interface. Avectus also included a complete wireless boundary microphone system, complementing an installed audio system. Several camera systems expand the installation's capabilities by providing multiple angles, presets and previews, which transmit real-time video signals to the far end and can be recorded on DVD.

The audience experience is displayed on multiple large screen projection systems and plasma display panels. Real-time face-to-face video and audio communication is enhanced with the capability of sharing real-time computer-generated materials such as PowerPoint presentations, product launches, corporate-related discussion materials and more.

For Bayer HealthCare, integrated videoconferencing technology is helping the company increase productivity, expedite decision



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making and streamline overall communications for this global leader in healthcare innovations. While integrated videoconferencing systems vary widely in cost, fully-integrated and installed videoconferencing systems typically range between \$5,000 and \$50,000, Avestus' EVP Frisco says. An "average" installed videoconferencing room with other audiovisual features and capabilities would cost around \$25,000, including microphones, speakers, LCD or plasma displays, integrated control system, installation, programming and training.



Jeff Prestel (left), head of BT Conferencing's video business unit, demonstrates a desktop conference unit.

Vemics

Some companies gear their videoconferencing services for particular market segments. For example, Vemics, which has moved its base from River Edge to Austin, Texas, maintains a key joint venture partnership with *Exceptional Parent* magazine in Woodcliff Lake. Using Vemics' LiveAccess, *Exceptional Parent* On-Line (EP-On-Line) offers hosted, single point of access educational programs to physicians around the world serving special needs populations. *Exceptional Parent* provides the program content while Vemics stages the events, from marketing and registration to technical support and

archiving for subsequent viewing.

"Our LiveAccess has evolved to being a powerful interactive voice, video and data videoconferencing platform that also offers video-streaming and archiving over a standard broadband connection (T1, DSL, cable modem or Wi-Fi), and it is accessible from PCs, laptops, Smartphones or PDAs, as well as in large conference rooms," explains Vemics' CEO Fred Zolla.

With EP-On-Line, as many as 15-20 hospitals might gather physicians in a videoconferencing room for interactive voice, video and data participation in the ses-

sion. Another 400 to 800 physicians might view the session individually, at their hospital or home, and can interact with the presenter via e-mail or instant messaging. Zolla points out that since Vemics packages its education solutions as a service, it is not restricted to using one technology, one content provider or one method of delivery. Instead, it can take advantage of the latest video, voice, data and learning technologies and develop its education solutions in partnership with leading colleges, universities (including the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey for the healthcare industry) and other content providers

or subject matter experts. "With Vemics' solutions, businesses can cost-effectively collaborate with and train their workforces, suppliers, service providers and customers, face-to-face and in real-time, without heavy investment in IT infrastructure or the uncertainty of evolving technologies," Zolla says.

LiveAccess is suitable for between 2 and 90 interactive users with participants only required to have a laptop with a Pentium 4 processor or better. The system can videostream to or be archived for an unlimited number of participants. Depending on the services required by a client, costs for educational events using the LiveAccess videoconferencing services for an average program of two hours range from about \$25,000 to \$75,000.

Vidyo

One of the newest companies on the videoconferencing scene is Vidyo, headquartered in Hackensack. Vidyo has developed a multi-point videoconferencing solution that works like the Internet. This proprietary architecture is based on the recent Scalable Video Coding (SVC) enhancement to the H.264 standard for video compression. It allows the video and audio components of VidyoConferencing to dynamically adapt to varying network conditions such as packet loss, fluctuating network bandwidth and network delay, and delivers the highest quality HD "personal telepresence" experience that the end user is capable of receiving, whether they are participating on a Mac (OS versions 10 and 10.5) or a Windows (Windows XP or Vista) desktop, or using Vidyo's special videoconferencing room set-up. Vidyo currently is the only manufacturer that is using this SVC standard for its videoconferencing set-up. No dedicated networks are needed, just a regular IP high-speed cable

or DSL Internet connection.

Launched in January 2008, the VidyoConferencing product family is a comprehensive solution that can scale from HD desktop videoconferencing to the highest end-room system. Primarily a software solution, VidyoConferencing is installed quickly and easily. Joining a conference involves going to the Web portal and simply clicking on the "meeting" to be joined.

Active professionals in the state's videoconferencing industry, Vidyo CEO Ofer Shapiro and

China. "Although there was a team of sailors and support staff in China, there was a significant team of people still in England who played a key part throughout the games," RYA Olympic team manager Stephen Park says. "We wanted everyone at RYA HQ to be part of our Olympic experience and this Vidyo technology enabled us to share our unique insights and experiences and keep the whole 'team' together even though we were thousands of miles apart."



In August, Great Britain's Royal Yachting Association (members pictured), used Hackensack-based Vidyo's technology to stay in contact with team sailors at this year's Summer Olympics Games in China.

Chief Scientist Alex Eleftheriadis co-founded Vidyo in 2005. They chose to stay in northern New Jersey because the region had "all of the attributes we were looking for: highly educated and skilled people, great programmers and a great location, plus easy accessibility from practically anywhere through Newark Liberty International Airport," Shapiro says.

In August, VidyoConferencing was used by Great Britain's Royal Yachting Association (RYA) during the Summer Olympics to stay visually and audibly well-connected with the people in Hamble, Southampton, UK who were supporting the Team GB sailors at the Olympic Sailing Centre in Qingdao,

Vidyo licenses are purchased annually and are based on the number of "seat" and "port" licenses a company purchases. The one set price is \$6,000 for the VidyoRouter that replaces the need for a multipoint control unit. Each "seat," which gives VidyoConferencing access to one person, is \$30 per year. Each "port," needed for multi-party calls (i.e., not for point-to-point calls,) is \$1,000.

Hotels Tuning In

New Jersey hotels are providing videoconferencing capabilities, especially as they see their conference and convention guests requesting them. "Videoconferencing is a high-ticket item that many

companies are still not ready to invest in, and many businesses still seem to prefer face-to-face meetings for training and motivational meetings because of the camaraderie that results," suggests Ed Reagoso, managing member at The Wilshire Grand Hotel in West Orange. "Hotels typically depend on preferred audiovisual companies like we do to ensure this premium service is available. We have, however, added an additional Flex T1 just for Internet service, ensuring the optimal Internet speed is available and that our IT infrastructure is in place as we continue to grow."

Marriott President and COO William J. Shaw has said that his company's use of technology is one service that enables Marriott to be responsive to customers. It also has earned Marriott recognition by *InformationWeek* magazine as a leader in the hospitality and travel industry in its use of innovative technology. In New Jersey, many of the full-service Marriott hotels have knowledgeable on-site audiovisual managers, ISDN and T1 lines for point-to-point and multipoint videoconferences, their own videoconferencing equipment and access to other needed videoconferencing equipment from outside suppliers.

In all cases, Shaw's philosophy comes through: "We strive to take care of the customer by providing whatever is best for them," says one A/V manager. "In everything we do, our goal is to do it and do it right," adds another.

Even as HD videoconferencing is taking hold, the next leading-edge videoconferencing technology – holography – is being offered by some high-tech companies, providing a 3D image of the speaker. With holographic videoconferencing, "reach out and touch someone" could take on a whole new meaning. ❧