

Connected Meetings

By Chris Gunton

During meetings, delegates now expect to connect and collaborate onscreen, in real time at the highest quality; with a growing focus on much more visual and video content being demanded across a wide spectrum of events.



Chris Gunton (chrisgunton@cga-integration.co.uk) is managing director of CGA Integration.

Creating desirable meeting rooms is all about the successful delivery of interactive technology.

During meetings, delegates now expect to connect and collaborate onscreen, in real time at the highest quality; with a growing focus on much more visual and video content being demanded across a wide spectrum of events. They need to be able to move seamlessly across a range of AV and connectivity solutions, which in turn have to be available in each meeting room area.

This technological interactivity can be achieved by addressing six main areas; HDMI, BYOD (bring your own device), connectivity, video and voice conferencing, speakers, and digital control.

HDMI Connectivity

It is vital to get meeting room connectivity right. With technology developments, we are seeing the rise of 4K televisions in the home, so the minimum quality expected in meeting rooms is now HD (1080p) resolution. In addition, most new laptops and video devices are based on the HDMI connector, which delivers digital quality in high resolution. It is therefore essential to upgrade meeting rooms connectivity to HDMI, whilst still providing the flexibility to accommodate VGA connectivity for legacy equipment.

Facilitating BYOD

Facilitating flexible presentation is key. The rise of BYOD is reflected by delegates no longer just having a laptop to present from. Presentation of content on screen is required from: iPads, iPhones, Android devices, Chrome devices, Macbooks and laptops, all wirelessly, from anywhere in the room.

Using Chromecast and Airplay, or through a useful app quickly downloaded to their device, delegates can connect and present quickly and easily. BYOD facilitates interactivity, with wireless delivered screen sharing, enabling two or more users to present their content on screen for comparison and review.

To ensure secure connection, your delegates will need to use the correct SSID in the Wi-Fi settings of their device, login and then enter a password to connect securely to the display in the room.

In addition, with delegates regularly working in the cloud and not actually having a device that stores all their information, good or preferably impressive Internet connection in meeting rooms has become essential.

Some of the BYOD platforms also offer broadcast functionality which allows delegates to follow the main presentation on their own device. This also enables them to save or highlight important sections or link BYOD devices to display content on multiple screens, even when the venue is not wired or where the screens are not permanent.

Connectivity: Touch Screens

We are all too familiar with the touch screen functionality of our portable devices. Once delegates have their presentation or image onscreen in a meeting room, they will want to be able to touch it and move, explore, explode or manipulate what they are presenting. All of this is possible with a simple

USB connection to the screen. Once this is applied, suddenly the screen can be an extension of their Windows or IOS operating experience, allowing full interaction on the screen.

Video and Voice Conferencing

Historically dedicated equipment was needed to launch a video conference (VC) call, this needed to be used by all parties involved and the telecoms provider needed to provide a solid connection between all the locations. But now VC has become the norm, with Skype, webex and a range of other video and voice conferencing facilities available in the cloud.

This means that if a key delegate is unable to travel, but wants to attend a meeting and actively participate in discussions, it is possible to use such services to bring remote delegates up onto the screen and hear them clearly through speakers. In addition, they can share their desktop computer on the meeting room screen, enabling them to make a presentation and discuss this with the other meeting delegates as if they were in the same room. In a more advanced or larger conference suite, it is also possible to bring remote delegates up on a separate screen to the data. This allows you to see more of the individual or remote group, including their body language and hand gestures.

The move to the cloud makes it much easier for venues to offer VC connectivity. A simple USB connection to a Windows laptop or Mac, connects the in-room speakers, microphone, camera and screen to the delegate's call on their VC software. This ensures that the delegate has the company IT security that they need, with the ability to share the call with all in the meeting room. The same can also be done with a voice call from a mobile phone and all delegates can be heard, and hear, through

the installed ceiling microphone and speakers.

Installed Quality Speakers

With video content and conferencing, you need both the correct image and quality sound which can be heard throughout the room. Speakers on a television or a sound bar underneath it, are often only enough for a small room. If content is to be heard throughout a room, there is a requirement for more ceiling-mounted speakers throughout.

Digital Control

As mentioned above, we are all now familiar with touch screen control. Centralizing the control of the meeting room functionality; screen, source, lights, AC, VC, etc. can all be pulled back onto one control platform. This gives venues and their delegates a tailored, branded, controlled experience, which does not rely on "finding the remote control" or physically finding a button to press.

Most of the modern display technology, and certainly the screen sharing products, all offer the ability to personalize the display of the system. This allows venues to add their own branding and personalize any login instructions for delegates, making their systems clear and easy to use. When delegates enter a room, the screen can show any message, logo, room name and instructions on how the delegates can connect their device to work in the space.

A digital control platform does require some IT backbone, but not only does it offer the client a better experience, but also enables the venue's AV integrator to connect and diagnose any problems in real-time and enables the system to proactively send out warnings and alerts before any hardware fails. By addressing interactive technology in your venue, you can maximize the appeal of your meetings rooms and your return business from fully-enabled delegates. *