Video Conferencing-as-a-Service Simplifies Communications for EDP

Background

EDP, a global energy company based in Portugal, has expanded rapidly over the past 10 years through organic growth as well as by acquiring other companies. Each of these companies had different video conferencing equipment, yet EDP considers it essential to connect its worldwide 12,000-employee workforce by video as well as voice.

EDP believes that non-verbal communication is key for any organization, especially one that uses multiple languages. The company wanted all employees to communicate easily, whether they used tablets in remote locations or boardroom videoconferencing equipment.

Challenges

To make video conferencing available across the company, EDP's corporate services wanted to use industry-standard Video Conferencing-as-a-Service (VCaaS). This approach would allow people to communicate without restrictions on location or the type of device used. EDP also wanted the VCaaS to be fully integrated with Microsoft Skype for Business and Microsoft Office 365.

The project required equipment for 255 conference and telepresence rooms worldwide. These facilities ranged from large auditoriums with immersive screens and a capacity of 300 seats to smaller meeting rooms with six seats.

In addition to the meeting facilities, the company wanted the flexibility to use Android and iOS tablets that could be connected to the video communications service. In this way, a manager could start a video conference from a desktop, transfer the conference to a tablet during her coffee break, and finish via smartphone while on route to someone else's office.

EDP had invested a great deal of effort in buying, connecting, and maintaining videoconferencing systems, often with solutions from different vendors in a single country. Now EDP's management wanted the IT department to focus more on tasks supporting the company's core business and less on setting up communications equipment. Financially, transforming video conferencing from a Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) to an Operational Expenditure (OPEX) required an understanding of the full implications of hiring services versus owning equipment.

Solution

Huawei and its integration partner, Tecnocom, won approval from EDP to implement Video Conferencing-as-a-Service. Based in Spain, Tecnocom has projects throughout the world and acts as an all-round system integrator for data centers and cloud services. The company has more than 30 years' experience with network management and also has experience with videoconferencing systems from major manufacturers.

"This is a game changer for the enterprise industry," observed Rogério Do Canto, Unit Director of the Technology Business at Tecnocom. "We used to sell and install according to a CAPEX model. But now we have a contract for an OPEX model."

The project included all new videoconferencing systems, including screens and peripherals. Tecnocom and Huawei showed that EDP could reduce costs, even if the company got rid of recently bought standalone systems from other vendors.

Tecnocom installed Huawei's telepresence system in 255 rooms around the world. Also included was a system that interoperates with the latest iOS and easy-to-use remote control system GUIs.

Huawei provided peripherals such as cameras, microphones, and end-points that support industry standards. These peripherals ensure that telepresence rooms or portable devices can make video calls to other vendors' systems outside the EDP network.

The peripherals include transcoding solutions for managing, recording, and streaming. Codecs from H.261 up to high-definition H.264 encode real-time, dual-stream 1080p at 60 frames per second. Smart proprietary algorithms such as Video Motion Enhancement (VME) ensure that, even with packet loss of 20 percent, video and audio quality remain high.

At a key point in the project, Huawei flew in a team of R&D specialists to better understand EDP's technological ecosystem and the gray areas between different systems. Afterwards, Luís Clemente, EDP's Director of Corporate Services, commented, "I value the effort of Huawei R&D specialists so much, that I have invited them to come for two weeks a year to work with our local teams so that we all can learn from each other."

Benefits

Since VCaaS is based on an OPEX subscription model, EDP now enjoys lower costs compared to the previous situation where they bought and maintained solutions from different vendors. Tecnocom is under contract to service video communications and enable full integration with Skype for Business and Microsoft Office 365.

Tecnocom's Network Operations Center (NOC) monitors the EDP-owned network 24/7. The NOC provides insights on a regular basis when bandwidth capabilities need to be upgraded or downgraded.

Video-calling a person at EDP is now as easy as sending an email. Sharing content, video, and voice in real time are integrated and connected with a few screen swipes or keyboard strokes. Employees can even attend meetings from home. The non-verbal communication that EDP values so highly is easily available for long-distance meetings.

In addition to video meetings, EDP now easily conducts webinars and records video for later use. Staff based in remote locations such as hydroelectric and renewable power plants with few terminals and low bandwidth can participate in meetings with EDP executives as easily as employees in urban areas.