Use Video Conferencing-as-a-Service and Save

Background

EDP, a global energy company based in Portugal, has expanded quickly over the past ten years by acquiring other companies, each with different legacy video conferencing equipment. However, EDP considers it essential that its worldwide force of 12,000 employees be connected by video as well as voice. Although English, Spanish, and Portuguese are spoken widely within the company, not everybody is fluent in all three languages.

EDP realized that non-verbal communication is key for any organization, especially one that uses multiple languages. And it wanted all its employees to be able to communicate more easily — whether they used tablets in remote locations or board room videoconferencing equipment in main offices.

Challenges

EDP's Corporate Services wanted industry-standard Video Conferencing-as-a-Service (VCaaS), where staff could communicate without any restrictions regarding location and devices being used. It also wanted VCaaS to be fully integrated with Microsoft Skype for Business and Microsoft Office 365. Since EDP's core business is generating and distributing energy, management wanted their IT department to be able to focus more on tasks related to their business and less on setting up communications equipment. Requirements included:

- All tools for communications and cooperation must integrate with Microsoft software

- Ensure that EDP's subsidiaries' legacy technologies are compatible with newer, standard technologies, especially if equipment (e.g., conference screens, end-points, terminals, and other essential systems) cannot be written off financially

The project also required:

- Nearly 255 conference and telepresence rooms worldwide, from large auditoriums with immersive screens and a capacity of 300 seats, to smaller meeting rooms with 6 seats.

- Android and iOS tablets that could be connected to the video communications service. In this way, a video conference could be started by an account manager from a desktop, continued during her coffee break, transferred to a tablet terminal, and ended via smartphone.

VCaaS is a new customer-driven concept. EDP used to buy, connect, and maintain videoconferencing systems — often with solutions from different vendors in a single country. In addition, some legacy solutions were bought before industry standards were recognized. Moving from Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) to Operational Expenditure (OPEX), required a comprehensive, financial understanding of the full implications of owning equipment versus hiring services.

Solution

EDP chose Huawei and its integration partner, Tecnocom, over 13 other competitors. Tecnocom is based in Spain and has projects throughout the world. The two companies showed EDP how their version of VCaaS not only would enable EDP to replace its entire system at much lower costs than purchasing new equipment, but also also could be integrated with Skype and Microsoft 365.

Tecnocom is an all-round system integrator active in data centers and cloud services and has experience with video conferencing systems from major manufacturers. The company installed Huawei's telepresence system in 255 rooms around the world. The proposal included:

- Replacing all videoconferencing systems, including screens and peripherals. The companies showed EDP how the company could reduce costs — even if it got rid of recently bought standalone systems from other vendors.

- Huawei peripherals such as cameras, microphones, and end-points that support industry standards. This ensured that telepresence rooms or portable devices can make video calls to other vendors' systems outside the EDP network. Other Huawei products included:

  - Transcoding devices and solutions for managing, recording, and streaming. Codecs from H.261 up to high-definition H.264 encode real-time, dual-stream 1080p60.
  - Smart proprietary algorithms like Video Motion Enhancement (VME) ensure that even with packet loss of 20 percent, video and audio quality remains good.
- A system that would interoperate with the latest iOS and easy-to-use remote control system GUIs.

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. What's more, Tecnocom's experience is a valuable asset to EDP:

- Tecnocom provides a five-year contract to service video communications and full integration with Skype for Business and Microsoft Office 365.

- Data centers in Tecnocom's Network Operations Center (NOC) monitor 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 is now as easy as sending an email. Employees can choose between attending a meeting from home or traveling to the meeting location. Greater balance between work and personal life has enabled improved productivity.

Besides video meetings, EDP can now conduct webinars and record video for easy playback afterwards. In addition, staff based in remote locations like hydroelectric and renewable power plants with few terminals and low bandwidth can participate in meetings with EDP executives as easily as employees in high-bandwidth urban areas.