

Telepresence Buyer's Guide

A Checklist to Ensure Your ROI

Deriving the best return on your telepresence investment requires that the solution deliver superior performance under all circumstances. Inconsistent quality and performance can reduce the overall telepresence experience and cause the telepresence rooms to have lower utilization. Ongoing costs for network infrastructure, network bandwidth, system support and service can have a tremendous impact on the value of a telepresence solution regardless of any up-front discounts. All these factors reduce the benefits of your deployment and the return you can expect. This checklist is designed to assist you in evaluating the critical areas that will allow you to maximize the return on your investment.

There's more to telepresence than just the hardware purchase and installation

Questions to Consider

What are the bandwidth requirements for an excellent quality HD telepresence call?

Some telepresence systems require ~20 Mbps of bandwidth to and from each location to establish and maintain a call, whereas other systems can offer superior performance at ~6 Mbps of bandwidth and good quality with acceptable performance at even lower levels. Establishing additional bandwidth includes the cost of the additional network infrastructure, the cost to maintain that infrastructure and the cost of the connectivity. Multiply the annual difference in cost of a 10 location global system over a five year period and you can have a delta greater than the cost of the original system purchase and installation. If a manufacturer is willing to provide your organization with telepresence systems at drastically reduced costs you should investigate where they're making their money and where you'll be spending yours in the long term. Efficient use of bandwidth while maintaining quality is the most important factor to managing your total cost of ownership.

Will an imperfect network (occasional higher levels of packet loss and jitter) cause a telepresence call to be terminated?

Pristine networks are ideal, but not always a reality. How will your solution perform when you are experiencing network variances? If reliability isn't assured – if calls drop during any network problems – users will travel to ensure the success of critical meetings. Your telepresence system needs to perform well despite occasional network issues.

Can I connect from my telepresence system to meet with people on other video systems like mobile PC video, desktop video and room systems? Is full quality and video image size maintained when the telepresence system interoperates with all these other solutions?

The inability to connect to other solutions and/or the reduction of quality or functionality when operating with other vendors means your telepresence system will compromise the user experience, which in turn will reduce the usability of the system. Less use means less value in your investment.

Can I set up a multipoint call between telepresence systems where all participants are seen on the screen at all times?

If you can't see everyone on the call most of the time, the solution doesn't really replace a live meeting. It is important to gauge all participants' reactions and body language to information being presented in a meeting. If you can only see the person speaking, or have no idea who is really still on the call or paying attention then the value of replacing an in-person meeting is severely reduced. Participants will still most likely travel when they want a "face to face" experience with people from multiple locations, which again reduces the benefit. Have your vendor show you how a participant knows who is in the call at any given time.

What do I do if I want to add or drop other locations during a telepresence meeting?

The answer may be that you have to call a concierge or reservation support person to do this because it's impossible or just too hard for participants to do it themselves. While concierge service may be right for some of your locations, it is important to be able to measure its cost against the benefit it provides rather than being required to use a concierge because the system does not allow participants to control their own experience easily. The ability to judiciously employ a concierge because it fits your users' needs rather than the systems' needs will be a major factor in managing ongoing cost.

Can a connection be made to other telepresence units at external organizations that do not share the same network or video vendor?

This is another key question that should be answered 'Yes,' and without any reduction in quality. Your vendor should be able to show you how it's done. Complexity and cost for Business to Business calls will severely limit the usefulness of your systems in meeting both cost reduction and productivity goals.

What kind of quality will I get if I'm joining a telepresence call using my desktop video in another location?

If executives can't join telepresence calls from the road and still have a high quality video experience, they may simply wait until they can meet face to face. Also, a call between Tokyo and the New York at 5 AM may make sense to do from home, but not from the office. If this can't be done at high quality, the call and the business priority waits. These are more deterrents to high usage of the systems.

I need to share multimedia resources like DVD-based videos with another vendor's video system. Can this be done?

Increasingly the ability to share rich media is critical. You may choose to travel if you can't use the right tools to complete the purpose of the meeting.

How long does it take to reboot the system when this is required?

When a quick adjustment and reboot is required or the system loses power for a minute, how long will it take to recover? If it's the better part of an hour can you ever be sure a critical meeting won't be disrupted? Ensure that this is actually demonstrated for you before you invest in a system. Ignore claims that it would rarely happen because although it may be rare, inevitably when it does it will happen during a very important meeting. Ask current users of the systems you're considering for the real story.

What management tools are available to support the system?

This is worth a deep dive. A robust management environment ensures reliability and cuts your management overhead dramatically. A complicated or incomplete management environment assures high cost or lower reliability, eating into the value of your investment. Ideally the total solution should be managed from a single, centralized platform that:

- Manages the provisioning and ongoing configuration of all video resources regardless of vendor type,
- Simplifies concierge support for ongoing meetings,
- Integrates video directories with corporate directories making ad hoc calling simple for the user and easy to manage,
- Provides unified diagnostics and fault management, and
- Facilitates scheduling for all video resources regardless of manufacturer type, with real time and historical analytics on usage that include ROI and carbon emission reduction.

For more information on TANDBERG Total Telepresence, please visit www.tandberg.com or www.tandberg.com/totaltelepresence.