

Editor's Note: The following article is an excerpt from The Wainhouse Research Bulletin Vol. 7 #09. To gain access to the complete archived issue or to subscribe for free to receive future issues, visit www.wainhouse.com/bulletin. Andrew W. Davis, andrewwd@wainhouse.com

One on One on High Definition with Hakon Dahle, Chief Technologist, TANDBERG



WRB: There's been a lot of interest generated in the past year by high definition videoconferencing. Do you think this interest is warranted, and do you think TANDBERG was scooped by LifeSize?

HD: Well, I'm not sure what you mean by scooped. Certainly LifeSize announced ahead of us. But there's more to this industry than just a quick product announcement; we are ready for high-definition, and we are in this for the long haul with a complete end-to-end solution. We have more than endpoints and multipoint solutions, we have management and firewall traversal.

WRB: Exactly what is your position then on high-definition. What can you tell us about TANDBERG's products' capabilities today.

HD: Simple, our MXP products today are ready for high-definition. Today, not tomorrow, and not with some future hardware upgrade. The MXP codec engine has the power to encode and decode high-definition. Today. In fact, over 25,000 MXP systems are now high-definition-capable with a software upgrade. Our hardware has a DVI connector to take in the video signals. Users are buying and installing a third party high-definition camera today, but this year we will provide a fully-integrated camera.

WRB: Do high-definition cameras provide DVI connectors typically?

HD: No, but converters are readily available. Again, this is a short-term measure, by the end of 2006 we will be shipping complete solutions. Our codecs already support 16x9 resolution video on inputs and outputs, within the H.264 specification.

WRB: What about multipoint?

HD: The TANDBERG MPS will support multipoint high definition with the latest version of the software, which has been shipping for over a month. Currently our embedded bridges do not support high-definition.

WRB: Sony announced a high-definition videoconferencing solution recently. So you're not even coming in right behind LifeSize. What do you think of the Sony announcement?

HD: Andrew, you know me better than that. I won't talk about our competition, but I will say that we expect all competitors in this market to eventually announce a high-definition product. We have a strong track record in this market for delivering, based on a strong product development philosophy. Press announcements from other companies are not going to cause us to lose focus.

WRB: Do you think all the ink being written about high-definition makes the situation overblown then?

HD: Well, high-definition is certainly going to provide the improved images that are going to make videoconferencing more exciting in many applications. But I see it as just another point on the performance continuum. The real issue is the continuous spectrum of resolution vs. bandwidth. High-definition is certainly going to require at least a megabit, and of course it requires special cameras and displays. We think many of our customers will be impressed with something between what they are using now and true high-definition. At TANDBERG we call this “optimal definition.”

WRB: Optimal Definition? Please explain.

HD: For example, in addition to the resolution you get with high-definition – that is, 720p – we are now supporting a screen resolution which we call 448p. Most of our customers are as excited about 448p as they are about high-definition because it provides them with almost a 3X improvement in resolution at the same bandwidth they are using today – and it is with a simple software upgrade. From its name, 448p resolution is obviously less than the 720p resolution, but it provides significant image improvements, and can be supported by the standard cameras and displays that we have installed in the field today. So, high-definition is just one resolution on the conferencing continuum, and there are great alternatives such as 448p or Wide448p for customers with bandwidth concerns. At the same time, if customers have the bandwidth, we can support full high-definition.

WRB: Besides bandwidth, are there other costs with high-definition?

HD: Well, there might be with some other systems. But we are supporting dual streams, meaning video plus content, along with full encryption, and with our packet loss recovery mechanisms. We don't think customers should have to give up features and functions just to get higher picture quality.

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