



TAMPA ELECTRIC COMPANY



Utility Company
Maximizes Productivity
and Minimizes Costs
with Videoconferencing

CHALLENGE

A subsidiary of TECO Energy, Inc., Tampa Electric provides power and value-added energy services to more than 645,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers. In 1999 — concerned about the impact Y2K would have on its operations — the company invested in videoconferencing equipment to enable its energy planners to visually access the large operations center. Additional units were implemented in other locations as well, and another TECO Energy subsidiary, TECO Coal, began utilizing videoconferencing for its production meetings in Kentucky.

As Bob Brumm, Senior Systems Programmer at Tampa Electric recalls, “People were traveling three hours in treacherous conditions over mountainous roads just to go to a one-hour meeting. Videoconferencing eliminated that travel time, not only increasing productivity but ensuring the safety of TECO Coal employees.”

Following TECO Coal’s lead, Tampa Electric decided in 2005 to take advantage of videoconferencing for its energy planning division, which had, until then, been holding daily operations meetings via audio conference calls. While the existing equipment offered acceptable video and audio quality, it fell short when it came to integration of a complex spreadsheet that was being transmitted to the four plant operations sites.

“The units we had couldn’t update the spreadsheets fast enough,” explains Brumm. “They would take up to 15 seconds to refresh, with the pixilation giving people headaches. We brought TANDBERG in and asked if we could borrow four units to prove that it could be done faster. We set them up and the spreadsheet refreshed in two to three seconds. By then it was a no-brainer.”





SOLUTION

Tampa Electric replaced its other equipment with TANDBERG units, which, says Brumm, “We have been using every day for 3 years at five sites for operations meetings, as well as twice a day in our energy operations and planning area.”

“In the past year,” he continues, “we’ve seen lots of benefits and other people have been asking about it.”

As a result, Tampa Electric purchased seven additional TANDBERG units as well as several infrastructure products.

“It’s been night and day as far as what we’ve been able to do,” exclaims Brumm. “We’ve integrated videoconferencing into a lot of different areas. For example, our fitness organization did a six-week fitness campaign with eight sites connecting over video. Not only does that eliminate the need to travel to eight sites, it provides a consistent message to everyone. And, the participation rate is higher because people can see all the sites and feel like they are part of the team.”

For work-related meetings, better communication is one of the obvious benefits Brumm sees from videoconferencing. “Having meetings over video instead of the telephone ensures that everybody is on the same page. People have a better understanding of the message you’re trying to relay. There’s less confusion. You can see the people and can pick up on it right away if someone doesn’t understand you. That’s a big advantage.”

Brumm says Tampa Electric also purchased the TANDBERG Border Controller, “and that allows us to connect to external parties doing engineering work for some of our plant expansions. We don’t have to send a team of people to Houston to work on engineering preparation — now we can do it on a videoconferencing call, which saves travel costs. And, productivity has quadrupled because that’s time we’re not losing.”

RESULTS

Tampa Electric’s holding company, TECO Energy, has saved an impressive amount of both time and money across the organization since implementing the TANDBERG equipment.

“Another TECO subsidiary, TECO Guatemala, also has TANDBERG units,” says Brumm. “So our senior corporate officer can just take an elevator and talk to Guatemala over video-conference every day — spending 15 minutes versus taking a six-hour flight to accomplish the same thing.”

The benefits are similar for the President of TECO Coal, who, notes Brumm, “doesn’t have to take a flight from Kentucky to Tampa to attend Board meetings.

“It comes down to time savings,” Brumm remarks. “For example, at TECO Coal, the VP of operations isn’t losing the two hours it would take to travel between sites. And here at Tampa Electric, we have remote divisions in outlying areas; now our engineering staff does not have to drive one or two hours for a one- or two-hour meeting. It’s much more productive for them to go down the hall, get on the call, and get right back to work when they’re done.”

Tampa Electric Company uses TANDBERG equipment to free staff from traveling hours to attend regular meetings, saving both time and money.



Even beyond the time and cost savings, Tampa Electric is reaping benefits from its TANDBERG equipment. As Brumm points out, “We can take the mobile camera device to power plants and use it for quality audits and maintenance audits. And we also use the desktop video equipment, which helps with productivity. I can be part of a videoconference right from my desk; sometimes I am swamped between meetings right up to the last minute, so being able to go from meeting to meeting without leaving my desk is great.”

The desktop units also help staff who are calling IT for technical support, says Brumm. “For the IT people to be able to see exactly what the caller is seeing makes a big difference.”

One of the TANDBERG infrastructure products, the Content Server, enables Tampa Electric to record video calls, which Brumm says was one of the requirements when the company was looking to replace its older equipment.

“When we have videoconferences with legal firms, we can record them for our legal department instead of paying an external party to do it,” he explains. “Vendors charge about \$600 an hour to record videoconferences, so we are saving that every time we have these calls. Plus, we don’t have to try to set up with the vendor on the bridging piece — we can connect using TANDBERG Border Controller and record it ourselves.”

Despite Tampa Electric’s preference for TANDBERG equipment, there are still instances in which the company must connect to endpoints from other vendors. Fortunately, TANDBERG offers the flexibility to do that.

“The TANDBERG Management Server is extremely easy and user friendly,” Brumm remarks, “and it doesn’t matter what endpoint you are connecting to. I can even manage other endpoints using the Management Server, which allows us to maintain our investment in those other room units, which were not cheap.”

A big benefit of having TANDBERG equipment, says Brumm, “is keeping it easy for the end user. To connect five sites, all you have to do is push a yellow button to turn on the microphone and you’re good to go. You don’t have to do anything — it does it for you.”

“People forget,” he comments, “that good technology can be easy.”

“To connect five sites, all you have to do is push a yellow button to turn on the microphone and you’re good to go. You don’t have to do anything — it does it for you.”

BOB BRUMM, SENIOR
SYSTEMS PROGRAMMER

Contact TANDBERG today to learn how our solutions can support your business processes.

Email us at tandberg@tandberg.com.