



UNITED STEELWORKERS



United Steelworkers' investment in TANDBERG Telepresence cuts six months off the merger alliance process, enhancing communications and saving millions.

CHALLENGE

With 1.2 million active and retired members in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Aruba, United Steelworkers represents people in a wide variety of workplaces — primarily in manufacturing industries such as oil, rubber and steel, but also in hospitals and large universities. The labor union is broken down into 13 geographic districts in the United States and Canada, with 120 offices across North America. Traditionally, the elected directors representing each district have met weekly via conference calls and attended bi-monthly executive board meetings, either in the Pittsburgh, PA headquarters or at another U.S. location.

Michael Krueger, Information Systems Director for United Steelworkers, says the organization began using video conferencing to enhance the weekly calls.

"We really noticed the benefits of video conferencing when we entered merger alliance talks with another labor union, Unite, based in the United Kingdom," he recalls. "They had 40 sites in the U.K. using TANDBERG video conferencing equipment and they were anxious to continue the merger alliance conversation using their telepresence system. So, we installed TANDBERG Telepresence and it took our video conferencing to a whole new level nationwide."

SOLUTION

Less than one year after the purchase, USW has recovered the cost of the TANDBERG equipment, with half of the savings coming during the merger alliance talks.

With the TANDBERG Telepresence solution, remarks Krueger, "Merger alliance talks were enhanced. Executives from each district office were talking with the Legal and Accounting Departments at Unite on almost a daily basis. We realized travel benefits and obviously saved a ton of money using TANDBERG Telepresence to complete the merger alliance."





“The merger alliance would have taken a lot longer and cost a lot more,” he continues. “The TANDBERG Telepresence solution allowed us to develop a close relationship very quickly, without having to travel back and forth. We easily cut six months out of the merger alliance process by using video.”

The success of the telepresence solution, notes Krueger, “encouraged us to begin using our other systems in a more organized fashion. The next step was to buy the TANDBERG Codian Bridge, which is the biggest and the best.”

As a result of that purchase, United Steelworkers can now bring in calls from ISDN sites, as well as IP sites, for even more cost savings.

“Before,” recalls Krueger, “we were renting bridging time from AT&T to get ISDN calls into our IP calls, which averaged about \$500 to \$800 per call, depending on the length of the call.”

In addition to saving the rental fees, he continues, “Now we can do ISDN calls instantly. When we rented the bridging time, we had to qualify people and go through testing — it could take a week to get an ISDN call together.”

“The TANDBERG Bridge is really scalable,” adds Krueger. “It also has a scheduling feature so it calls everybody when it’s time — all the user has to do is make sure the unit is on.” Additionally, the TANDBERG Bridge has helped USW in its collective bargaining efforts with Harley Davidson and the Machinists Union.

“Normally,” explains Krueger, “when contracts come due, 30 to 50 members have to meet somewhere for the coordinated negotiations. And, they have to do that more than once during the bargaining process. It’s a fairly expensive endeavor for that many people to travel and stay in a hotel.”

“Now,” he continues, “we are using our ISDN Gateway to have ad hoc bargaining meetings. Financially, my guess is those meetings would cost \$2,000 per person. With 50 people, it’s no small amount, especially if you do it frequently.”

Krueger also discusses the union’s bargaining relationships with companies that do business in both the United States and the U.K., noting that “Our folks at Unite are negotiating their agreements with those companies the same as we are — so now we’ve got this globalized bargaining going on via the telepresence system and the bridge. We never would have gone to the expense in the past to have people travel back and forth between here and the U.K. Now, we can do it and it’s not a phone call — phone calls just don’t work for those kinds of meetings.”



RESULTS

“As a result of the merger alliance,” Krueger states, “we began using TANDBERG. We will slowly phase out our other devices and replace them with TANDBERG HD room systems.”

In the meantime, USW can continue to make use of its previous investment. As Krueger explains, “TANDBERG is very interoperable — their bridges and border controllers work with other vendors’ devices so you can mix and match, unlike other vendors that are very proprietary. We can actually continue to use our legacy devices along with TANDBERG devices and then phase them out one at a time, versus taking a big forklift approach.”

Krueger says that the solid infrastructure offered by TANDBERG “gives us the benefit of having flexibility in our endpoints, but ultimately the quality is enhanced with TANDBERG endpoints.”

Beyond the weekly director meetings, bi-monthly executive board meetings and bargaining meetings, USW takes advantage of video conferencing across the organization, with virtually every department using it for staff meetings. And one particularly cost-effective use is for new-hire interviews.

“Previously,” explains Krueger, “each new hire who made it through the provisional period would have to go to Pittsburgh for an interview with one of the directors. And, we hire from all over the country. Now, that’s done via video, which provides substantial cost savings. Plus, it makes better use of the directors’ time.”

All these cost savings have added up to a measurable return on investment. In addition to recovering the cost of the TANDBERG equipment, says Krueger, “We are recovering the annual maintenance and data costs. It has also allowed us to do globalized bargaining at a substantially reduced cost.”

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MICHAEL KRUEGER, INFORMATION
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