

President Bush had been doing it weekly to confer with his national security team. Even Wendy's International, the fast-food giant, has just announced a deal to equip eight locations. In the last six weeks companies have turned to video conferencing to strategize, sell, recruit, and react.

Manners matter.



Nothing has made video conferencing seem more relevant to our daily business life than the combination of a national tragedy and a weakening economy. It saves money and time. It helps build relationships. It lets us share knowledge. It cuts down on air travel. But it can have its drawbacks, especially when those participating don't work from established ground rules. Like any other convergence of people and new technology, considering etiquette guidelines will make video conferencing a productive and enjoyable experience.

Adopt some etiquette guidelines.

Want your employees to embrace video conferencing? Then adopt and abide by some simple video conferencing etiquette guidelines. Failure to lay down some ground rules and educate people about them will likely lead to your expensive video conferencing equipment gathering dust in the back of the conference room. Here are the Emily Post Institute's tips on videoconferencing.

Be Prepared!

Test Equipment in advance. Have a contingency plan. Allow participants a brief "practice session" to familiarize them with the equipment and set-up. Run video conference sessions according to a well thought out agenda. Let participants know ahead of time what to expect and who will be present. Set clear objectives regarding what will be accomplished in the session and communicate them to participants.

Appearance counts.

Remind participants that they should dress as they would for an in person meeting.

Lights, camera, action!

Begin and end on time. Introduce all participants. Speak clearly and loudly. Make eye contact with the camera and with other participants in your room. Use names to direct questions to specific people. Consider using name plates. Don't speak over people or interrupt. Don't be too close to the camera. Avoid making excessive background noise, like rustling papers. Turn off beepers, watch alarms and cell phones. Don't leave the room unless absolutely necessary.

Convert the masses.

A 1997 study of Swedish companies found four key factors affect the successful integration video conferencing: The technology is embraced by upper management. People are most comfortable using video conferencing when the surroundings are similar to those of an in-person meeting. Familiarity with the equipment increases people's faith in the technology. One key person can motivate an entire corporation to use and enjoy video conferencing. To get your staff on board, point out to them the specific goals that video conferencing helped you accomplish. "We completed the budget forecasting 30 percent faster this year because of our use of videoconferencing, and we saved \$3,500 in travel expenses."

The Emily Post Institute works with companies to develop etiquette guidelines for video conferencing and other new interactive technologies. For more information e-mail etiquette@emilypost.com This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it or call 802-860-1814.