

The Virtualisation of Video Conferencing Infrastructure

How the trend of Virtualisation is impacting on the world of Video Conferencing

Introduction

Server Virtualisation has been a top priority for IT for many years – its benefits include improving infrastructure manageability, improving Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery, offering load balancing, failover & scalability, reducing maintenance, as well as being less expensive, having a lower total cost of ownership and being easier to expand.

However, Video Conferencing has generally remained non-virtualised with specialised Hardware, as it traditionally relies on very compute intensive processes for interoperability and performance, which has been very hard to match with software running on standard servers. Now, recent improvements in server technology and developments in processor capability is enabling Video Conferencing to catch up with the rest of the IT world.

“Customers are on a treadmill of complexity and cost that limits the value IT delivers to the business. Virtualisation is a key technology to help liberate IT.”

-Andrew Lees, Vice President of the Server & Tools Business at Microsoft

Traditional Video Conferencing

Video Conferencing has historically been a high end business solution, kept free for high level strategic meetings, and saving calculations based mainly on the reduction of travel within an organisation. However, more recently, video conferencing has been recognised as much more than just a way to reduce travel– it has the ability to massively improve collaboration, enabling higher productivity and better efficiency, whilst offering a much higher quality & productive communication method with both employees within the organisation and the wider supply chain.

Despite the proven benefits of HD video, the growth of video has been constrained – with specialised infrastructure, the cost has prohibited small organisations from even considering deployment, whilst larger organisations have found it difficult to add capacity and justify huge upfront investments. Additionally, deployment has always been complex with multiple boxes needed for multiple capabilities, requiring dedicated personnel to manage & maintain, long deployment times, and large management costs for storage, space, power & cooling.

Research carried out by Forrester amongst IT managers in Europe & North America recently has found that almost half of IT management express the cost of purchasing video conferencing infrastructure as their biggest concern. Video Conferencing infrastructure hardware can cost hundreds of thousands of pounds to implement, and resources have to be purchased ahead of being able to prove its worth. Research also finds that 44% of those surveyed want the ability to deploy incremental capacity as little as 1 seat or 1 port at a time, and be able to scale this up, as well as down, as and when needed.

“Buying Video Conferencing is like buying eggs. You have the option of buying half a dozen or a dozen eggs, even if you only want one or two at that time. That’s OK, at, say, 50p an egg but at the cost of +£10,000 a resource, having to over provision is a huge concern, and seen as a barrier towards video conferencing adoption”

Simon Dudley, Video Evangelist at LifeSize

BENEFITS

BETTER COLLABORATION

IMPROVE EFFICIENCY

FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION

REDUCE TRAVEL

ACCELERATED DECISION MAKING

SHARE KNOWLEDGE

ACCESS FROM ANYWHERE

IMPROVE TRAINING

PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

FASTER TIME-TO-MARKET

REDUCE STRESS

CONNECT REMOTE EMPLOYEES

IMPROVED ATTENTION & FOCUS

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

ACCESS TO SPECIALISTS

INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

RECORD & STREAM EVENTS

IMPROVED CUSTOMER SERVICE

ENGAGE & INTERACT

MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS

Similarly, traditional Video Conferencing infrastructure has been difficult, or impossible to demonstrate and trial. With hardware costing in the region of £100k+ and requirements to ship, deploy & integrate with current infrastructure, video conferencing manufacturers have been very reluctant to offer infrastructure trials.

“Organisations want to try the equipment – they have heard about the great benefits video communications can bring, but without being able to try for themselves and prove these benefits, they are unable to sell the idea to the rest of the business,” commented Simon Dudley, Video Evangelist at LifeSize.

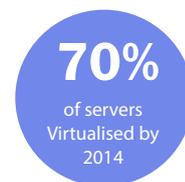
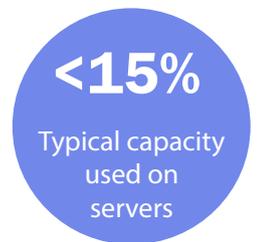
What is Virtualisation?

Virtualisation has become a major trend in IT, as IT staff are challenged to do more with less. With network environments expanding with more complex technology, huge resources are needed both in management, time, cost and space, and a much more efficient way of operating is required.

Virtualisation is the process of splitting the single physical server into multiple isolated “virtual environments” or “virtual machines”. By separating the software from the physical hardware, multiple hardware resources can be consolidated into one, dramatically reducing the number of servers required, producing much higher server utilization and enormous cost savings.

Data centres can also centralise on specific hardware, thus achieving economies of scale when purchasing new hardware, with the ability to hold generic servers as spares for rapid deployment when required. Additionally, management & maintenance can be streamlined, with automatic management tools enabling a much easier & faster way to manage the network.

Already, independent research from Gartner suggests that almost 70% of the server market will be virtualised by 2014, whilst Forrester Research claims 67% of IT management believe it will, or is already improving Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity, and 60% claim Virtualisation is attractive due to its much more simple, all-in-one management capabilities & flexibility.



Virtualised Video Conferencing

Video Conferencing is proven to have huge benefits when properly implemented, however huge inefficiencies, costs and complexity have prevented the uptake of traditional video conferencing in many organisations.

Virtualising video conferencing infrastructure offers higher efficiencies of hardware, more flexibility of features & capacity, faster deployment – minutes & hours not weeks & months, huge cost savings and ease of provisioning, along with ironing out the issues that have prevented the adoption of traditional video conferencing.

Some of the key benefits of virtualised Video Conferencing include:

1

Reduce deployment complexity due to compatibility with existing IT environments

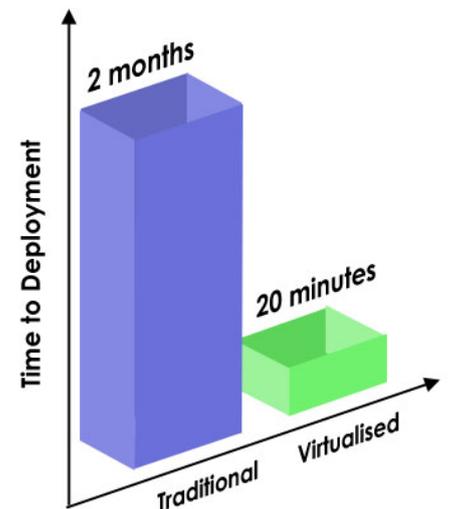
Whereas in the past, each piece of video conferencing equipment has been supplied as its own single purpose, fixed capacity appliance, IT can now feel confident with the technology, with maintenance being carried out on the same familiar hardware they are used to. Management is simplified and repetitive tasks are eliminated.

2

Organisations can start small and scale up (or down) as needed

For small to medium organisations, the ability to start with tiny numbers, perhaps 3, 5 or 7 resources, and scale up as and when the business grows has never been available for video conferencing before.

This inability made video conferencing a too high investment for many organisations who do not want to step up capacity in large increments and over provision for resources they may never use. Virtualisation offers flexibility and scalability never previously available with video infrastructure.



“Rather than two months, a virtual server can be delivered in 20 minutes. This speed is a fundamental change in service delivery to a business”

- Gartner Research

3

Being able to trial infrastructure before deployment

Without expensive specialist hardware to loan and install, virtualised infrastructure can be quickly and cheaply deployed across an organisation for trial. Being able to trial equipment, test with current infrastructure and prove its worth throughout the business is invaluable, especially to new organisations looking to implement video across their organisation.

4

Maintaining interoperability with existing video conferencing environment whilst supporting emerging technology

In the past, upgrading Video Conferencing infrastructure has often had to take the “rip & replace” approach. When technology moved forwards and new technologies emerged, old infrastructure just couldn’t handle new protocols, ways of management and interoperability. Hardware that cost £100k+ would be ripped out and replaced with another expensive box, just to find out months down the line that changes were again required.

Virtualisation offers you the ability to simply download the new software to the server and off you go. No more ripping and replacing, just solid investments for the future.

Video Conferencing technology has always been prohibited by cost, and server virtualisation breaks down those cost barriers to enable organisations to really consider their video conferencing strategy and realise the real benefits of video communications.

Speak to VideoCentric to find out more about Virtualised Video Conferencing offerings from all the world’s leading Video Conferencing providers and how Video Conferencing can fit into your virtualised environment.

10:1

reduction in hardware requirements

50%

Lower capital & operational expenses



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