



Video-Conferencing – not just for the big boys!

A small business near Lincoln has proved that video-conferencing can be just as effective for SMEs as it is for large multi-nationals.

CasoFour Limited provides consultancy services to the plaster and plasterboard industry. Some of its most recent work has involved extensive research and development with colleagues in a Canadian laboratory. The outcome of this work is the development of a brand new process set to revolutionise the global plasterboard sector. CasoFour's owner and Director Charlie Blow has spent a great deal of time travelling to and fro between the UK and Canada working on the project. A new company has also been set up to promote the new process which a large engineering company in Canada has invested in. The company's first client is in Mexico where a new plant has recently been built.

With the growth of the overseas business, Mr Blow found himself away from the office for a number of days at a time travelling to regular meetings. Realising this was not an effective way to spend his time or money, he began to look at alternative ways to conduct meetings. Originally, the company looked at audio conferencing, but it was felt

Client: CasoFour Limited

Requirements: With the growth of the overseas business, Casofour found themselves away from the office for a number of days at a time travelling to regular meetings. Realising this was not an effective way to spend his time or money, he began to look at alternative ways to conduct meetings.

Solution: Innovations installed A Lifesize video Conferencing system, which allows the user to link up to a PC and share presentations and spreadsheets whilst still being able to see those present at the meeting.

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Innovations knows that when it comes to audio visual solutions, one size rarely fits all. Bespoke installations like CasoFour is where the company excels because its technical knowledge is second to none. A recent survey among its key clients supports this – all participants rated Innovations' technical knowledge and ability as excellent.

this was not good enough because meetings required presentations and visuals. Charlie also felt it is better to be able to see people and their reactions.

"You can't see people so you can't read their body language. Audio conferencing is about passing on messages, video conferencing is about having a proper meeting," said Mr Blow.

Having decided he wanted more than audio-conferencing could provide, Charlie contacted Innovations, the Cambridgeshire based audio visual specialists, to discuss the possibility of video-conferencing. Andy Russell, Director from Innovations, spent time listening to Charlie, understanding his business and providing advice on the best options to meet his needs; which were expanding all the time. In addition to meetings with Canada, Charlie now needed to include the Mexico plant in the loop. Video conferencing is now available to all parties in Canada and Mexico and Charlie plans to use it with future clients too.

Commenting on the impact video-conferencing has had on his business Charlie says: "It's great; it allows me to talk to lots of people at the same time and to see their reactions and body language. I can see who is talking and gauge when someone wants to chip in so in that way it is far better than audio conferencing."

The "Lifesize" system that CasoFour has allows the user to link up to a PC and share presentations and spreadsheets whilst still being able to see those present

at the meeting. This allows robust and meaningful discussion that is as near to face to face meeting as possible.

As a small business, Charlie was naturally concerned about the cost of video conferencing but he was pleasantly surprised to find it wasn't as expensive as he thought it would be. He also benefitted from a financial initiative identified by his regional Business Link service, which he uses on a regular basis to ensure his business remains sharply focussed.

"The system has more than paid for itself. Whilst I still have to occasionally travel overseas, I have cut back enormously, saving money on flights and accommodation as well as hassle and jet lag!"

Charlie also has praise for Innovations' after sales support, "Andy has spent a lot of time working with me to get the system up and running and helping to overcome teething troubles. He's been great."

Commenting on CasoFour's use of video conferencing, Andy Russell said: "We install lots of video conferencing systems in companies of all sizes. People assume it is only worthwhile for larger organisations but CasoFour is a great example of a small business that is benefitting from it. I would urge anyone that is spending a lot of time and money on travel within the UK or overseas to consider video-conferencing. Not only can it save money, but it vastly improves productivity and even preserves your sanity – especially in the current climate of ash clouds and industrial action! "