

A Brief Beginner's Guide to Telepresence

I. What is Telepresence?

Telepresence, or video conferencing, is when individuals or groups of people connect with each other via the internet. Telepresence is the next best thing to face-to-face interaction because it allows people to visually connect. It is a more personable means of connecting than e-mail or telephone.

II. Why Care About Telepresence?

The use of telepresence is rapidly increasing in the United States and around the world. The start-up costs for telepresence may seem high, but over time many companies are able to see a substantial return on their investment. Telepresence also complements the current corporate and government goals of 'going green' and supporting sustainability. The use of telepresence has been shown to reduce travel costs, alleviate scheduling conflicts, increases productivity and promotes a more cohesive work force across the many times zones of our new global economy.

Integrating the use of video conferencing technologies into daily operations can alleviate the problems with scheduling. Cisco and Telco offer high end enterprise systems for video conferencing that usually result in a conference room with multiple screens and microphones. For personal use or a small business with a need for a less costly system, services such as ooVoo and Skype offer a cost-free plan where you can talk to another person and see them at the same time.

III. Rules of the Road

Telepresence and video conferencing are now being used in nearly every industry. That is why telepresence etiquette is necessary to learn in order to be successful in the workplace and beyond. While it may seem easy to learn, seeing yourself on screen brings to light any nervous or bad habits you may have not realized. It takes time to become comfortable with seeing yourself on screen, adjust speech, compose yourself in front of a camera, look at the camera while speaking and effectively manage lighting.

To read articles about telepresence, you may visit GVSU's E-HR website:

<http://www.gvsu.edu/e-hr/>

Teleconferencing Etiquette

Preparation

- Have an organizational session

- ✦ Test all equipment; microphone, computer connection well in advance of meeting.
- ✦ Create list of participants – names & location
- ✦ Determine initiator/facilitator well before the meeting.
- ✦ The facilitator initiates the call; sets the time of call; initiates the call a few minutes ahead of meeting; and restarts call if technology fails.

- Establish ground rules

- ✦ Allow everyone to speak
- ✦ Listen carefully
- ✦ Turn off cell phones
- ✦ Consider language differences
- ✦ Consider what is behind you and in view of the camera.
- ✦ Always be prepared – do not waste time.

- Create an agenda prior to the Meeting

- ✦ Share documents needed for meeting prior to meeting if possible.

Start the Meeting

- ✦ Introductions (Know who will lead discussion (facilitator) prior to meeting.)
- ✦ Establish communication: can everyone “see” and “hear”
- ✦ Leader explains purpose of meeting; tasks at hand, etc.
- ✦ Only record video if everyone grants permission for the recording.

Visuals

- ✦ Share materials (visuals) slowly due to the natural lag time of the camera
- ✦ Keep visuals simple; easy to read, large text format
- ✦ Need to leave? Let everyone know before leaving.
- ✦ Some programs (Like the ooVoo Business Package) have desktop sharing. Make sure everyone in the group is comfortable with this technology.

End the Meeting

- ✦ Summarize issues and recap action items
- ✦ Set next meeting date
- ✦ Thank everyone for their attendance
- ✦ Write up summary/minutes to send via e-mail or DropBox.

Tips for a Better Meeting

A. Appearance

- ✦ Dress appropriately
- ✦ Business attire
- ✦ Wear solid colors
- ✦ Consider any shade of blue
- ✦ Keep dress simple

B. Be Mindful of Body Language and Tone of Voice

- ✦ Sit up straight
- ✦ Monitor facial expressions and personal gestures
- ✦ Smile
- ✦ Make eye contact and sit in center of screen
- ✦ No eating, drinking or chewing gum.
- ✦ Speak clearly and avoid rapid speech and sudden movement.
- ✦ *Practice by making messages but not sending them.*

C. Camera and Setting

- ✦ Adjust camera prior to meeting
- ✦ Adjust camera so you fill the majority of the screen
- ✦ Test all equipment prior to meeting time
- ✦ Consider camera background (what others see) – screen for background?
- ✦ Check lighting
- ✦ Mute background noise

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In Summary



Using telepresence is an excellent way to improve your speaking habits. Practice is important. There are four things to always remember before you make a web call:

- **First, modulate your voice (not too loud; not too soft; not too fast.) Slow and steady.**
- **Second, look at the web cam and place the other person's face under your web cam so it looks like you are looking right at them.**
- **Third, lighting is crucial in regards to how you look on screen, so play with your lighting before you make a call.**
- **Fourth, be organized and ready to conduct the meeting. Check your sound, your mic, and your headset to make sure everything is ready to go.**