

The Art of Conference Calling

How is Your Audio and Web Conferencing Etiquette?

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Have you ever been on a conference call and put the call on hold to step away for a moment, not knowing you've exposed the entire virtual conference room to Dolly Parton's rendition of "9 to 5"?

As audio and web conferencing grows as an acceptable and preferred way to conduct routine business meetings, plenty of newbies are learning the ropes – the hard way. Even seasoned veterans are finding they suffer from anxiety-induced conference call episodes as they dial into the wrong bridges, disconnect participants, and subject countless others to what they thought was a private conversation.

Here are some tips to see that you don't make these and many other mistakes as you take advantage of conferencing technology.

> Start on time.

Dial into the audio bridge and/or web URL a few minutes before the start, especially if you are the host. Many people aren't aware that if the conference call host is not dialed in first, some conferencing systems will place participants in a black hole that can eventually make them anxious about having the right number, leading them to hang up.

> Make dial-in and web log-in easy for participants.

Provide call information for both audio and web portions of the call in one email, with the subject line clearly stating date, time and purpose of call.

New technology even makes it possible for conferencing systems to send emails that link directly to an appointment scheduling software application like Microsoft Outlook™, immediately depositing the appointment and call instructions into a participant's schedule upon acceptance of the appointment.

> Make sure your system is secure.

Some bridges are 'always on,' meaning once you give out your call-in number and password, participants can typically dial into that number at any time and listen into whatever conference is in progress. If you add additional layers of security for each conference, like participant or event PINs, only those with PIN numbers will be allowed access to a particular conference.

> Consider adding a web component to your call to command attention.

Participants can be easily distracted during audio-only conferences handling emails and other tasks. By adding web conferencing to the audio component, hosts can more effectively hold participants' attention with presentations and other supporting visual elements. This material can be marked up in real-time to emphasize important points and key messages and keep the listener's attention.

> If web conferencing is used, keep presentations short and interactive.

If conferences become a monologue, participants can quickly lose interest. Dialogue is very important. During the conference, the host should ask open-ended questions – "How does this plan sound so far?", "What do you think about that last statement?" Certain conferencing systems provide features that allow hosts to



quickly conduct polls and surveys, posing these to the participants throughout the conference. A presenter might ask, for example, "Have you cut technology spending by more than 50 percent this year?" And, participants can click Yes or No, without revealing their identity. The polling feature tallies up the responses and reports them back to the presenter, allowing the presenter to address that point in his or her presentation. This succeeds in both keeping the audience's attention and providing the presenter with feedback.

> Minimize background noise and interruptions.

Turn off the ringer on any other phone line in your vicinity. As a participant, turn on your mute button if you will be taking notes via a computer keyboard that could be heard by others. As a host, you may be able to mute individual participants' lines if they become disruptive.

If you must leave a conference call momentarily, do not place the call on hold. Other people in the call might be subject to your phone system's hold music. It's best just to leave your phone on mute and return as quickly as possible.

During the call, always introduce yourself and where you are from when you start to speak. If you must use a speakerphone, stand up and smile while you are talking to sound more energetic. Lastly, if you have call waiting, disable it before calling. With most phone systems, you can do this by dialing *70.

> Confirm that all participants have hung up.

Sometimes at the end of a call, colleagues will continue to talk with one another, not knowing that some participants may have not completely signed off. This could lead to potentially embarrassing situations.

Also be aware that outsourced conferencing systems will continue to charge for people that

stay on the line long after the host has signed off, leaving the host surprised when hefty, unexpected call fees show up on their bill.

> Be aware of cost.

Conference calls are typically far less expensive than travel, but you should be aware that some outsourced conferencing providers can charge up to 39 cents per minute for each audio conference line. At that rate, a one hour call with 10 people costs \$234. Adding web conferencing, at a cost of \$100 or more per month per person, boosts the costs still higher.

As a rule, conferencing from outside service providers is usually more costly than in-house audio and web conferencing systems.

Yankee Group, an independent research firm, estimated in a recent report that typical enterprise users of audio and web conferencing can save up to \$7,000 per month and realize a positive ROI within seven months using an in-house audio and web conferencing system. Costs include per minute audio charges, which were as low as 3 cents with an in-house model. If you or your company are spending more than \$1,000 in conferencing each month, it may be worth a look.

Happy Conferencing!

Sonexis, Inc. delivers a premises-based, integrated audio and web conferencing system that helps businesses improve business processes and communications while significantly reducing the cost of conferencing. The Sonexis' ConferenceManager system is easy to use, enhances security of sensitive corporate information, requires low administrative overhead, and leverages existing network investments. The system has been proven to significantly lower costs and deliver rapid return on investment. Headquartered in Massachusetts, Sonexis is backed by Zero Stage Capital, Venrock Associates and UBS Capital Americas.