

This is a customer case study that we wrote for RHUB Communications, a Web conferencing company. The case study was published by Communications News in May 2008.

Web Conferencing Goes Mainstream

Businesses of all shapes and sizes are beginning to embrace Web conferencing. With its vastly increased capabilities for interactive sharing and recording of information, Web conferencing is becoming a viable alternative to face-to-face meetings. While face-to-face meetings allow attendees to take in the subtleties (and distractions) of body language and tone, Web conferencing offers much more, including the ability to save and review meeting content, instant sharing of documents and data, and interactive presentations. Web conferencing also eliminates the time and expense of business travel for face-to-face meetings, allowing widely separated employees to collaborate on short notice. Today, businesses large and small are using Web conferencing for a wide variety of communications.

FleetPride Incorporated, a large distributor of parts and services for the trucking industry, is just one example of a traditional business that is incorporating Web conferencing into its overall corporate communications strategy. FleetPride needed a communications solution for its network of over 160 offices. The Company required an internal network solution, particularly for training purposes, and it also needed external Web-access for communications with their National Accounts and Wholesale sales divisions that include outside customers and vendors. Security was a top concern and they were sensitive about opening up their internal network to outside communications.

FleetPride compared and demoed several different Web conferencing solutions, including hosted and pay-per-view services. Most options were expensive and included many features that were not going to be useful. Pay-per-view solutions were excessively expensive. After evaluating the available options, FleetPride decided to use RHUB Communications TurboMeeting Web conferencing appliances. The decision was based on cost, ease of use, and the sensible feature set offered by TurboMeeting.

TurboMeeting was configured as on-premise appliance, whereby FleetPride purchased and installed the units in their facilities, giving FleetPride complete ownership, control, and security, and eliminating monthly fees. This also means that FleetPride must maintain and troubleshoot the system, but TurboMeeting was designed to be easy to install and operate, and it doesn't require extensive IT support.

"FleetPride was looking for a Web conferencing solution that would allow our staff to support and train over 2,000 users without breaking the bank or overwhelming our network with unnecessary features we would never use," said Ken Grimes, FleetPride's Network Security Officer. "TurboMeeting is a perfect solution – an appliance that has a very clean and easy interface for setting up, scheduling, and conducting webcasts."

FleetPride uses two units - a TurboMeeting 500 for internal network use, for large meetings with many attendees, and a TurboMeeting 200 unit for more limited external use. The Company is using TurboMeeting for a broad range of communications - IT Helpdesk support, corporate training for H/R, Sales Training, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, Payroll, and IT user training of new programs and policies.

TurboMeeting appliances are small, only about 9" x 6" x 1.4", with installation as simple as plugging in network and power cables, and following a very simple configuration process. Configuring the unit is as simple as:

- Install TurboMeeting unit on the internal network in the DMZ of the firewall
- TurboMeeting negotiates with the dhcp server to get an internal IP address and registers as "myonlinemeeting"
- The administrator accesses TurboMeeting using a Web browser, as "myonlinemeeting", and assigns a static IP address to the unit
- Firewall ports 80/443/8889 are mapped to the unit

- Set up a domain name mapped to the static IP address
- Input user information for those who will be hosting meetings

The TurboMeeting 200 Web-access installation is the same as the internal network installation, with the difference being opening a port on the firewall, allowing the system to operate over the Web. It essentially has a small window open through the firewall allowing only specific inside users to use Web access with outside participants.

The install and configuration typically takes only about 20 minutes. FleetPride's complete installation for the initial TurboMeeting 500 unit on the internal network took about 2 hours, which included adding all users, printing training documents and initial testing. The TurboMeeting 200 installation on the Web took about three days, primarily for management approval of opening FleetPride's firewall, and determining who needed both internal and external access. There were some image resolution issues with some wide screen and dual monitor setups, but those have been resolved in the latest TurboMeeting update.

"Last November and December, we completed physical inventory training at all of our service centers – over 160 locations," continued Mr. Grimes. "This included training on the actual PC systems our users work with. We broke the training sessions into groups of 20 locations at a time, with two webcasts per day. TurboMeeting worked very well, and we completed the entire organization's training in six days."

Every organization has its own Web conferencing requirements, and TurboMeeting has a variety of options and features that allow users to select those they need. FleetPride uses Seminar Mode as their primary training format. Interactive mode is used primarily by sales training personnel and IT support for the iSeries IBM mainframe. Remote Support and Remote Access are also useful on occasion.

One very useful option is "View Only" mode. View Only mode allows the moderator to continue the meeting and answer questions without stopping the webcast to allow users to join in. View Only mode can be especially useful for users with low-end PCs or handhelds with limited RAM, because no download is required, or for users with firewalls blocking outbound traffic, or with locked-down computers. A typical FleetPride office has two high end PC's and 6 – 10 low end PC's with limited download capacity. View Only is very useful for these locations, as it allows all users to attend meetings on their own PC's – otherwise they would have to invade the manager's office for the duration of the meeting!

As FleetPride has become familiar with TurboMeeting they are finding new applications. For example, local area managers are using TurboMeeting to perform one-on-one training with new employees, and to provide specific training to address individual or isolated issues. This has been a big time and money saver, as previously this was often done by sending the local manager to the site. TurboMeeting updates promise to enable even more applications – the latest version includes a record/playback function that allows training and other webcasts to be recorded for later playback. This is likely to be a big feature for FleetPride.

"We had been using pay-per-minute Web conferencing services, and we estimated that our savings with TurboMeeting would pay for itself within a year," added Mr. Grimes. "In fact, our sales force has already saved enough in travel expenses in only a few months to pay for the TurboMeeting 500 unit, and we expect the units to save us even more, as we are identifying new uses."

Web conferencing today is becoming so inexpensive and easy to use that nearly any organization – from small home offices to large enterprises – will find it useful for all manner of communications. Some firms are conducting job interviews with Web conferencing; schools are offering classes with Web conferencing; soldiers overseas are even using Web conferencing to stay in touch with their families back home. Now that is surely a sign that Web conferencing is going mainstream.

About RHUB Communications

RHUB is a premier provider of on-premise Web conferencing appliances, based on the Company's TurboMeeting software, that meet the needs of any organization. The Company's end users total over 5,000 in a variety of market segments including services, manufacturing, and government. RHUB's on-premise Web conferencing appliances focus on criteria of the highest importance to users: ease-of-use, affordability, security, control, and reliability. RHUB's breakthrough View-Only technology enables users of any platform to join meetings by a browser, requiring no download. With a small footprint, and power draw of only 4.5 watts, RHUB's on-premise Web conferencing appliances are the perfect choice for organizations seeking to improve their environmental credentials. RHUB is privately-owned and headquartered in Silicon Valley, California. For more information, visit www.rhubcom.com.