Leveling Up Your Video Experience For The Long Term

If your company was like most in 2020, video provided a critical way to communicate with employees — especially those who worked remotely.

Not only did companies use the technology for team calls, but they also used it for recorded and live trainings, all-hands meetings, and live-streamed events. Teams also used videoconferencing to connect socially for Zoom happy hours.

Even after the pandemic is over, companies will still rely on video. While some businesses are preparing to go back to the office, many aren't there yet, and others may never be. Several companies, such as Twitter,[1] have announced they will allow employees to work remotely indefinitely.

Additionally, although some employees will eventually return to the office, the return to business travel may take even longer, as companies weigh the benefits, risks and liabilities of travel compared with using video for communication.

With the long view of video being the preferred mode of communication by many businesses, now is an excellent time to level up your company's video experience for effective, sustainable, long-term use.

Rewind to Review Video Use in 2020

To determine the best way to incorporate video as part of a long-term business practice, it helps to look back at how companies used it during the pandemic and how they anticipate using it now and in the future. Sonic Foundry partnered with CIO Dive studioID to conduct a survey of business leaders in October 2020 to get a clear idea of their evolving video use.
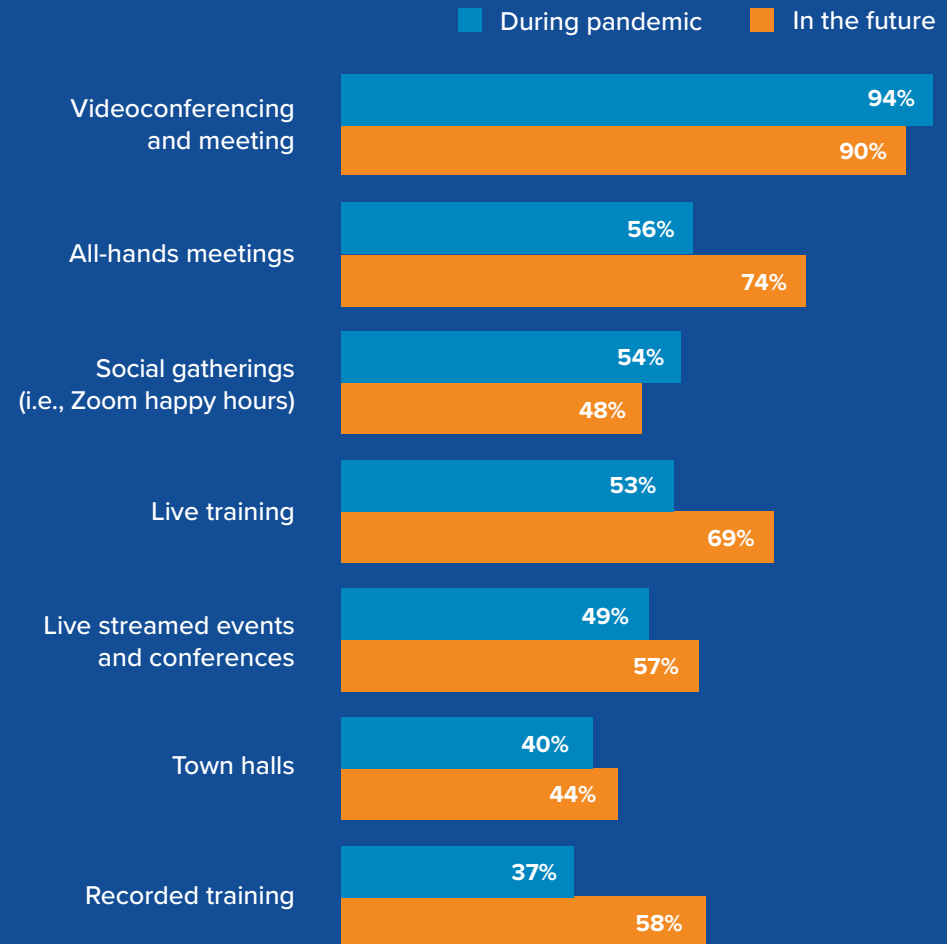
SURVEY RESULTS:

- **As much as leaders used video, they did have some concerns.** Security was a significant issue for 87% of leaders, with bandwidth coming in second at 86%.

- **Video was critical for companies, regardless of industry or size.** During the coronavirus outbreak, most respondents (96%) said that at least some of their employees worked remotely, compared to 9.2% who said their entire workforce was fully remote **before** the pandemic. With such a massive shift of so many people working remotely, video became an essential way to maintain communication. As an example, during the pandemic's peak, Zoom had 300 million daily participants in virtual meetings.

- **Business leaders said their top challenge for managing remote employees was making sure everyone felt connected (62%).** Keeping everyone connected and up to date was essential in industries affected by safety protocols and state and local regulations that changed quickly.

- **Ensuring that companies maintained their culture was a significant concern for more than half (54%) of the leaders surveyed.** Tracking work and productivity and maintaining communication with the remote team were also concerns.

- **Leaders stressed that video needed to be easy to use, yet secure.** They also said if video technology included recording capabilities, was cloud-based and could convert audio to transcripts, it was a big plus.

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Business leaders used video in various ways during the pandemic, and that use has staying power. When leaders look forward to more normal business operations after the COVID-19 pandemic eases, they expect to use video even more, but perhaps in slightly different ways.

Although some companies have used video technology for years, many were not using it to its fullest potential. The pandemic forced companies to jump into the video-communication pool. Now that companies have greater comfort and reliance on video technology, it will become an integral part of how companies operate.

With that knowledge, it is useful to delve into the long-term benefits video communication offers and how companies can use it to create connections in an organization.

COMPARISON OF VIDEO USE IN 2020 AND EXPECTED FUTURE USE

During pandemic   In the future

Videoconferencing and meeting
During pandemic: 94%
In the future: 90%

All-hands meetings
During pandemic: 56%
In the future: 74%

Social gatherings (i.e., Zoom happy hours)
During pandemic: 54%
In the future: 48%

Live training
During pandemic: 53%
In the future: 69%

Live streamed events and conferences
During pandemic: 49%
In the future: 57%

Town halls
During pandemic: 40%
In the future: 44%

Recorded training
During pandemic: 37%
In the future: 58%

The Unique Influence of Video Communication

It's no surprise that businesses leaned on video strategies during the pandemic. When employees were suddenly sent home to work, companies needed a way to mimic the in-office experience. Videoconferences, which were already popular, became a lifeline for teams to collaborate. Leaders used video calls to help employees transition to remote work. Managers used videos to deliver training on hand hygiene and infection control.

Although audio and text also provide communication, video adds an extra component that makes the delivery of messaging even more useful.

Like in-person interaction, video provides face-to-face contact, including eye contact, which builds trust.[2] Building trust within and across teams is always important, and especially during a crisis.

Video makes collaboration easier when employees are not in the same location. The ability to hear, talk and see one another, and share visual materials, makes working together more efficient.[3]

When used for learning, video offers audio and visual components, making it more likely that the message will be remembered.[4] Research has found that viewers retain 95% of the message when they watch a video, versus retaining 10% of messages delivered by text.[5]

Another benefit from video versus a live interaction is that a video can be recorded and disseminated, ensuring that everyone in the organization receives the same message. This helps increase consistency in applying policy and developing organizational culture.

Companies Embrace More Ways to Use Video

Organizations are increasingly using video in a variety of ways, said Bill Cherne, vice president of customer success and global technical support at Mediasite. The first is on-demand, recorded or prerecorded, or produced ahead of time, he said. Recorded meetings have their advantages. With so many employees working at home, alongside family members who share that work or study space, they can have conflicting activities or be distracted. Recorded meetings let employees review comments and notes.

"We're also seeing our customers use Mediasite more for town hall meetings, company-wide updates, health checks and policy updates."

Bill Cherne, vice president of customer success and global technical support at Mediasite

That use is particularly prevalent for delivering COVID-19 information. "If your company is at a higher risk, where perhaps you have factory floor workers who must work in close proximity, COVID updates are a lot more urgent and pressing."

Training is yet another growing use for video, Cherne said. With business travel limited and in-person training significantly decreased, companies that want to develop employees rely on online video sessions for training, Cherne said. That can be interactive and live, as in individual coaching or scheduled live group classes. Or, it could be recorded, allowing individuals to watch the video whenever it is convenient.

Besides video technology being effective and flexible to various needs, companies also save money and time with aspects like online training.[6]

HOW NAHQ'S SWITCH TO VIRTUAL ENABLES CONTINUITY

Each year, the National Association for Healthcare Quality (NAHQ) holds its educational conference for health care providers in person. But in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the organizers knew the traditional in-person program would have to change its format. Instead, NAHQ held its first entirely virtual conference with live and recorded events. Just as with in-person conferences, attendees joined virtual sessions featuring speakers, networked online with fellow attendees, went to breakout sessions and sought more information during Q&A discussions.

Typically, conferences have so many sessions and contain so much information, it is difficult for attendees to take full advantage of all the offerings. However, with the content available on video recordings, attendees had unlimited access to the video platform and its conference content for six weeks after the event ended.

With no travel expenses and other savings, the association was able to give attendees more value for the event offering more continuing education credits without raising the event's price.
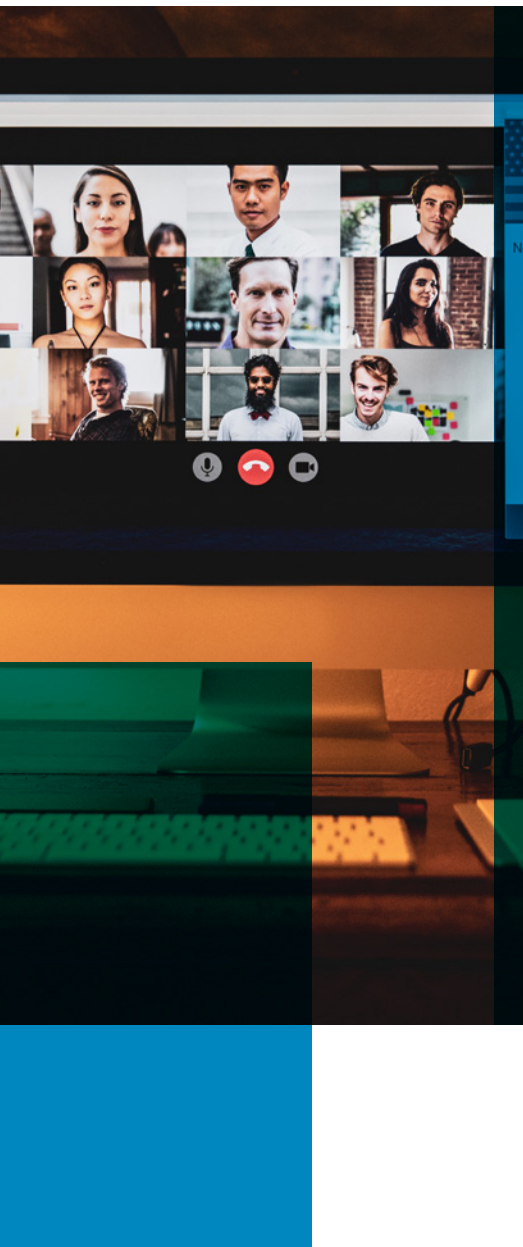
Building Community with Video

The use of video can be tactical. Video training on social distancing guidelines or how a retail employee should approach guests to inform them of the store's mask policy ensures that everyone who watches gets the same instructions and that all employees can get this information simultaneously.

Sharing communication with employees via video can be more than tactical. It offers a strategic way to build culture and community. "One positive thing that has come from this is that we're sharing our faces more on video," said Cherne. "We're all letting our guard down because we're at home and can be a little less formal. That helps you learn about your co-workers and clients more, so you care about them and can be a tighter team."

That message of caring is especially effective when it comes from the top, Cherne said.

"Every week or so, our CEO, Joe Mozden Jr., will record a video to all employees just giving a status update. Mozden records these informal videos from his home or office and may highlight team accomplishments or provide encouragement. It takes 30 seconds to record, but they get a message to the entire workforce in a very approachable way," Cherne said.

History will remember 2020 for more than the pandemic. It was also the year that many issues of social unrest came to the surface, and employees looked to their company leaders to confirm organizational values on equality.

Companies that wanted to convey their beliefs to the workforce **used video to deliver their messages to ensure everyone received the same information in a personal way.**[7]

Making the Most of a Video

With an understanding of the variety of ways video can be used and why it works so well, it helps to look at best practices of videoconferencing that will help it improve your business strategies.

When making a video, it needs to be aesthetically appealing. While no one expects employees to be videographers, anyone can use some foundational tips to make the sights and sounds of the video experience more pleasing:

1. **Be sure the audio on the video works well.**
   "Sound is critical," Cherne said. "You can have subpar video and be OK, but if your audio is just staticky, crackly, or drops in and out, it's not going to work."

2. **Prepare the camera view.**
   Have enough light in the room, coming from the right direction to help the camera focus on the subject. Ideally, light the face with two lights, one on the left and one on the right. Avoid being backlit, which casts shadows. Check your background to ensure no sensitive information or unprofessional content is visible. Use a virtual background if necessary, Cherne suggested.

3. **Make sure your video has accessibility features,**
   including closed captioning and transcripts so it is easier for viewers to consume the material.

Best Practices for Video Communication

As companies anticipate leveling up their use of video, the following guidance will help them improve the use of video as a long-term practice:

- **Plan for video storage.**
  Companies may think that unlimited data is best, but it can become a liability as things become cluttered, Cherne said. Storage costs can increase, and the data can become old or inaccurate or difficult to search through. Companies should consider how much video storage is needed. This issue often comes forefront as storage costs increase to a certain threshold, Cherne said.

- **Create a data-retention policy.**
  Getting rid of outdated video content might not be easy. A data-retention policy — or lack thereof — can determine what information must be kept. At a university, for example, a professor's lectures may need to be available for months or years. A lot of data-retention policies are driven by auditing rules, Cherne said. The policy should also outline who owns the material, i.e., the manager or the organization?

- **Determine how and if to repurpose videos.**
  Content can be created and quickly forgotten, but companies will get more from their investment if they repurpose videos. This repurposing might include putting it on different social channels or linking it to a related blog post.

- **Use analytics and data to improve content delivery.**
  When creating content, look at how it is being consumed to determine hot topics. This helps organizations create content most meaningful to the audience.

- **Take a break from video occasionally.**
  While it may sound strange to suggest using less video, it is also critical to use a variety of communication to battle issues such as "Zoom Fatigue."[8] Have an audio call periodically, Cherne suggested.

- **Have flipped meetings.**
  Schools call it flipping the classroom — pre-record a video reviewing the topics and attendees go through the meeting material in advance so the meeting time can be used for discussion. This can be effective in business settings, too. When employees try to absorb knowledge, they don't have time to think of questions all the time, Cherne said. "For example, I have two meetings that are training for new products being rolled out. Instead of me trying to demo the whole thing, I'm going to send out the video ahead of time for attendees to watch. I can look at the analytics to see that they are watching it and then spend the meeting time more productively by going over questions."

- **Consider using outside sources for video services.**
  Not all companies are ready to capitalize on using videos as part of a long-term strategy. They may lack the technology, storage capacity or bandwidth necessary to provide their employees and audience with a seamless experience. But, as companies increasingly use this technology, they have to find ways to get better at it, faster.

Companies see the need for video regardless of whether employees work from home or in the office.

While employers may have used stopgap measures to deliver video communication in the past, now is the time to reconfigure and determine strategies to effectively use video to create strong communication and enhance the company culture.

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