

SCORING WITH TECHNOLOGY DURING THE WORLD CUP

WE'VE heard countless times that getting around will be tricky during the World Cup. Air travel will be expensive and road travel within and between the host cities will be hampered by significantly increased traffic.

According to leading consulting and accounting firm, Grant Thornton, travelling between cities for business will drop off significantly due to congestion and inflated car rental and accommodation prices.

But with the appropriate technology, business can now be done "face to face" by staying put.

"The only thing you can't do virtually or remotely these days is to physically share a cappuccino with your business associates," says the Nedbank Group's head of networks, telephony and end-user communications, Barry Froneman. "With the advancement in business communication tools, there is little reason to physically get in your car or on a plane to conduct business."

He adds: "From my PC I can make contact with you, we can see each other on screen and talk to each other and while we are communicating I can e-mail you my presentation or documentation. I can refer to page 3 or point 5 or whatever we need to discuss."

"If I need to send you a contract I send it to you straight away by e-mail or e-fax, dispensing with the need for paper or for a separate fax machine and printer. In other words, my PC or laptop becomes the ultimate all-in-one office."

Videoconferencing, which saw a

recent surge when the volcanic eruption halted air travel in and to Europe, is rapidly being adopted worldwide.

In a 2009 survey conducted by Global IP Solutions (GIPS), 40 percent of business professionals in the US indicated that their company would be deploying a video communication solution within the next year or two. This is the situation the world over.

"A friend of mine who recently started working at Google in London says his first meeting was a video conference with his team and several other Google teams all over Europe," says Andrew Burns, sales manager for Dial a Nerd's business division.

"All participating teams were projected on a giant screen and as each person spoke their image would enlarge, and then shrink back to normal size when they had finished talking. Similar systems are available in South Africa for about R50 000 for a decent size company."

The technology is also improving rapidly. The ultimate in videoconfer-

encing - which won the 2009 Global Conferencing Telepresence Product of the Year Award - is Digital Video Enterprises' Immersion Room, which displays HD 3D images of people in the middle of a luxury meeting room.

The individual or small business is doing things on a different scale, Burns says. "Plenty of people are buying webcams and there is a surge in peer-to-peer technology systems like Skype."

The big advantage of Skype is that it is free and "polite". Because it shows real-time availability, you can send a chat message to find out if the person with whom you wish to speak is available, whereas when you phone someone you don't know.

(Skype has also unveiled plans to offer a videoconferencing service - a beta version is being tested - but it will be a paid-for option.)

"Another excellent communica-

tion tool, never to be underestimated, is the teleconference call," adds Burns. "The great advantage is all you need is a telephone."

"It's only when you get to multi-person teleconferencing via PABX systems that it gets more expensive. A system for 10 to 15 users, for example is roughly between R30 000 and R40 000."

The difference between using videoconferencing and a phone is in the overall experience, explains Dan Engel, regional sales manager of Polycom, an international communication technology business.

"Videoconferencing units now give a very high quality image (up to full HD) as well as very high quality sound (similar to a CD). Even though users are located in different rooms across the city, country or globe, the experience is one of having a meeting in the same room."

Less travel, more mobility is the motto for better business during and after the World Cup, writes Heather Dugmore

Polycom's videoconferencing units start at about R22 000 excluding VAT. For the individual or smaller business, their range includes the Polycom Communicator C100: a simple, hands-free set for the computer when using Skype, retailing for about R1 200.

Another company offering an alternative to travel is Vox Telecom, which has a high-definition videoconferencing solution called Eyeris, which it says is a fraction of the cost of currently available solutions. What makes it affordable is that Eyeris is a hosted videoconferencing solution that doesn't require major upfront capital expenditure.

Whichever aspect of the virtual business mode you choose, it will amount to considerable savings in time, money and wear and tear - and stress on people.

Most businesspeople find travel time-consuming and exhausting. "I

call unified communications. As the name suggests, it is a system where all the tools of technology interface with each other no matter where the user is situated.

"If I phone you from my home, for example, my office line shows up. My phone, my BlackBerry, my laptop and my PC are all linked for maximum professionalism. I can be anywhere, anytime, and I can conduct business anywhere and anytime."

Froneman does, however, emphasise that the ease of mobility also increases the ease of data and information interception, and stresses that users need to ensure that all networks are safe and secure.

To combat the risk of theft associated with mobility, at Nedbank all PC data is encrypted, so even if a staff member's laptop gets stolen, the information cannot be retrieved without their password.

"The beauty about technology is that it can only get better, more secure, more efficient and more environmentally friendly," says Froneman. "And the more sophisticated and mobile technology gets the easier it is to use. The only setback with mobility is that I don't know when to down tools."

- Polycom products are available through Kathema. Call 011 844 9900, e-mail info@kathema.co.za or see www.kathema.co.za
- Call Andrew Burns of Dial a Nerd's Business Division at 082 883 8270 or e-mail andrew@dialanerd.co.za
- For info on Eyeris, see www.voxonion.co.za

cannot ever recall going to the airport in a relaxed, calm state," says Froneman. "It is always a mad dash and this leads to anxiety."

"The transition to the virtual office and mobility, which is happening at a rapid rate, reduces stress and considerably improves people's work-home-life balance because they don't spend so much time travelling or on the road."

"At Nedbank we have introduced 'flexi-time' and 'work-from-home' for our employees so that they can avoid rush-hour traffic and thereby increase productivity. This can't apply to everyone - tellers, for example, need to be physically present - but a significant percentage of staff members in most businesses can operate flexibly."

Nedbank has also introduced a bus for staff members travelling from Centurion to Sandton who were spending over two hours in heavy traffic every morning. "We have a wireless LAN system on the bus so that they can work on their laptops while travelling," says Froneman. "It's all part of what we





There is a videoconferencing solution to suit all, from individuals to small and medium-sized businesses to large corporations.



Technology such as the RPX (RealPresence Experience) from Polycom helps to facilitate important meetings and conferences, such as this one between Midrand and Cape Town, without the travel.

PICTURE: POLYCOM HANDOUT



**HIGH-DEFINITION
AND HIGH-FIDELITY**



1. Microsoft HD LifeCam Cinema, R799,95, Incredible Connection.
2. Polycom's Polycom Communicator C100, R1121,90 excluding VAT, is available through Kathrea.
3. Logitech's HD webcam, the Pro 9000, at a recommended price of R999,99, is sold at stores such as Hi-Fi Corporation and Incredible Connection.

