



by George Page

Video Conferencing is a Gimmick

Who really thinks that video conferencing is anything but a gimmick? It can be expensive and that's not even when you consider the special – and expensive – equipment you have to buy to make a video conference work. The quality can be bad with choppy or slow visuals and scratchy or clipped sound. These complaints above are why some say video conferencing is a gimmick, meaning “a piece of trickery or manipulation intended to achieve a result dishonestly” (ex. “It’s just a sales gimmick”). What the rest of us know – the millions of people who use video conferencing – is that video conferencing really is a gimmick, or “an ingenious device or mechanism” that is, among other things, “something that attracts attention or publicity.”

There will always be a gizmo that is the best tech available. It will always be the most expensive and quite possibly the coolest looking. It will provide the best experience of whatever genre it's the top of. In video conferencing, it's a system that costs several hundred thousand dollars, has specialized equipment, constrains a conference to only the locations the specialized equipment is in, and needs the highest bandwidth available. It is also surreal as it is the most realistic experience possible without being in the same room. The images move without any delay, the colors are vibrant, and the floor to ceiling screens complete the impressive ensemble.

This system you do not need, but how incredible would it be to have it? Maybe one day when holographic conferences are available – “HoloConfs,” you saw it here first! – then the huge screen and perfect video conference will be available to all at a reasonable price. In the meantime, we should realize that the gimmick of video conferences does not lie in the best equipment, but rather in what we do with what we have. What you should look for is a video conference provider that has reasonable costs, offers quality conferences, and does not require any special equipment other than a webcam and your computer. You get smooth video, clear audio, multiple participants, and a good video conference experience.

The best example of the use of this more sensible type of video conferencing is doing regular video conferences with your customers. Not only do you save money above equipment and service costs by going without travel and lodgings, but you respect your customer's time. They don't have to prepare to meet with your company's representative in person, and thus you get to meet with them more often. And never discount the bonding a video conference gives you and your customer by sharing the experience of being on the “cutting edge” of business and technology.

On a much smaller scale on the video conferencing technology tree is an idea that probably is most considered a gimmick – the bad kind of gimmick – if not looked at in the right perspective. This idea is the free webcam and instant messaging type of video conference. For those who don't use instant messaging, you should know that not only can you “bleep” messages to your contacts quickly, but you can also do voice and video. All you need to do this is a mic and



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webcam for your computer. Setup is easy and use is just as simple as pressing the “chat with video” button.

Unlike a real video conference, you can only do video with one other person, the quality is choppy, and the screen is small. You would only want to use this with coworkers – or friends of course – for a quick video chat. We all have a pretty good idea when a phone call just won’t cut it and we need to see someone in person, so think of cheap video chat as another choice between a face-to-face and a phone call. You will be able to see the disposition of your coworker, know that they are paying attention to you, and see if they understand or not. All of that from a quick video chat.

The future of video conferencing is here, but then again, it will always be here. The most bespoke technology will give you the results you want, but so will the options that are far more reasonable. Video conferencing is a gimmick, but make sure it is in your business arsenal, and use it for the “ingenious device or mechanism” that it is.