

Industry Perspectives: Video Communications During A Crisis

In a crisis, will your company sink or swim together?
Video communications could be your solution.

[Editor's Note: Industry Perspectives is a regular feature in which vendors in the streaming media space explore issues and trends on which they can shed unique perspective. The articles reflect the opinions of the authors only, and we print them as a means of starting discussion.]



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Executives agree that it is always important to effectively and consistently communicate with all of your employees worldwide. In times of crisis, though, it is vital. During a crisis, maintaining visibility and consistent interaction with employees can make the difference between the success and failure of a business. This includes responsibility assignment, situational debriefing, and vertical and horizontal employee communications—even in the face of extreme stress. Better-informed individuals are the building blocks of a motivated and well-performing team.

In today's always-on environment, workers expect up-to-the-minute information that connects them, their companies, and their leaders to a shared vision. Yet, a disparate team and information overload make it more difficult than ever to deliver your message to everyone—even at the outer edges of your enterprise—in an engaging, timely, and intimate way. These challenges increasingly require direct communication from the top of the organization. There is no time for the slow flow of information or the twists and turns the message takes as it weaves its way through your organization.

A New Generation of Enterprise Communication Options

Most companies already have several forms of corporate communication systems in place. These can include email, intranets, instant messaging, video conferencing, blogs, podcasts, wikis, and online video. In challenging times, it is important that your message not only is delivered quickly to everyone, but also that it exudes authenticity and inspires confidence. However, in the face of shrinking budgets and resource constraints, leaders are often forced to choose between speed, reach, consistency, and quality of communications. The next generation of enterprise video on demand solutions for employees resolves all of these issues at 1/10th the cost of traditional approaches.

Large enterprises and small companies alike are struggling with this dilemma. Large companies may have the breadth of systems, but often can't execute effectively because they lack control over communications scheduling; fear they might bring down the network; or are concerned about difficulty in reaching all remote employees. Smaller companies also struggle with limited bandwidth and may have additional scalability issues.

Traditional communications, like face-to-face meetings, certainly have the intimacy required in delicate situations. Leveraging the hierarchy of the organization, the message is disseminated telephone-style—often with a series of additional meetings—throughout the company. Although personal, these traditional communication methods may sacrifice the reach, consistency and speed required in crisis-mode.

On the other hand, high-speed communications, represented mostly by web communications like email, can get the message delivered quickly. But these first-generation methods lack the intimacy of more traditional communications. And in a sea of emails, vital messages can often get lost.

Many companies have deployed next-generation web communication methods, like online video, in an effort to leverage the Internet and rich-media to deliver a more engaging message. In a recent survey by Interactive Media Strategies, video was not only cited as the most engaging of communication elements, but it also had the greatest increase in its perception from 2007. Video allows CEOs to deliver an engaging, powerful, and memorable message to all employees with up to three times greater information retention than other media types, according to a Watson Wyatt Worldwide Communications study.

Video for Crisis Communications

With online video, executives can deliver consistent, emotive and memorable messages that can be replayed and reviewed by employees. Video can be used to engage and educate employees with the delivery of crisis management simulation, communication drills, or corporate advisories. Typical companies communicate far more often and more effectively to their employees in their larger locations. The team at the corporate office always seems to have an information advantage on the remote workers and the offices distributed across the globe. Effective use of video can democratize communications during a time of crisis and increase motivation and performance of the entire workforce.

Forward-thinking companies are already using video as a means of communication for training, advertising, or customer successes. But when it comes to a crisis, video is often misconceived as time-consuming or resource draining. However with the right tools, video can effectively be used for urgent communications—in time and with existing infrastructure.

Leveraging Existing Infrastructure for Video Delivery

Preparing for effective employee communications requires establishing organizational and technological infrastructure before a crisis occurs. Not addressing the inherent network requirements of quality video distribution will result in a poor user experience that can negate the benefits of video communications. Many companies deploy more hardware to handle the load on the global network, but this can be costly, take months to deploy and lack the scalability needed in a crisis. Also, infrastructure investments are typically skewed towards larger corporate offices, leaving smaller remote offices and workers even more disconnected than usual. A classic case of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

The right PC-based software solution, on the other hand, can offer a cost-effective and flexible alternative for video distribution. Some leverage distributed computing services, allowing companies to efficiently utilize large networks of existing machines for previously centralized tasks like video distribution. This can help equalize network load even in peak situations. Software can enable wide-scale simultaneous video on-demand, even to the outskirts of your workforce, without increased hardware expense or network threat. Software solutions can also give executives direct control when the message is sent and received.

Aligning an Organization with Video

Online video democratizes communications during times of crisis and improves business performance across today's global enterprise. Video can personalize a crisis for everyone; target the right message for the right team and unify people to learn, understand and move forward together.

With the right infrastructure in place, enterprises are able to deploy high-quality video on a scalable and cost-effective platform without impacting existing network infrastructure. Secured and engaging video messages are critical parts of an effective crisis communications strategy that is essential to morale and productivity. Effective crisis communications can make the difference between a company swimming together to rise above the situation, or one with uninformed, floundering workers bringing the company down.