



Enterprise

Daily Use

- Merger & acquisition communications
- Client interaction
- Team meetings
- Management meetings
- Recruiting interviews
- Project management
- Remote site communications

Solution

- Polycom® HDX™ 9004 room telepresence solutions

Results and Benefits

- Reduced travel costs for clients
- Improved productivity
- Accelerated business processes, particularly with complicated M&A deals and candidate interviews
- HD telepresence represents unique competitive advantage among investment banks
- 100 percent ROI on every system within 12 months of implementation
- An estimated \$150,000 saved annually through travel reduction

Houlihan Lokey Streamlines Business Processes and Enhances Customer Experience with Polycom®

Background

Houlihan Lokey is an international investment firm with services that include mergers and acquisitions, valuations and financial advisement. It is also one of the largest financial restructuring companies in the world. Thomson Reuters recently ranked the firm the top merger and acquisition advisor for U.S. transactions under \$2 billion.

Houlihan Lokey's nearly 900 employees serve more than a thousand clients from offices in the United States, Europe, and Asia. Because the firm's business requires frequent face-to-face negotiations, travel represents a major operating expense, often surpassing \$2 million annually.

With the lifecycle of a merger and acquisition or restructuring deal ranging from weeks to many months, "our people are constantly traveling to visit clients or to attend meetings at one of our 14 international offices," said Mr. Louis Chen, senior vice president and chief information officer at the Los Angeles-based company. "Many of our people bill millions of dollars a year," says Mr. Chen. "Having them spend lots of time in the air, where their ability to work is limited at best, doesn't make sense financially."

Houlihan Lokey management began looking at visual communication—and at telepresence, in particular—as a way to reduce the impact that near-constant travel was having on the productivity of the firm's employees.

Though Mr. Chen had for years considered linking the company's offices with a video communications network, the interest in video conferencing grew as fuel prices and airfares skyrocketed. The company's initial concerns over the cost of a video communications network gradually eased as gasoline prices continued their steady march toward \$4 a gallon.

"One of our board members saw a magazine article on telepresence and said, 'We must have this,'" recalls Mr. Chen. "From a company acceptance standpoint, that started the ball rolling."

Going with the Industry Standard

An intense five-month evaluation of video conferencing systems concluded with the firm choosing Polycom high-definition (HD) telepresence solutions. "We looked at all the major vendors, but most offer a closed, proprietary solution," says Mr. Chen. "We need an open system, one that allows us to tie in any video conferencing system we want. Polycom systems are based on open standards, and that's a major advantage over the other providers."

"We chose Polycom because we knew we'd get a standards-based, high-quality HD telepresence solution that's also very cost-effective."

Louis Chen, Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer, Houlihan Lokey

Mr. Chen says Polycom's reputation in HD telepresence was another deciding factor. "We chose Polycom because we knew we'd get a standards-based, high-quality HD telepresence solution that's also very cost-effective."

Some Houlihan Lokey employees, however, harbored concerns about telepresence. "They had memories of early systems from older technology that suffered from poor picture quality and long lag times," says Mr. Chen.

Turning those perceptions around was as easy as showing them a Polycom® HDX™ 9004 system in action. "To demonstrate the quality of the Polycom HD video, we zoomed in on the nutritional information on the back of a Coca-Cola can," recalls Mr. Chen. "I can say virtually 100 percent of the people who walked into those demos walked out very impressed."

Negotiating Face to Face

With the help of Polycom Professional Services, Mr. Chen's team initially deployed six HDX 9004 room telepresence systems in its offices in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Minneapolis, Hong Kong, and London.

Outfitted with dual plasma screens measuring from 50 to 60 inches, each system delivers the compelling "across the table" experience that Houlihan Lokey finds vital to its business.

"In our business, it's important to see that body language," says Mr. Chen, who says accurately interpreting a counterparty's moods or responses is essential to successful negotiations. "Those slight changes in a person's demeanor can tell you a lot."

It's one reason why the firm appreciates Polycom UltimateHD™ technology, which enables users to see and interact with video, audio and content—all in true HD quality.

"The advantage of HD is that it makes it feel like you're truly having a face-to-face conversation," reports Mr. Chen. "Latency is barely perceptible, even when we're teleconferencing overseas. And the clarity of the audio is outstanding. Some of our people occasionally use the Polycom HDX system for important phone calls, simply because the audio is so clear."

The initial six Polycom HDX 9004 solutions proved so popular with users that the firm added others in Paris and Frankfurt.

Accelerating the Interview Process

Having the Polycom telepresence solution has also enhanced interview processes by significantly reducing the amount of travel required for managerial level employees.

"Our senior-level hires used to have to fly to 3-4 cities to participate in in-person interviews," notes Mr. Chen, "Now, we can bring them into one office and interview them via telepresence. This has dramatically cut down the interview process in terms of time and cost."

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Realizing ROI in Three Ways

While the cost of world-class HD telepresence initially concerned a few Houlihan Lokey executives, the firm has found that Polycom's ROI is rapid and easy to measure.

Houlihan Lokey has achieved its ROI in three key ways:

- Improved productivity. Eliminating a single trip automatically saves hours—even days—of employee time. "In the past, we'd have to rely on travel, e-mail and telephone calls to get business done—a process that was costly, slow, and ineffective. HD telepresence definitely accelerates the business process, particularly with complicated merger and acquisition deals. We're not wasting people's time with unnecessary travel."
- Sharpened competitive edge. Polycom telepresence also helps Houlihan Lokey's clients reduce their own travel costs, and that helps the firm's relationships with customers. "A German client acquiring a U.S. company can conduct meetings with its American counterparts from our Frankfurt office. Especially during merger and acquisition transactions, the counterparties like to meet face-to-face. You can imagine how much they appreciate handling many of those meetings via telepresence." And, says Mr. Chen, there's a "wow factor" to HD telepresence that sets Houlihan Lokey apart from other firms in its market. "Polycom builds impressive HD telepresence systems, and they are impressive to clients as well," he says. "It's a differentiator that helps maintain our image as a leader in our industry."
- Reduced travel costs. "We've easily realized savings in the tens of thousands," says Mr. Chen, who calculates that each new system pays for itself within a year. "All it takes to pay for one HDX 9004 system is keeping 20 staff members from having to make 15 to 20 trips in a year. With our travel schedules, that's an obvious savings."

Mr. Chen says the investment bank eventually would like to link all 14 of its offices with HD telepresence systems, and potentially install video endpoints at key client locations.

And with millions at stake in some negotiations, Houlihan Lokey won't trust its telepresence network to anything less than the best. "HD telepresence allows you to make eye contact...to feel the presence of the other party," says Mr. Chen. "Polycom has made our job easier and our business much more effective."

Learn More

Polycom, Inc. is the global leader in telepresence, video, and voice solutions and a visionary in communications that empower people to connect and collaborate everywhere. Visit www.polycom.com to find out how Polycom solutions can benefit your organization.

