Business Continuity

For Polycom Users, It's 'Business As Usual' as Volcanic Ash Wreaks Havoc for Millions

Daily Use

- Maintaining operations amid a European air travel ban
- Replacing in-person meetings with video conferences
- Keeping in touch with corporate travelers, family, and friends

Solution

- Full array of Polycom collaboration tools, including Polycom® Converged Management Application™ (CMA™) Desktop, and Polycom personal, room, and immersive telepresence solutions
- Polycom hosted bridge solutions, which enabled partners and customers to supplement their video conferencing capabilities during the crisis

Results and Benefits

- Employees, partners and customers maintained operations as millions of travelers were prohibited from flying for nearly a week.
- Robust and scalable, the Polycom corporate network environment accommodated up to double the normal video call volumes without having to increase bandwidth

For organizations looking to cut costs and operate more efficiently, video conferencing and telepresence have earned an established place among the strategic weapons of business.

But on April 15, 2010, the value of face-to-face collaboration was suddenly recognized by more people, in more places, than ever before. On that day, ash from an erupting volcano in Iceland pushed eastward and closed airports across much of Europe, prompting authorities to cancel more than 95,000 flights over the next week.

That left millions of tourists and business travelers stranded and waiting for airports to reopen. Across the continent and the world, business operations were crippled, conferences and meetings were cancelled, customer visits were postponed, and untold revenues were lost.

Polycom and its customers, however, found themselves especially well equipped for just such a crisis. Despite facing the same challenges of all global organizations, they responded in a way that underscores an essential advantage of video communications: They just kept working, almost as if nothing had happened at all.

Their experience illustrates how video communications can help companies maintain business continuity at the very moment their competitors are standing still.

Ensuring Productivity from Afar

"I knew I was stranded," recalls Peter Lurie, who ended up in Munich when the ash plume interrupted his customer trip through Europe. "I couldn't just sit there. Customers are counting on me. Colleagues are counting on me."

As a global Unified Communications architect for Polycom, Lurie is in regular face-to-face contact with customers, even though he works from a home office outside Boston. "Without video conferencing, I'd be on the phone all day, sending e-mail, not feeling entirely productive," he says. "I knew I'd need that capability from Munich."

Fortunately, Lurie's notebook PC was equipped with Polycom® Converged Management Application™ Desktop (CMA™ Desktop) a software application that transforms any computer with a Web camera into a video conferencing station. "I spent that weekend doing audio and video calls to try to find a way back home. Come Monday morning, I was able to work full time from my hotel room." Polycom CIO Glenn Noga points out that because the company has

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widely deployed CMA Desktop, no Polycom employee was ever truly stranded. "They not only could make and join video calls, but they could make and receive calls on their company phone number," says Noga. "They could operate like they were in the office."

With CMA Desktop, Lurie was able to attend all his standing meetings, which typically are conducted over video. "People attend these meetings remotely anyway, and you never know if they're in the office or on the road, and it doesn't really matter," he says. "But I was struck by how many people participating in the meetings happened to be stranded."

One reason: A technology summit for Polycom partners and customers located throughout the EMEA region was about to wrap up when the travel freeze began. The company's UK offices in Slough, outside London, hosted the event—and continued to accommodate attendees unable to leave Slough by making available the Polycom video conferencing and telepresence solutions usually used for sales demonstrations.

"It was business as usual," says Kevin Pitts, senior product manager for CMA based in Westminster, Colorado. He says being able to use the Slough facilities meant he didn't need to spend all day in his hotel room—and having access to video conferencing meant he didn't have to miss any meetings. "You walk into a conference room. You sit down, you dial a number and you go to work. It's that easy."

Making Every Minute Count

Along with other U.S.-based employees, Carin Lockhart found the biggest challenge was a time zone difference that left her with a brief, two-hour window to interact with her Colorado management team before her work day in the UK ended. But video communications helped her make the most of those two hours. "To be able to see people makes a big difference; it's a substitute for dropping by their desk to check in with them," she says. "On a general level, I was able to coordinate from Slough everything I normally could in Westminster."

Even employees who journeyed home by land stayed productive. Shai Farkash, vice president of engineering, Moshe Lipsker, director of software development, and Amit Keynan, director of EMEA infrastructure product management—all from Israel—attended the Slough summit. The trio traveled to Paris by train, to Madrid by car and finally made it home by Monday, April 19. While en route they relied on CMA Desktop to keep in contact with co-workers and family.

Returning to Work On Time

For Graham Walsh, vacationing in Dubai with his wife when airports in Europe closed, video conferencing meant returning to work on time—even though he was still nearly 3,400 miles away from his UK office. Staying in a hotel with free WiFi access, Walsh promptly purchased a camera-equipped netbook for $400. Once online, he downloaded CMA Desktop software. "I was on the Polycom corporate network within a few minutes," says Walsh, who manages relationships with HP and Microsoft, two partners within the Polycom Open Collaboration Network. "I was back at work on Monday and made all my meetings."

And, says Walsh, because the Polycom CMA Desktop solution enables users to make both voice and video calls, running CMA software over the hotel's Wi-Fi network likely saved Polycom hundreds of dollars in mobile roaming charges.

Beyond Polycom: Customers and Partners

Throughout the travel ban, similar scenarios played out again and again within organizations around the world. Regus, a Polycom customer and operator of 2,500 publicly available video conferencing rooms and immersive telepresence suites, saw usage jump108 percent in the UK and 18 percent across Europe as stranded travelers sought to connect and collaborate.

Polycom's own corporate video network carried 4,991 video and gateway calls on Tuesday, April 20—the most ever in a single day, and twice the typical call volume. The company also carved out areas of its video infrastructure for use by partners and customers who required extra capacity for their own business continuity efforts. Polycom's IT group achieved it all without having to increase bandwidth.

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Learn More

To find out how Polycom solutions can help your organization, visit us at www.polycom.com or speak with a Polycom Account Representative.

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