



EBOOK

HOW TO EVALUATE VIDEO PROVIDERS



INTRO

Unless your company decided long ago to communicate by carrier pigeon and carrier pigeon only, you already know how important video conferencing has become for today's companies. As workforces have become more and more distributed, video conferencing has gone from boardroom luxury to cross-company necessity. That's probably why you're reading this right now, eh?

Selecting the right solution for your company is critical. In a [recent survey](#), we found that satisfaction with solutions is down at a shocking 17%. But our survey also showed that finding the right solution, one that suits your business model and has the flexibility to scale, can actually drive adoption at exponential rates.

Maybe you're one of the whopping 83% who are fed up with your current video solution. Maybe your company is just making moves to video conferencing. Whether you're considering ditching your current video conferencing provider or just ditching your old carrier pigeon network, we have a few tips on [how to tell when it's time to make the change](#) and how to make sure you're making the right change.



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KNOWING WHEN IT'S TIME TO FIND A NEW SOLUTION

Chances are your employees are already using some sort of video solution, even if it's not something IT specifically implemented. Maybe they're beating down your door with complaints, suggestions, and requests for help. Or maybe they've been so beaten down by the inertia around your legacy system that they've decided their collaboration goals will never be fully realized. Try these tips to find out how well your current solutions are working or why they're [being ignored](#):



1 - GET THE USAGE DATA

Your current system's software should be able to produce customizable, user-friendly reports on your real-time usage data. From these reports you can get a sense of baseline usage and outliers within your company and across departments.

- + Baseline usage will tell you whether your system is generating value company-wide.
- + Outliers will give you an idea of where to look for exceptional use cases.

3 - GET EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

A survey is a great way to get a representative sample of sentiments from across the company. But also consider including those outlying departments and stakeholders in a few focus groups to make sure you have a full sense of what is and isn't working.

- + If you have a department using video conferencing at three times the average rate, they may have insight on how to make the system work well.
- + If you have a department that almost never uses it, they can probably articulate some important reasons the system is failing them.

2 - GET FEEDBACK FROM I.T.

Not only can they clear up any questions about the specs on your current video system, but they're uniquely positioned to tell you how the solution is working across the company. If IT reports that they're being routinely invited to sit in on meetings "just in case something happens," that's a clear sign it's time to make a change.

4 - WHEN IN DOUBT, GO TO THE SOURCE.

Employees can't always articulate the issues they're having or the alternatives they'd prefer. Check out the conference room calendar and ask a meeting leader if you can be a fly on the wall the next time they fire up the video conferencing system. As you observe the meeting, keep half an eye on the clock. The amount of time lost to technical issues is a strong metric of the system's weaknesses.



DETERMINING YOUR EVALUATION CRITERIA

Now that you're sure it's time to make a change, it's time to decide how you're going to choose a new solution. This is undoubtedly one of the most critical steps of the process. If you're not crystal clear on why you're changing and what you need up front, the results you get from your new system are going to be equally muddled. There are three key things you should do to determine your evaluation criteria:

- 1 GATHER FEEDBACK FROM END-USERS
- 2 ORGANIZE AND DOCUMENT THE REQUIREMENTS
- 3 PRIORITIZE YOUR REQUIREMENTS

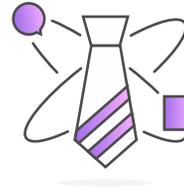
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GATHER FEEDBACK FROM END-USERS

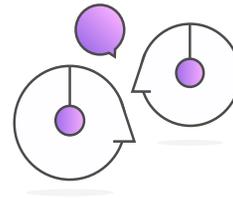
It's pretty much a given that each department will be using video conferencing for different purposes and in different ways. After all, if everyone was doing the same task in exactly the same way, they wouldn't really need to collaborate with one another, right? Before you contact your first vendor, make sure you know which departments are going to use your solution and for what. Ideally, you'll identify the early adopters within each department, those key end users who are most excited about using video. Engaging them early in the decision-making process will give them added incentive to bring their teams on board quickly when the new system is in place.

You'll know best which fine-grained questions to ask, but here are a few core questions you shouldn't overlook:

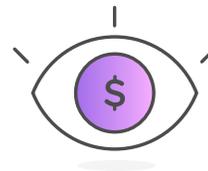
- + How do you communicate and collaborate now?
- + Why video? How will you use it?
- + What is holding back your productivity now?
- + What's not working about your current video options?
- + What could you do better with a different solution?
- + What new capabilities would a different solution give you?



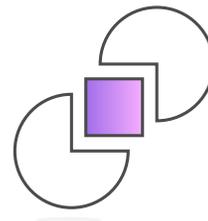
Is HR planning to conduct preliminary interviews with candidates via video?



Is Support/Success hoping to roll out a video chat service to offer customers face-to-face solutions to their concerns?



Perhaps Sales wants to be able to give eye-catching presentations by video so they can expand the reach of their product demos.



Maybe Marketing and Engineering have decided they need to set up weekly standup meetings to keep on the same page and easily share data.

2

ORGANIZE & DOCUMENT THE REQUIREMENTS

When you're seeking detailed feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, that feedback can get out of hand in a flash if you're not ready to receive it. Knowing that you're going to get complex, perhaps even contradictory inputs from across departments, it's a good idea to have an organization and documentation system in place well before you send out your first survey. You can start by organizing your evaluation criteria into buckets, leaving space to break those buckets into subcategories and to record the details of the end-user feedback you receive. Here are some typical buckets and a few ideas about the details to look for in each category:

EVALUATION CRITERIA

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

FEATURES & FUNCTIONALITY

How will people schedule meetings using the new solution?

How will people join the meetings using the new solution?

What do remote meeting attendees need to be able to do during a meeting?

What does a meeting organizer need to be able to do?

What devices will people be joining meetings from?

How often does your team screen share during meetings?

EASE OF USE & END-USER EXPERIENCE

How do people feel about the process they go through to create and join calls?

How do people feel about what they have to do to accomplish their goals during a meeting?

How long does it take to do basic tasks?

How much explanation and training is required?

COST

Is there a set budget for video conferencing?

How do the benefits of the new solution compare to the costs?

SETUP COMPLEXITY, TIME AND COST

How long does it take to install the new solution?

What equipment is required to install the new solution?

Are there network modifications or upgrades that will be necessary?

Are professional or implementation technical services required?

Are construction or building facilities services required?



QUALITY

What is the quality of the hardware?

How good is the audio and video quality in typical operating conditions?

What are your conference room acoustics like? Are there glass walls? What size are they? Is there significant background noise outside your conference rooms?

Are you using video conferencing in huddle rooms, open spaces, larger conference rooms?

Do you have a lot of remote employees? What devices will they use to access your video service? What limitations to sound quality might those devices create?

SOLUTION RELIABILITY, VENDOR REPUTATION & VENDOR SUPPORT

What is the uptime of the solution, if using cloud-based software?

How responsive is the vendor when there are issues? Is there a SLA?

How satisfied are other customers with the solution?

How does the vendor offer support - what channels are available, what are the support hours, typical response times and satisfaction ratings?

3

PRIORITIZE YOUR REQUIREMENTS

So you've laid the foundation for your search and scaffolded out the needs of your key stakeholders. Now it's time to decide what shape your selection criteria are going to take. Are you building a skyscraper by focusing on one crucial criterion and aiming for the highest possible result? Or are you building out a mixed-use development that does a few different things reasonably well? No matter what, you'll have to prioritize requirements because most likely you won't be able to find a solution that has exactly everything you want.

It can be a daunting task, translating stakeholder feedback into clear evaluation criteria. We suggest understanding which bucket of evaluation criteria is most important for your company, and then identifying the must-have requirements in each. From a broader industry perspective, a survey we recently conducted found that companies are making ease of use and quality their top criteria today:

TOP EVALUATION CRITERIA



34% EASE OF USE



20% AUDIO QUALITY



19% VIDEO QUALITY



15% COST



10% FEATURES & FUNCTIONALITY



OUTLINING YOUR SOLUTION SELECTION PROCESS

OK, we all know it ain't over til the fat lady sings, but congrats nonetheless! With a clear set of criteria based on an accurate needs assessment and a solid business strategy, you are more than halfway to a great new video conferencing solution. Now it's time to make a plan to implement those criteria in your solution selection process.

SET A TIMELINE AND DIVIDE IT UP INTO CLEAR STAGES FOR THE EVALUATION PROCESS.

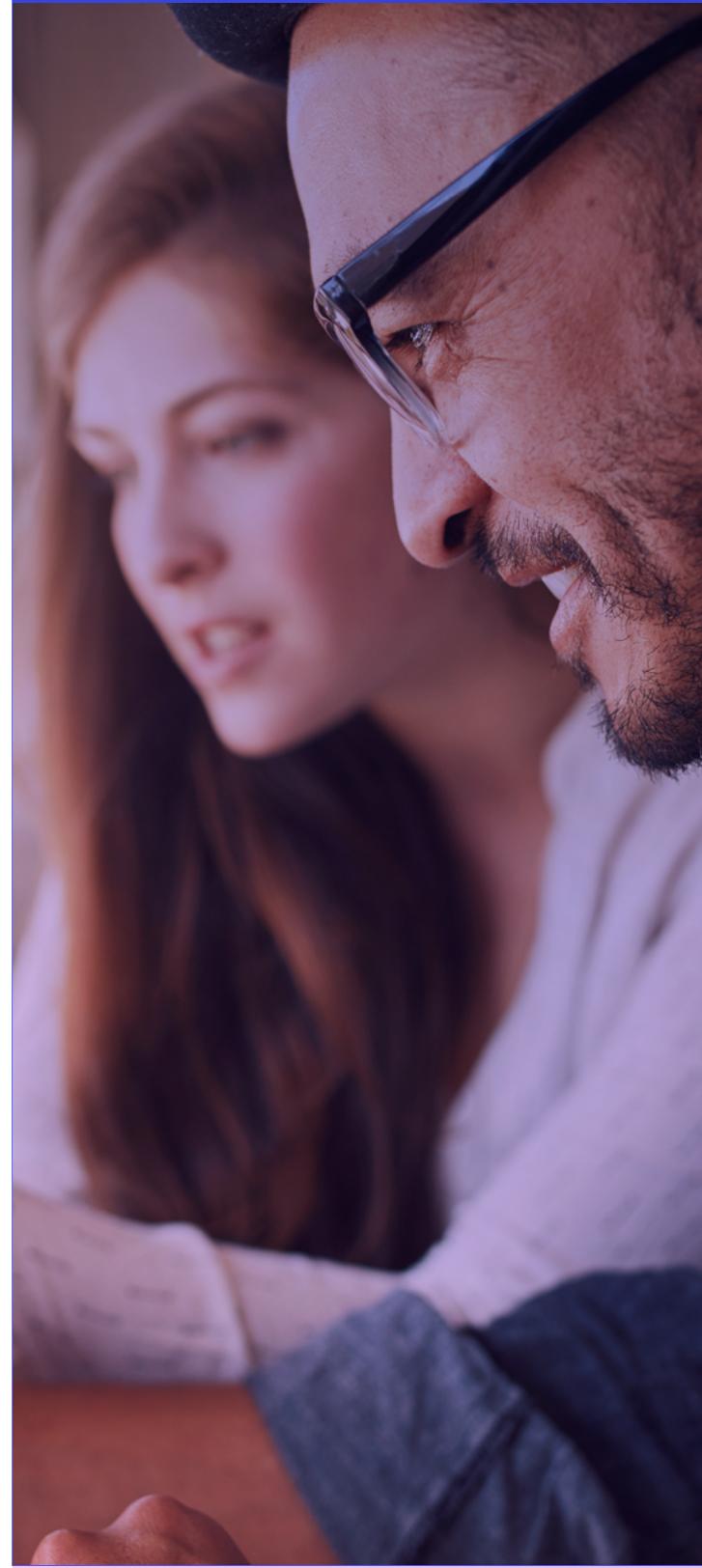
- + How much time do you need to search for vendors and do demos?
- + What will your trial/proof of concept look like?
- + How much time will you need for that?

IDENTIFY THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS THAT WILL BE LOOKING AT SOLUTIONS AND TRYING THEM OUT

If it's convenient, try to work with as many of the key stakeholders you previously interviewed when you were establishing your criteria. Again, this will feed the excitement for the new tool among early adopters, fueling company-wide onboarding.

MAP OUT WHO WILL APPROVE THE PURCHASE AND WHAT LEVEL OF INFORMATION THEY WANT

- + Will you need to present a formal business case, or will it be a more informal chat?
- + Even if you only need to have that informal chat, it's still smart to put the selection process and timeline in a document that you can easily share with all stakeholders to make sure everyone understands their role and expectations.





FINDING VENDORS

Chances are you already know of a few vendors that make video conferencing solutions. And while no one ever got fired for buying IBM, it is worth looking broadly to find some of the newer, more innovative players in the space. Here are a few suggestions to kick off your search:



Vendor websites. Kind of a no-brainer, but you might be pleasantly surprised when a simple internet search brings back a few companies you'd never heard of.

Tech and Business Journalism. From media stalwarts like WIRED and Fast Company to online-only journals like The Verge and TechCrunch, there is no shortage of valuable reporting on the state of the market and the innovations vendors are bringing to the table.

IT forums and consumer review sites like [G2 Crowd](#) and [Spicework's community](#) page bring you unbiased (or at least less biased) accounts of how vendor's have performed IRL.

Consultants and analysts. Research firms like [Wainhouse](#) and [Nemertes](#) specialize in analyzing the value of business technology. This is a particularly useful approach if you've already identified a few equally promising options and you need a detailed analysis of their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Conferences and Tradeshows. Even in this digital age, sometimes there's just no substitute for the face-to-face demos, networking, and tip-swapping you can get at a good old-fashioned tradeshow.

As you evaluate each vendor, make sure to keep track of how each solution stacks up against your requirements. If you can fold this data into the evaluation documentation you shared with all your stakeholders, so much the better for your future roll out.



JUSTIFYING THE PURCHASE WITH FINANCIAL MODELING AND A BUSINESS CASE

As we mentioned before, the folks approving your purchase will require different levels of formality when it comes to your business case, but no one ever says no to hard numbers. Even if you're just having an informal chat with the decision makers, it's always good to have a sense of the costs and benefits of the solutions you're considering.

LET'S START WITH SOME COSTS TO CONSIDER:



Upfront, one-time cost. The one-time purchase price should include the cost of all necessary equipment, software (if applicable), and any installation.

Legacy on-premise providers typically require massive upfront costs, forcing customers to put up nightmarish capital project investments.

If you are considering a big upfront investment in a legacy system, make sure your vendor has clearly justified the investment, especially in terms of the product's lifespan. The only thing that hurts more than making a big investment is watching that investment become technologically obsolete inside of a decade.



Recurring costs. The bottom line here is that you should only pay for the value you're receiving. As you dig into the recurring costs that your vendors are proposing, think carefully about how the solution will scale with your company's growth and make sure you're not paying for something you aren't using.

Some video systems are subscription-based and charge a small monthly fee based on the number of users you have. If a per-user fee holds you back from scaling the solution to new users in your company, that's a dealbreaker.

Others may require you to purchase an annual license, which can be costly if you are required to buy licenses for employees who only use video on occasion.



IT and support costs. Here you'll need to weigh the clout behind bulky legacy systems against the potential gains offered by today's modern room-based and cloud-based systems.

Traditional executive conference room systems are the most expensive options on the market, typically involving complex, on-premise equipment and a dedicated IT staff to perform maintenance and updates.

Consider that the harder the system is to use, the more your IT staff will need to support and train end users.

If that training grinds to a halt or creates a strong resistance to change, you run the risk of dropping huge sums on a tool that nobody knows or cares to know how to use.

Once you have a firm, steely-eyed understanding of the costs, it's time to consider the benefits. This is a lot more fun, but the challenge is, the benefits are often much harder to quantify than the costs.

Here are a few places to start:



Time savings. Stack up the answers to the following questions against the performance data of your proposed solution, and you'll start to get a sense of time savings you can expect. To translate this time savings into a dollar value, calculate the hourly dollar value of each employee who is currently in a meeting, cursing at an inscrutable control console.

- + In each of your meetings right now, how much time is being spent on getting the tech up and running?
- + How much time is spent on troubleshooting?
- + How long does it take to get screen sharing figured out?
- + How much time does your IT staff spend getting called in to fix conference room problems?



Productivity gains. It can be especially difficult to correlate collaboration and productivity in hard numbers, but consider [these findings](#):

- + One division's global network of technical project managers generated annual savings of about \$1.8M as a result of collaboration between divisions.
- + Identifying and building connectivity between specialists in other groups helped a large construction firm raise its revenue to \$275 million, from \$80 million, in a single year.

If figures like these are hard to calculate in your case, another way to get a firm quantitative grasp on this benefit is to consider the per-employee cost of the solution. Do you believe that implementing a better, more seamless collaboration solution will allow them to produce at least as much added value as the per-user cost?



New capabilities. If you have departments that are itching for a new video conferencing solution so they can launch new business initiatives, be sure to work closely with the leaders of those initiatives to factor their potential value into your business case.

- + What kind of savings will HR achieve by running more initial interviews via video?
- + How much new business can Sales bring in by giving more and better remote product demonstrations?
- + Can you quantify the increase in customer satisfaction and loyalty that a customer-facing video support service will create?

A FEW LAST THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

By now you're homing in on a few standout solutions, and you have a pretty clear idea of how they stack up in a cost-benefit analysis. But before you click purchase, take a moment to consider what comes next:

Rollout. The [user adoption strategies](#) you use to present this new tool to your company can dramatically affect the value you get from it. Will your vendor help you roll their solution out to the company? If so, how? Will customer success teams come onsite to help lead the transition? Does the vendor provide you with onboarding materials to help you follow through on initial training?

Vendor support. Let's face it, today's video solutions are in a sorry state. Our survey found that 40% of meetings are plagued by software or hardware issues, and it takes an average of 12.3 minutes to resolve those issues. Given all that, you need clear answers from your vendor about how they handle technical issues. Beyond the level of support they provide, be sure to also get a sense of how responsive are they when you file a ticket. In a world where uptime is everything, you can't afford to be waiting days to get the answers you need.

Your infrastructure. To ensure your system operates at peak levels with no embarrassing lag time, check the speed of your network. You need to be running at or above 5 mbps in ensure HD video quality. You'll also want to consider how your office is currently wired and whether you want to use existing TVs and projectors or purchase new ones. If you have a [BYOD policy](#), how will that affect installation or rollout of the new system? This is also a good time to revisit the research you did into the variety of conference rooms, huddle rooms, and other meeting spaces your company uses, making sure your proposed solution is going to provide the flexibility you need.



QUESTIONS TO ASK EACH PROVIDER:

- + How long does it take to learn to operate your system?
- + Does your system require training for employees to use it? If so, how is it deployed? How quickly can I set up and deploy your system?
- + What guarantees do you offer?
- + How do you support your customers?
- + How much maintenance am I responsible for with your system?
- + Can you give me examples of how your system is better than (insert name of another company you are considering)?
- + References are important to me. I'd like to talk to a customer who loves your system, as well as a customer who has had an issue with your system that you resolved.

CONGRATULATIONS!

It's a big job, finding the right video conferencing solution. At times it can feel a lot like juggling torches, blindfolded. But you built your search process on a solid business strategy, and you engaged with the right people to determine your company's needs. You prioritized your evaluation criteria, empowered key stakeholders throughout the selection process, found a strong roster of vendors, and built a compelling business case for the outstanding candidates. Once you've got all your last questions answered, you're on your way to more efficient meetings, vivid in-room collaboration, and brand-new capabilities to take your company's productivity to new heights. And when the new solution is rolled out and scaling, you'll be able to look up to those heights and say, "I helped build that."



YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY — HIGHFIVE!

At Highfive, we deliver high-quality video conferencing with the easiest-to-use meeting room solution that combines elegant, lightweight hardware with intuitive cloud software. And at a fraction of the cost of traditional systems, you can put Highfive in every room, not just the boardroom. See how Highfive can transform your meeting rooms and improve face-to-face collaboration in every meeting.

[GET A DEMO](#)