LIFESIZE Runs the Analyst's Gauntlet

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Frost & Sullivan's Analyst Gauntlet is a structured program wherein participating vendors and service providers give industry analysts deep dives, demonstrations and trial use of their collaboration solution. After using the collaboration solution over a period of time, the analyst provides candid feedback based on his/her user experience with the specified tool.

This week, the Connected Work research team at Frost & Sullivan is evaluating a collaboration solution set from Lifesize comprised of a mix of new and updated products and services.

Lifesize offers a cloud-based audio, video and web conferencing service delivering content sharing and live streaming, chat and recording for one-to-one and multiparty collaboration sessions. This subscription service is offered at volume-tiered pricing and supports standards-based SIP and H.323 video conferencing endpoints, as well as Lifesize mobile, desktop and web clients. Each virtual meeting room supports up to 50 meeting participants, of which 13 can be seen on video at one time. On the same platform, Lifesize also supports Live Stream, a webcast-like service that scales up to 10,000 viewers and 50 video-enabled sites per event.

(Note: Lifesize Live Stream was not part of our evaluation.)

SPECIFICALLY, WE EVALUATED THE FOLLOWING LIFESIZE PRODUCTS:

Lifesize Icon 450: The newest Lifesize video conferencing endpoint, Icon 450, incorporates an integrated, high-definition camera and codec. It pairs to the Lifesize app and HD Phone, supports single display and features the following attributes: digital pan, tilt and 5x optical zoom; 10 camera presets; wide-angle lens with 82-degree field of view; auto focus/gain; automatic updates from Lifesize; and is compatible with standards-based, third-party products and services.

Lifesize Phone HD: A conference room phone with a contemporary 5-inch color capacitive multitouch display, Lifesize Phone HD delivers high-definition audio with noise cancellation and other acoustic performance mechanisms. It offers a Lifesize app-driven set of menus to manage audio and Icon video settings, camera PTZ and presets, screen share and ability to add users, launch calls and more, including standards-based, third-party meeting environments.

Lifesize App: Newly redesigned and updated, the cloud-based Lifesize desktop and web apps provide user access via a simplified PC/Mac and web (Internet Explorer and Chrome) experience. Lifesize also has a mobile app for iOS and Android, which will be updated later this year. Using the new app, meeting hosts/moderators can schedule, launch and control meetings (lock/unlock, mute all, participant list visibility, remove participants, etc.). Meeting participants leverage the soft clients to join and collaborate in meetings via voice, video, group chat and content sharing in one-on-one or multiparty sessions.

EXPERIENCE ANALYSIS

LIFESIZE
CLOUD-BASED SERVICE

PRO Signing up for Lifesize services and installing any necessary software clients (desktop, mobile) is as easy, if not easier, for users than other popular cloud video conferencing services. In addition, the Lifesize Admin Console provides clean, intuitive access to a range of controls and reports.

PRO Audio (wideband HD with built-in echo cancellation) and video quality (1080p HD up to 60 fps) as well as content resolution are superior to a number of alternative services that Frost & Sullivan has evaluated.

CON Admin functionality is only accessible via the Admin Console. As such, admins must use two different interfaces to manage their accounts and host/join meetings. A number of competing solutions have consolidated these interfaces for ease of use and efficiency.

PRO Numerous dial plans support diverse environments and workflows. Users may directly dial any other user, video system or meeting room for instant connection. Meet-me meetings can be created via Chrome Extension for Google Calendar; meeting links are shareable via email and copy to clipboard; there is an add-in for Microsoft Outlook (2010, 2013, 2016); and any ICS-compatible calendar is supported (such as IBM Notes and Zimbra). Legacy dial plan support includes dial-out to any IP address or URI. These options are more expansive than most alternatives.

PRO Lifesize extends numerous ease-of-use features, such as single-button recording and sharing. When screen share is selected, all available screens are visually previewed, allowing users to accurately select the appropriate one. Once shared, that screen is optionally displayed as a small panel within the app interface and a green text box additionally confirms which screen is being shared. Among many other ease-of-use features is an intuitive call escalation option that enables participants to be added to calls in progress, rather than dealing with the latency and confusion involved with sending out invitations mid-call.

CON Although expanding, the lack of open APIs results in comparatively limited integrations compared to other popular web and video conferencing platforms. Examples of key integrations that are not available yet include calling into Microsoft Skype for Business Meeting Rooms using the Lifesize app or Icon endpoints, social media integration (LinkedIn, Twitter) for single sign-on, and integration with cloud file storage and sharing applications such as Dropbox, Box and Google Drive, as well as third-party notes services such as OneNote and Evernote.

LIFESIZE ICON 450

PRO Lifesize simplifies initial Icon 450 setup through auto provisioning that makes it easy enough for nontechnical people to implement. Lifesize also delivers automatic software updates to Icon 450 and all other Lifesize endpoints. These typically take place overnight, when the endpoint is powered on and updates are less likely to disrupt meetings in progress. When users are ready to join their meetings, they do not need to worry about the time or distraction of software updates.

PRO In addition to 10 camera presets, Icon 450 supports Lifesize smart framing, which automates camera pan, tilt and zoom based on participant motion. It ensures meeting participants are in the optimal position within the video frame, allowing them to focus on the meeting rather than fiddling with technology.

CON The Lifesize Icon 450 hibernates or sleeps when not in use. However, there is no button to power off the unit as some companies prefer for physical security, energy conservation and other factors. (Note regarding security: Lifesize video traffic is encrypted at rest and in transit.) Power-off requires the power supply to be disconnected from the wall outlet or from the back of the unit.

PRO The Lifesize Icon 450 features a small footprint and form factor that is well-suited for small meeting spaces and huddle rooms, yet without sacrificing any functionality in robustness or versatility.

CON The Lifesize Icon 450 supports single display, leaving locations and users requiring dual display (a display for content and second display for simultaneous video) unaddressed.

PRO It's a straightforward process for admins to register Icon 450 as a room system or use it to join as a guest on both the cloud-based Lifesize app and third-party video conferencing services. The registration allows admins to list the room as an individual contact and in third-party directories. Paired with the Lifesize app, Icon 450 offers direct and meet-me calling and the ability to invite the room to both scheduled and ad-hoc meetings

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LIFESIZE PHONE HD

PRO Meeting hosts and participants can access a range of controls from the Lifesize Phone HD touch screen similar to that supported by the app and Icon 450, including camera control, presets and smart framing; audio volume; audio and video mute; favorite contacts, directory, meetings calendar, call launch/end and keypad; presentation control; meetings history; system menus (health, information, brightness, reboot); and do not disturb and sleep settings.

PRO Lifesize Phone HD, through its control interface and superior audio, minimizes the equipment needed in huddle rooms. Lifesize Phone HD is also powered by the Icon 450 camera, which reduces cabling complexity and provides a cleaner meeting environment. Many alternative solutions require separate dedicated devices for both control and audio, with separate power supplies that add complexity and clutter to valuable, small-meeting-space real estate.

CON As a full-form audio conferencing device, the Lifesize Phone HD is rather large. At 266 mm/10.48 inches in diameter, it may simply require too much desktop real estate for some small meeting spaces and huddle rooms.

PRO However, its size enables Lifesize Phone HD to support superior audio delivery and voice pick-up compared to most USB audio devices found in small meeting spaces. It incorporates four low-noise microphones, rare-earth magnet loudspeaker driver and a wide range of advanced audio features to ensure effective audio communications.

PRO There were no issues using the Lifesize Phone HD interface to join meetings on third-party services. Third-party web conferencing and video conferencing sessions were joined by using the Lifesize Phone HD keypad to dial both IP and SIP URL addresses and entering meeting IDs. This is a key capability to easily collaborate with others both inside and outside of the same organization.

LIFESIZE APP

PRO The Lifesize app offers a fairly consistent feature set and in-meeting experience via web and desktop access in terms of look and feel, and feature availability. The consistency offers users flexibility based on needs, preferences and location, while also instilling confidence that drives adoption and utilization.

CON At the time of our evaluation, the new web app was only supported in Chrome and Internet Explorer browsers. Edge and FireFox browser support is still a roadmap item. Updates to the mobile app also remain roadmap.

CON Users can turn self-view on/off and choose whether content or video is maximized. However, content and video panels cannot be split between two displays, and video panels for individual participants cannot be isolated or drag/dropped to other areas of the display. As such, users may perceive limited personalization as well as difficulty viewing other local applications they need during meetings, such as notes, spreadsheets and business databases, particularly in single-monitor setups.

PRO Precall audio and video check capabilities help to ensure users join with preferred options activated (i.e., video on/off, audio on/off and volume levels, and correct mic and camera are selected) to limit wasted time and distractions at the start of meetings.

PRO Meeting participants can view the presence status (available, do not disturb, offline) of all contacts in the directory. Users can chat in or out of calls with one person or in group sessions. These capabilities consolidate disparate collaboration tools (such as standalone IM and traditional standalone meeting tools) and enable all relevant information to reside in one place.

ANALYSIS SUMMARY

There's a lot to like about the Lifesize solution we evaluated. Overall, we found it easy to set up and use from the admin, host and meeting participant perspectives. The cloud-based Lifesize app and Icon 450 with Phone HD deliver a competitive feature set with high quality that's difficult to match. There are, however, a few capabilities Lifesize does not support that prospective buyers may not be able to live without, although Lifesize continues to enhance its solutions regularly and plans to address a number of these. Further, it's extremely helpful that Icon 450 and Phone HD may be used with third-party services and on-premises infrastructure because rich-media intra-company collaboration is increasingly important for efficiency and teamwork in today's highly competitive and global business environment.

Lifesize offers a "better together" value proposition that few other cloud video conferencing service providers can match. Producing and supporting its own hardware and software endpoints, applications and service delivery network give Lifesize better quality control and full accountability for the entire solution. This enables differentiated features such as directory-based direct dialing, ad-hoc and scheduled meetings, in-session call escalation and a single ecosystem to standardize end-to-end collaboration solutions and support for different meeting spaces and types across virtually any business environment.

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