



B

Taking part in video-conference calls

Briefing

Ingredients of a successful call

What are the ingredients of a successful international video-conference meeting? Let us summarize the key points here.

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|---|--|---|
| 1 | Time | Agree the timetable for the meeting in advance. Remember, different groups may have different ideas about punctuality and a suitable time across time zones. |
| 2 | Hierarchy | Find out before you start who is the most important person in the group. It may be important to address them first or with respect. |
| 3 | Purpose | Make sure everyone understands the purpose of the meeting. |
| 4 | Sensitivity | Be sensitive to different personalities when you know them. If someone is shy or uncertain, make sure they have space to speak. If someone dominates the conversation, ask them to be succinct and brief. |
| 5 | Expectations | If you can, find out people's expectations before the meeting in one-to-one or small group conversations. Preparing the background and knowing participants' expectations can make a big difference between a successful conference call and an unsuccessful one. |
| 6 | Small meetings are better than big ones | Think about having a small conference call with a few people. This may help quieter participants and non-native speakers of English. If it has to be a big meeting, you can delegate someone to summarize the discussion. |
| 7 | Explain the context | Always explain <i>why</i> decisions are taken, not just what the decisions are. People will feel more integrated into a strategy if they understand it, even if they don't completely agree with it. |
| 8 | Alternative communication channels | For people who won't speak in public, ask them their opinion in private. They may find it easier to communicate their opinions in writing. |

Advice on video-conference calls

In a video-conference call there are additional problems compared with a telephone conference call, and one advantage – you can see people.



Here are five pieces of advice on video-conference calls.

- 1 **What's on the wall?** Anything confidential? Anything outsiders shouldn't see? Does the wall behind you promote your company? Do designs on the wall make participants look stupid?
- 2 **What's on the table?** Is the table tidy? Papers, coffee cups, half-eaten sandwiches? Clear the table!
- 3 **How are you dressed?** Bright clothes are fine. But be careful of stripes – they strobe, creating lines on the screen. Are you dressed respectably? Does your dress code match the conventions of the other people? This may particularly apply to you if you are dressed too casually or reveal more flesh than is appropriate.
- 4 **Can everyone see you?** Don't hide behind the large person next to you. If you are on the side, don't lean backwards, as you will be out of shot.
- 5 **Wave!** Six people on a video-conference call can be hard to distinguish. When you start to speak, make a gesture or wave so everyone knows who is speaking.

Listening

**1**

Listen to part of a video-conference call involving the same people you heard in 9A: the Chair, Bill, Jess and Nina. The Chair and Nina are together and Jess and Bill are together. Are these statements true or false?

	True	False
1 At the beginning Bill and Jess can see but not hear very well.		
2 Bill doesn't know what an SLA is.		
3 The Chair can't see Jess and Bill.		
4 The Chair says they have left the conference call.		
5 There is a problem with the video-conference call technology.		
6 They call a technician to solve their technical problem.		

**2**

Listen again and complete the sentences.

- 1 Just to, can you see Nina and me OK?
- 2 And how sound? Is that all right?
- 3 The sound's a bit
- 4 Sorry, I hear very well.
- 5 I think the satellite connection is
- 6 We talking about the SLAs.



Business practice



1 Listen and repeat these sentences.

Checking sound	Can I just check everyone can hear me OK? Just to check, is the sound OK? I just want to check the audio is clear.
Checking visuals	Just to check, can you see us OK? How about the video – is it all right? I just want to check the picture is OK.
Confirming reception	We can hear you clearly. We can see you fine. Sound is OK. Satellite reception is fine. The picture has come back up.
Reporting problems	I can't hear you very well. I can't see you. Reception is bad. They've gone offline.
Explaining bad reception	The sound is distorted. The picture quality is very poor. The satellite connection is down.
Referring back to before a communication breakdown	As I was saying before we were interrupted, ... Where were we? Let me pick up where I left off.

2 Test yourself. Cover the sentences above and then complete these sentences.

- 1 Let me pick where I left off.
- 2 The picture quality is very
- 3 They've gone
- 4 I can't hear you very
- 5 I just want to check the audio is



3

You are taking part in a video-conference call with a pharmaceutical industry customer. Follow the instructions. Then listen to the model conversation.

Customer: *[distortion on line]* As you know, in clinical trials, quality standards of health and safety and careful recording of samples and results are absolutely vital to the success of the trial. Can you reassure us on those points?

You: *Apologize and say that you can't hear very well and explain why. Ask the customer to repeat what he said.*

Customer: *[distortion on line]* I said, can you reassure us about your quality standards of health and safety?

You: *Explain that you can't see or hear the customer clearly. Ask him to check the connection at his end.*

Customer: *[pause – line is now clear]* Yes, our technical adviser has just checked the system and he says the satellite reception is fine now. Can you hear and see me now?

You: *Reassure the customer that reception is fine.*

Customer: As I was saying, can you reassure us about quality standards in clinical trials?

You: *Explain that every distributor and every operator in clinical tests has two weeks' health and safety training to international standards. [pause – picture has gone] Say you can't see the customer but you can hear him. Ask if the satellite is down.*

Customer: We're obviously having problems with reception at our end. Thanks for your answer. It may be best to continue the conversation by email.

You: *Explain the satellite has come back up and that reception is better again.*

Customer: I think to save time it's better if we continue by email. Anyway, thanks for the reassurance on quality standards. Nice talking to you. Bye.

Business writing

See pages 108 and 109 for how to express your opinions in writing.

Key take-aways

Write down the things you will take away from Unit 9 and how you will implement them.

Topic	Take-away	Implementation strategy – How?	Implementation time frame – When?
Tips for successful telephone calls			
Tips for successful video-conference calls			
Conference call etiquette			
Ways of reporting poor reception			
Tips for successful international meetings			
How to express your opinions in writing			



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