The Age of 3D Video Conferencing

Video conferencing in perspective

Business travel today is about airport queues, huge mounting organisational travel costs and terrorist threats. It's no longer about just walking in the airports from one port to another. Economic growth has meant frequent travel therefore a higher cost factor. 9/11 diminished the difference between a missile and an airplane.

In such a situation video conferencing is probably the most perfect solution that cuts travel costs, keeps the employees happy and zero threat to life. Added benefits include lower carbon emissions. If the "presence" was a factor in the last decade the present 3D video conferencing takes care of that rather well.

The Booming Market: According to sources 3D Telepresence and video conferencing sales are forecasted to reach $2.7B by 2015, the telecommunication technologies' popularity is increasing now more than ever before. Consider this what was worth $64 million in 2006, it will top the $1 billion mark in 2011, according to an IDC research estimate. Frost and Sullivan in a recent release said videoconferencing has proved to be a viable solution for companies that are reducing their travel expenditure, thereby boosting the European videoconferencing endpoints market growth.

A recent Frost & Sullivan study revealed the Telepresence market in the Asia Pacific region is predicted to grow at a whopping 64.4 per cent by the end of 2010, to reach revenues of over US$73 million.

The Big Boys: The booming market and the big boys are here to play or rather connect. Cisco, HP, Polycom, Microsoft and Adobe are some of the leaders in video conferencing. Like in many industries, the market is getting segregated on the basis of affordability, with differing features and quality levels.

Cisco with a service branded TelePresence, Polycom with Realpresence and HP with Halo are on the top end. Microsoft chooses to keep its price low to be able to attract the small and medium enterprises version of its solution called Roundtable. The top-end has high-definition video, true-to-life images, surround sound and other finer details.

The New Smart Entrants: There are interesting entrants in the market like Actis Technologies which are giving a Telepresence or a Realpresence type of solution but at a fraction of the cost of the big ones like Cisco and HP using open ended technologies. Actis recently launched their 3D Telepresence solution with some of the finer details of the top end solutions, high tech sensors, touch based control interface, room scheduler and multi-locational room control. So a 3D handshake is almost a replica of a real life handshake. Expressions are real and emotions like frowns and happiness can be seen as if almost real. The furniture is matched. The images are life size. "Real-time communication and collaboration have become the lifeblood for any modern business, and our 3D Telepresence offering delivers the highest quality of communication and interaction available today - almost like being in the same room," Abhimanyu Gupta, Director, Actis technologies.

Collaboration Tools: Video conferencing today is about large video screens, electronic projectors and interactive whiteboards to help collaborative discussions while viewing common pages or documents can dramatically alter workflows. These, in industry jargon, together constitute the world of "virtual solutions." So while physically you could be miles apart you can have an almost real life like meeting sharing documents, collaborating spreadsheets and doing so much more.

The Last Word: Rising bandwidths, awesome collaboration tools, cutting costs, new innovations in video imaging and almost real life like presence makes video conferencing one of the hottest sectors in IT. Besides the corporate sector for a country like India it could spell another rural boom in areas like rural medicine, rural education and so much more.