VoIP Conferencing Best Practices
Ultimate Guide for Hosting VoIP Conferences

A detailed guide on best practices for VoIP conferences:

1. Setting Up Your Hardware
2. VoIP Conference Software and Its Settings
3. Executing a Professional VoIP Conference
Executive Summary

This guide will help professionals, who regularly host remote conferences, in improving their preparation and performance in Voice over IP (VoIP) conferences. Salespeople, professionals in financial services, management consultants, software development teams, and corporate trainers are just a few groups of professionals who will find these guidelines valuable. This white paper will go over the best practices for understanding tools associated with VoIP conferencing and hosting an effective VoIP conference.

Who is this White Paper for?

This white paper is for professionals looking to increase their effectiveness in conducting VoIP conferences. It will offer value to people who are interested in enhancing their performance, as well as individuals who are new to the VoIP conferencing landscape. These best practices will enable them to:

- Know what equipment is needed for voice conferencing online,
- Understand how to select the right voice conferencing software,
- Be ready to maximize software settings for an effective voice conference,
- Prepare for a conference in advance,
- Improve their performance in conducting voice conferences, and
- Be more prepared for executing successful VoIP meetings

What to Expect in this White Paper?

VoIP conferencing is gaining traction as an effective means of business communication. But just like an in-person meeting or a phone conference, successful execution of a VoIP conference requires preparation and some polished delivery skills.

With a little bit of preparation, anyone can deliver and succeed at VoIP conferences. Implementing some proven best practices will help you to take advantage of VoIP calls, while helping you establish rapport and credibility with your audience.
Setting Up Your Hardware

One of the biggest priorities with VoIP conferences is sound quality, and this can come down to your hardware. The equipment you use should be conducive to clear communication between you and the listeners in the conference. If you are working in an open office environment, the need for hardware that keeps your online conference free from outside distractions is even greater. Otherwise there will be potential for distracting co-workers in the office space around you. Likewise, your conference participants’ attention could be disrupted by ambient noise that comes from your office space.

Use Headphones

From that standpoint, it's best to use headphones in an online voice conference. This holds true for when you are working out of an open office space or even a private home office environment. Using the regular computer speakers could create a bad echo effect for your conference attendees or could make it difficult for you to hear them, which will undermine your rapport.

You also want to eliminate possibilities of ambient noise infiltrating the online voice conference on your end. Headphones will help in keeping your online voice conference private and free of unwanted, noisy distractions.

Be Aware of Microphone's Sound Quality

Once you have secured a pair of quality headphones, the next step is a microphone. Many computers nowadays come with a built-in microphone. However, for the sake of good sound quality, that may not be enough. When you are speaking to your conference audience, your communication should be clear and easy to understand. Be sure to test your microphone quality. If it's hard to understand what you are saying, you should probably turn to using an external microphone.
Best of Both Worlds: Use an External Headset

While you can use your headphones and the built-in microphone for the sake of good sound quality, that may not be enough. The biggest problem with using a built-in computer microphone is that your attendees will hear all the background noise from your office. To ensure the best experience for your attendees, it's recommended that you use an external headset with a microphone. This will let you speak and listen to your VoIP conference participants with ease.

Above all, the biggest point of consideration to keep in mind about VoIP conference hardware is what it does for sound quality. Avoiding such a negative experience for your attendees is the number one reason why you should always use an external headset. Take efforts to invest in quality equipment that helps foster clear communication.

💡 Bonus Tip: How comfortable and easy is your headset to use?

When shopping around for a headset that fits your needs, it's advisable to keep the following points in mind:

- Is the headset easily adjustable for comfort?
- Will it feel comfortable when you wear it for longer periods of time?
- Does it have any extra features that make it easier to operate? For example, can you adjust and move the position of the microphone relative to your mouth?
- If the headset has extra features such as a mute button and volume control, are these well positioned so you can intuitively reach and operate them?
VoIP Software Settings

You have invested in some audio conferencing hardware – now it’s time to address your voice conference software needs.

What to Consider When Choosing VoIP Software

VoIP conferencing provides you with more options than you would have in a traditional telephone conference. These options include muting of a conference attendee or the audience, and control over microphone sensitivity. When selecting voice conferencing software you should ensure you receive the benefits of most importance to you. Here are a few points to keep in mind when considering different options:

- Is the voice conference software easy for you and your colleagues, prospects, or clients to use?
- Is it convenient? For instance, does it require any installations for you or your attendees?
- Is the software compatible with all platforms?
- Does the software have any additional features that would be valuable for a conference presentation, such as microphone sensitivity, instant messaging between attendees, or screen sharing?

There will be more details about these features and settings in the next section.

Become Familiar with Software Settings

Before you conduct your first online voice conference, it’s advisable to test out your conference software settings and become familiar with them. Here are a few key features to keep in mind:

- **Microphone sensitivity** - This is one of the most important features of all. Your microphone sensitivity level will determine the extent to which conference participants are subject to background noise. It will also set the stage for how easily a conference audience will hear you.
It's best to find a balanced microphone sensitivity level that will keep ambient noise largely at bay and where you do not have to speak too loudly to your listeners.

- **Audience muting** - It may be surprising, but the mute feature is an important part of conference coordination. If a lot of people are on an online conference, there is potential for more than one person to speak at once during a presentation. That can lead to confusion. The mute feature will help in keeping the audio channel clear during a presentation so the conference agenda stays organized and efficient. After the presentation is over, the mute feature can be disabled for a Q&A session. Or it could be disabled should you prefer to address questions during the presentation itself. Furthermore, although you will most likely use an external headset as explained above, your attendees might not do so. That can mean their background noise is transmitted through the conference call for all attendees to hear. Temporarily muting such an attendee will resolve that. Either way, the mute feature plays a big part in executing a professional voice conference.

- **Emoticons** - When conference participants are on “mute,” emoticons are a great way for gauging their reaction to what is being said. These icons let the attendees give you feedback on a number of things, including whether you are speaking too quickly or too slowly, if they have a question, or have any remarks to make. Familiarize yourself with the different emoticons available within your conferencing software, and encourage your conference audience to use them during your online voice conference.

- **Chat feature** - This is also very helpful when conference attendees are muted. It enables you to keep track of the questions asked during the online session. That will make it easier to address all of them, whether you do so during your presentation or at the end. It's also useful for any comments or additions that arise in the course of the presentation. Another small benefit: the chat feature lets you have a small greeting ready for participants when they enter the conference session, which helps the meeting start off on a good, cordial note.
• **Screen sharing** - During a conference call, the host or a conference attendee may wish to present something to the audience. Screen sharing is the perfect solution here, even in cases when they spontaneously decide to offer a visual representation of what they are discussing. With a screen sharing feature, there is no need to email files or documents to attendees later. With a couple of clicks, you can present your screen to your audience there and then, and you reinforce what you are talking about in the process.

💡 **Bonus Tip: Become familiar with your software on the participant side as well as the presenter side**

When you first give your voice conferencing software a test run, you will be familiar with it from the presenter side. It is helpful for you to become acquainted with the software on the participant side, as well. For instance, you might familiarize yourself with the steps needed to join a voice conference as an attendee. Doing so may help with addressing technical challenges that first-time conference participants may encounter. This can include you becoming familiar with the basic steps for entering the conference call, and then clearly communicating these details to attendees who are not as technologically savvy in an email ahead of the conference date.

Joining a voice conference is very easy. Nonetheless, it's important to remember that some of your attendees may be new to this.
Executing a Professional VoIP Conference

Now that you have secured your VoIP conference equipment and have become familiar with your voice conferencing software, it's time to execute your online voice conference.

Conduct a Test Run

It may be an obvious step, but it's definitely worth the effort to test everything with a colleague or trusted friend before you conduct your first VoIP meeting. This would include checking out the sound quality, finding the best position for the headset, and becoming comfortable with the software. If there's time, it's worthwhile running through some test scenarios with the software features. Note the bonus tip above about testing the software on the participant side as well.

Send a Meeting Agenda and Any Required Documents Beforehand

It's essential that your participants get the most out of your online conference. Prior to the online meeting, send a meeting agenda and any required documents for reading beforehand. This will inform the participants of what is to be expected and ensure they are prepared when they attend the voice conference – a much better alternative to distracting your audience with documents in the meeting itself.

Set Microphone Sensitivity Ahead of Time

This is an important step to take before the voice conference. It's recommended that you set your microphone sensitivity to an appropriate level when you are rehearsing with colleagues or friends. Fidgeting with it and readjusting it during the voice conference, when it could have been done ahead of time, could otherwise open up opportunities for distraction.
Be Punctual About Scheduled Meeting Time

When you have set a date and time for an online voice conference, be sure to stick to it. As the conference host, you should be on time. It's advisable to arrive a few minutes early ahead of the planned time. Doing so will convey professionalism and respect for your conference attendees’ time. It's no big deal for you to wait in the conference for a couple of minutes until your attendees start joining. If you arrive a few minutes past the time you set for your online conference, meeting participants themselves will likely be late in the future.

Introduce Yourself and Your Attendees to One Another

In a conference call, it's important for your audience members to be familiar with you and each other. As meeting host, you will help breed familiarity by introducing yourself to your attendees. Then you should introduce participants to each other. This will not only help your audience feel more comfortable, but also set a professional tone for the online meeting from the start. It will also be valuable for establishing relationships that will develop after your online meeting is complete.

Initiate and End the Conference

As the conference host, you play a big part in setting the professional tone. Regardless of how many people are part of the audience and are presenters, you should be the first and last person to talk. Once all of the participants have joined the conference, it's advisable to welcome them and then start the meeting. After you have finished the conference, wrap up and thank everyone for their participation, time, and input. Aside from helping you establish further rapport with the conference audience, it will give you the opportunity to recap on everything that has been discussed.
Bonus Tip: Wait a few minutes before formally beginning the meeting

People may be late to join your meeting for a variety of reasons. They may not be as technologically savvy as other attendees and have problems joining. They may be late coming from another meeting. Regardless of how prepared you are, unanticipated events can occur. If it’s appropriate, you may want to consider giving people whom you expected to join a few extra minutes to come in. In particular, meeting participants are likely to appreciate this gesture in a voice conference with a smaller audience.

Be Mindful of Your Speaking

Another important point is that you should take note of the speed and the way in which you are speaking. In their book, “The Human Touch: Personal Skills for Professional Success”, the authors explain how you can create ‘immediate rapport over the phone within the first five seconds.’ One of the simple but key techniques discussed in their book to help you build rapport during a call is to sit up straight. Your posture can have a direct influence on the tone of your voice. In a face-to-face meeting, your body language plays a crucial role. But during a conference call, it is your tone of voice which you will rely on to project professionalism to your attendees.

Furthermore, if you are presenting and talking for long periods of time, confirm with your listeners at strategic points that they can hear you all right.

Bonus Tip: Smile

It may be hard to believe, but people can hear a smile. In the aforementioned book, Philippa Thomas, Debra Paul and James Cadle recommend you start your call with a smile which will relax your attendees and get your conference call off to the right start.

Be Clear about Meeting Standards from the Beginning

To make the most of everyone's time, the voice conference needs to be efficient and orderly. Having a meeting process and protocol will help in facilitating this. When you have begun your online conference, in particular with attendees you are speaking to for the first time, your first point should be to make these protocol clear. Points to mention include:
• How the participants will be muted during the presentation segment
• Times at which participants will be unmuted
• When opportunities for asking questions will be available
• Features which are available for use, such as the chat or emoticons feature

Addressing these issues mid-way through the conference call will be distracting. Being clear about these details will let the conference run efficiently. It will also help the participants understand and appreciate you are looking to maximize their time.

Make Sure the Audio Channel Remains Clear

In a VoIP conference, the sound quality is important, and keeping the audio channel clear is an important component of this. Aside from keeping the meeting orderly, muting the meeting participants at the right time reduces background noise. When you are speaking, it's best to ensure there are no opportunities for ambient noise on your end. Distractions such as telephones ringing or co-workers talking with each other can be highly disruptive when you are speaking. Most external headsets, as mentioned above, will compensate for this with noise cancelling. However if you are not using such hardware, you will need to consider surrounding noises.

Use Meeting Notes and Checklist

Aside from your own delivery, one other factor to keep in mind is the participants' attention span. Prepare notes and a checklist ahead of time so you can keep the conference on schedule. If you will be presenting, this step takes on even greater importance. Make sure to go over these notes and your checklist so you are well acquainted with them ahead of the meeting time. These can be tremendous assets for keeping the meeting running smoothly and on time.

Address Participants by Name

When hosting a voice conference, it's important to address people by name. This is especially true in smaller group sessions or online meetings with new colleagues, clients, or prospects. It will help in not only establishing a stronger sense of rapport between you and the meeting attendees, but can also help build familiarity among colleagues who do not know each other.
**Bonus Tip: Record the conference for people unable to attend**

For people who are unable to attend, consider recording the meeting so you can send them the recording afterward. You can also send meeting re-plays to people who attended and requested them. This will let them go back over the meeting content at a convenient time and ensure they understood all important discussion points.
Closing Thoughts

Voice conference software is a powerful alternative to the limits of a traditional phone conference. It has more features which can add further depth to online meeting presentations. It also helps professionals save time in communicating with many people at once, no matter how much distance lies between them. Screen sharing programs which have a built-in VoIP capability are also valuable, as they allow you to provide a visual demonstration of points you are discussing with your audience. Follow these steps closely, and your effectiveness in VoIP presentation delivery will be strengthened.
About Mikogo

Mikogo incorporates innovative desktop sharing technology to provide an easy-to-use online meeting solution for high-quality online collaboration.

Used by more than 1 million registered users in over 180 countries, Mikogo’s customers consist primarily of small- to medium-sized businesses that use the software for online meetings, web conferencing, remote support and online trainings.

At present, more than 3,000 corporate customers are using the Mikogo technology and benefiting from significantly reduced travel time and travel expenses.

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