6 CRITICAL ROOM VIDEO DECISIONS THAT CAN

MAKE OR BREAK

YOUR UC INVESTMENT

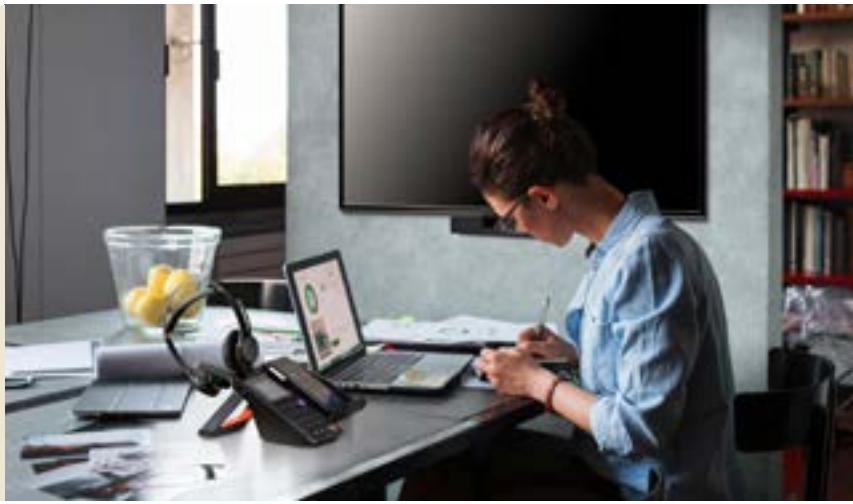
INTRODUCTION

Unified communications (UC) is key for organizations as they strive to navigate a new reality where employees are social distancing and working from home. UC helps bridge geographic disconnects and enables real-time communication and collaboration. However, it is the video conferencing component that supports rich face-to-face interactions, providing the social experiences your employees are now yearning for.

As an IT lead, you and your team worked diligently to get all employees up to speed on UC capabilities for a suddenly remote workforce. While they may now be used to the new normal, it's your job to always be thinking several steps ahead. A critical question you must answer now is: What is my strategy for enabling rich interactions once employees come back to the office?

Crisp visuals and high-quality audio inspire employees to engage rather than passively listening or multitasking.

But if you don't select the right technology or deploy it correctly in your meeting rooms, you risk sabotaging these work experiences—and the ROI potential of your investment.



As the UC space continues to evolve, you need to have a nimble technology strategy that allows your organization to quickly adapt and evolve.

At Poly, we work with IT professionals from around the globe and have witnessed a variety of UC objectives and challenges. This guide distills their experiences and lessons into six key areas of focus. By understanding these considerations, you'll be able to find the right partners and solutions to help you develop a flexible, scalable, and future-ready room strategy.

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KEY CONSIDERATION #1

Deployment model

Perhaps the most critical question you need to ask while developing your in-room strategy is: **What deployment model will we use?**

There are three ways to launch and run meetings in rooms:

01 **BYOD,** or "bring your own device," in which employees use their own laptops to run meetings.

02 A general **PC in the room** with USB peripherals for audio and video.

03 A **full video appliance** that contains everything necessary to conduct meetings.

Each of these deployment models has benefits and trade-offs in user experience, setup complexity, and security.

01

BYOD

Sometimes, meeting rooms—especially small huddle rooms—have little to no technology. Users must literally "huddle" around someone's laptop or someone has to position their laptop at the end of the table for everyone to see. Laptop webcams and microphones are designed for just one person sitting very close to it. This creates a frustrating experience for multiple attendees, especially those farthest from the webcam.

Most organizations now realize this and are deploying permanent, in-room technology to complement BYOD. Users bring in their laptops, on which they run the application for a UC platform, such as Teams or Zoom. Then, they plug into peripherals in the room, such as speakers, cameras, microphones, and a display, over USB and HDMI connections. After all connections have been established, everyone in the room and everyone on the call can see and hear each other.

PROS

BYOD is a very low-cost and flexible way to deploy group video conferencing. Since users connect with a cloud video app, there are no concerns about whether the technology in the room is compatible with the type of call users need to make.

CONS

It takes several steps to establish a connection before the meeting starts, making setup cumbersome. If users aren't comfortable with these steps, they may avoid video calls entirely or opt to stay at their desks. Additionally, one meeting attendee must surrender his or her laptop for the sake of the call. Volunteers for that will likely be slim because it inhibits multi-tasking, typing notes, or referencing topic-related information. In addition, instant messages and email notifications can pop up during calls, which can be distracting or even embarrassing. Finally, virus scans or other processes running on the laptop can degrade audio and video quality, potentially rendering it unusable for calls.

02

DEDICATED IN-ROOM PC

With this option, PCs or Macs reside in the meeting rooms and are dedicated solely to cloud-based video calls. When users arrive in the meeting room, the PC is already connected to all of the peripherals: displays, cameras, mics, speakers, and a table-top controller with which users can start and manage meetings.

PROS

There are two ways to deploy a dedicated in-room PC: by installing a general PC or Mac that IT configures to facilitate collaboration, or by putting in a dedicated UC vendor device, such as a Microsoft Teams Room or Zoom Room PC. Both options are extremely turnkey for the end-user. They're already familiar with navigating the UC experience on a PC or Mac, so starting and running a meeting is easy. The in-room PC can create a high-quality, native experience through all peripherals, supporting your environment of choice. If you decide to move forward with a general-purpose PC, it can often be reconfigured for other native cloud video apps if your UC vendor preferences change.

CONS

While easy for end-users to operate, this option can be inconvenient for IT. In-room PCs must follow the same security policies as other PC devices in the organization, resulting in mandatory security patches that can be difficult to schedule. However, solution providers are mitigating the impact of this issue.

This approach can also lead to excess clutter. Because the in-room PC has to connect to displays, peripherals, and a controller, the end result can look somewhat unsightly or unprofessional. In some cases, expenses can also quickly add up. A common misconception is that because the solution requires a PC—usually an inexpensive investment—the total solution won't be costly. That often isn't true, as each peripheral equates to additional expense.

03

VIDEO CONFERENCING APPLIANCE

A video conferencing appliance can be a "video bar" that touts processing, camera, and audio in an all-in-one solution, plus a tabletop controller. Or it can be more of an integrated solution, with the processing (known as a "codec") hidden in the room and configured with various camera, microphone, and control options. In either case, the software on the device is designed specifically for real-time video and audio. It is often based on a standard operating system like Android but can be customized for the needs of video collaboration.

Traditionally, these devices run just one piece of software, or "app," which connects to video calls using industry standard protocols, such as SIP or H.323. This is known as "interop mode." But newer devices are now starting to take advantage of their Android OS roots to run native cloud apps as well, such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom. This allows them to act as an alternative to dedicated PCs when deploying native cloud video solutions.

PROS

Video appliances run a hardened and optimized OS that doesn't require the virus scans and security patches required of general-use PCs. Robust management options are available, including customization of settings specific to video and audio collaboration, network management, display customization, and other settings that may not be possible from a general-purpose PC. For devices that can run native cloud video apps, IT departments still benefit from the flexibility of being able to run different apps. Set-up is simple with just a few cables, helping meeting rooms look clean and professional.

CONS

Higher-end devices with large room cameras can be more expensive than PC-based solutions, especially if room integration is involved. Device management sometimes requires a specific platform or cloud service, though this can vary depending on the cloud video app. Additionally, native apps running on video appliances may have slightly different features available than PC or Mac versions of those apps, creating inconsistent experiences for users.

KEY CONSIDERATION #2

Users' expectations

Your deployment approach is the foundation of your in-room technology strategy; however, your users should guide the experiences you strive to create. After all, tech is so ingrained in our daily lives–inside and outside work–that users have very specific standards and expectations about how it should work for different types of meetings and collaborative experiences.

To help determine workers' expectations for video conferencing, evaluate these key questions:

01

Are most of our employees **in offices, on the go, or at home?** How will this change, if at all, over the next 12 to 24 months?

02

Do users **frequently meet with clients, partners, and other people from outside the company,** or are most of their meetings with colleagues within the organization?

03

Do in-room video meetings tend to be in **smaller huddle spaces or in larger conference rooms?** Will that change in the future?

04

How do users work and collaborate? Do they require certain features in meeting rooms and spaces?

Your responses will dictate the experiences you'll need to support employees and, in turn, the features and capabilities you'll need to drive adoption and optimize the investment of your technology.

MASTERING THE SMALL/HUDDLE ROOM EXPERIENCE

More businesses are creating "huddle rooms" to foster rich collaborative experiences for smaller teams. These rooms typically seat fewer than six participants and are best suited for one-on-one chats and small team discussions. IT will need to adopt technologies that support these smaller groups, particularly as they connect with parties working remotely or on the go.

As of now, huddle rooms are typically not powered by technology. **Frost & Sullivan reports there are currently 34 million huddle rooms, but only 3% have video capabilities.** Individual employees are trying to change that by bringing in their own device; however, this will lead to a mediocre-at-best experience that includes low audio and video quality and unnecessary background noise. Our clients' experiences with huddle rooms and workers who use them reveal several universal imperatives for in-room technology.

WORKERS MANDATE THAT IN-ROOM VIDEO TECHNOLOGY MUST BE:

- ☑ Easy for the meeting organizer to start.
- ☑ Easy for meeting attendees to join.
- ☑ Easy to use all capabilities during the meeting, including whiteboarding.

PLUS, IT MUST OFFER:

- ☑ A rich experience for all users—those running the meeting and those participating in the meeting.
- ☑ Seamless, high-quality content-sharing capabilities.
- ☑ A smart camera that automatically adjusts to the conversation flow.
- ☑ Robust audio, with microphones that pick up everyone's voices clearly, no matter where they are in the room.
- ☑ Technology that blocks distracting noises inside the room and side conversations happening outside the meeting space.

KEY CONSIDERATION #3

Native vs. interop experience

When developing your in-room technology plan, one of the most important decisions IT must make is whether to employ a native or interoperability (interop) experience.

A native experience is marked by a user interface (UI) with icons, graphics, and terminology that are specific to a certain cloud vendor and are consistent among laptops, mobile devices, and conference rooms. It includes specific and unique collaboration features for controlling video meetings, managing the roster, and sharing content.

VS.

An interop experience delivers the ability to connect to any cloud video or UC service. Well-defined industry standards are used to connect to nearly any type of meeting, either directly or through an interoperability service. This gives users the most flexibility, but some vendor-specific branding and UX components may not be available.

INSIDER TIP:

Some cloud UC vendors are building interoperability right into their services so users can dial out to competing cloud video services. In some cases, this may offer a desired native experience, along with a bit of interoperability when needed. This is an ever-evolving area of the space. It's wise to look into supported features before relying on service-based interoperability to deliver what your users need.

Following is a quick overview of some of the key differences between native and interop experiences:

	NATIVE	INTEROP
EXPERIENCE	☑ UI, icons, graphics, and terminology are consistent with a specific vendor. ☑ UI is consistent across all devices. ☑ Seamless accessibility, with one-touch to join a meeting.	☑ UI is simple but brand agnostic. ☑ Seamless accessibility, with one-touch to join nearly any type of meeting, without the user needing to know what type of video service is being used.
SECURITY	☑ In native mode, cloud video and UC provider typically builds in security protocols and firewall traversal technology that's aligned with their desktop client.	☑ In interop mode, make sure to pay attention to network requirements to ensure the system can make SIP and H.323 calls reliably without getting held up by the firewall. ☑ Keeping in close contact with the networking and IT security teams will be important to verify everything runs smoothly and video calls can be run as expected.
TESTIMONIAL	"The quality of our collaboration experience directly impacts the product we deliver to our customers. After evaluating UC cloud providers against our requirements, including high-quality video/audio and integrated telephony, we selected Zoom as our next-gen collaboration platform. The features provided to our users with native Zoom conference room solutions are critical for achieving our business objectives." **–UC Engineering Lead at a global media/entertainment company**	"In our business today, employees use both Skype for Business and Zoom during the day for various meeting purposes. Collaboration happens internally and externally with our users across these platforms, and our conference room spaces deliver seamless interoperability so our people can be productive." **–VP at a Fortune 500 insurance company**

75% If more than 75% of your video meetings are through a specific vendor, you may feel confident with going native. However, if users have to connect to meetings through two or more different vendors to have conversations with clients or partners, interop may be your best route. This is a larger discussion that you should have with your IT team and the tech vendors you're thinking about partnering with.

KEY CONSIDERATION #4

Setup, security, and management

TURNKEY SETUP THAT ANYONE CAN DO

In the early days of video conferencing, a small number of larger rooms were equipped with video capabilities. Often these were integrated spaces, with an outside vendor handing all setup and installation work. But meeting spaces have evolved. Huddle rooms require businesses to implement video technology into many smaller rooms, which is making the setup process more daunting for IT teams–especially if new office openings or acquisitions are on the horizon.

We've learned that a key requirement for success is a **turnkey setup process** that anyone can handle–whether it's someone from IT or an admin at a remote location with limited tech resources. Some ideas to consider as you narrow down your options:

01 THINK THROUGH EACH ROOM'S LOOK AND FEEL.

Your tech setup will have an undeniable effect on whether employees use in-room technology or go rogue. A complicated setup with a PC or box plus lots of cables is going to be hard to hide from users–even ones logging in from their own locations. You don't want to risk your meeting space looking sloppy. You also don't want to risk people tripping and falling over cables and wires.

02 LOOK AT AVAILABLE SET-UP DOCUMENTATION.

Browse vendors' websites to get an idea about set-up. How many components and cables are required to hook everything up? If it's more than a few, set-up could become a headache. Understand what type of installation experience you're signing up for before you decide.

03 CONSIDER AN ALL-IN-ONE SOLUTION.

Look for room solutions that require very few steps to connect the system. Newer "video bar" solutions–including the processing, camera, speakers, and microphones all in one device that sits above or below the display–make setup easy.

TOP-NOTCH SECURITY FOR ALL ASPECTS, INCLUDING ENDPOINTS

IT faces a delicate balancing act: creating an easy, high-quality experience for end-users while securing the business from outside threats. Cyber threats are growing more sophisticated and the results are more severe. Also, known and emerging data privacy regulations such as HIPAA, GDPR, and ISO hold organizations to a higher standard.

Ask these questions when considering the level and type of security your company needs:

01 DO YOU NEED TO HANDLE SECURITY IN-HOUSE OR ARE YOU COMFORTABLE DELEGATING SECURITY TO A RELIABLE UC VENDOR?

In many cases, UC vendors are meeting the security requirements of even the most security-conscious organizations and industries. Additionally, offloading security to a vendor can lower the total cost of ownership and overall risk, especially when weighing the time and bandwidth it takes to "cobble together" different solutions to meet regulatory requirements and security needs.

02 HOW MANY ENDPOINTS WILL YOU HAVE?

Adding more devices to a meeting space adds more possibilities for threats. You'll need to manage security/patches for every device, including laptops, mobile devices, and IoT peripherals.

Insider tip: Security of endpoints should always be considered, even if UC vendors are largely handling the security of the actual cloud communication.

COMPREHENSIVE MONITORING AND EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT

To ensure that you optimize your technology investment, choose a solution that offers rich monitoring and analytical capabilities—specifically one that helps the IT team:

01 KEEP A CONSTANT PULSE ON MEETING PERFORMANCE AND END-USER EXPERIENCES.

02 TROUBLESHOOT QUICKLY, EVEN WHILE EMPLOYEES ARE STILL IN THEIR MEETING, TO DETERMINE IF THE ISSUE IS END-USER BASED OR A PLATFORM ISSUE.

03 CENTRALIZE PERFORMANCE INFORMATION.

We've found that the more robust monitoring and management capabilities a solution offers, the better. IT can be more proactive about addressing performance issues and ultimately help boost employee morale and excitement about new in-room technology and experiences.

KEY CONSIDERATION #5

Flexibility

There's one constant in business and that's change, so your in-room technology must be flexible and adaptable to all employees' needs—not just today but into the future. **Which of these scenarios could be on your organization's horizon?**

01 OPENING/DEPLOYING NEW OFFICE(S).

02 ADOPTING OR SWITCHING TO A NEW PRIMARY UC PLATFORM.

03 EXPANDING COLLABORATION OPTIONS; FOR EXAMPLE, ROLLOUT OF HUDDLE ROOMS AND OTHER SPACES.

04 MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS.

In addition to changes, employees might have various work scenarios that require different collaborative environments and even different cloud video and UC vendors. While adding or changing cloud UC providers can (in theory) be as simple as pulling out a credit card, changing the equipment isn't so easy.

Consider these factors for hardware investments:

01 Hardware investments involve significant one-time costs (especially if several rooms are outfitted) and are typically amortized over several years.

02 Removing and replacing gear requires significant time and effort.

03 Onboarding and training for employees on how to use equipment and drive necessary adoption that validates the investment takes time.

04 Training IT staff to configure and manage it takes time.

We mention all of this to reaffirm how important it is to **invest in technology that will last for the long term,** even as your cloud video and UC decisions shift and evolve.

AS AN EXAMPLE:

Whether you're using Microsoft Teams or Zoom, you have access to in-room technology that helps enrich the conferencing and collaboration experience with native features and functionality. However, it may be difficult for employees to connect to meetings through other UC vendors.

When you can use the same conference room gear, no matter what UC vendor you select, it gives you the flexibility to add or change cloud providers as your business needs require it. If you're locked into gear that only works with one or a limited number of cloud services, you may end up stuck when needs change–and they will.

Flexible room solutions can also help tremendously if you are in transition.

AS AN EXAMPLE:

If you are moving from Skype for Business to Microsoft Teams, it's important to have solutions that work with both to ensure a consistent user experience and to minimize re-purchase of hardware.

KEY CONSIDERATION #6

Service and support

Today's workforce is global, so it's important to receive and provide support anywhere around the world quickly. Simple "break-fix" support is one thing, and it's important to get quick support with fast parts replacement should it be needed. But many of our customers have found more advanced help to be critical to their video conferencing success. **Options to look out for include:**

- When purchasing some devices, support comes through the UC vendor, not the device manufacturer. That's a problem if high up-time is critically important and you need next-day replacement service for key components.
- When transitioning cloud providers–from Skype to Teams, for example–workspace design services can assess, evaluate and recommend the right technology.
- Consulting services to ensure your network environment is ready–not only bandwidth, but also the security, routing, and other considerations that may not be apparent on the surface.
- Installation and remote monitoring services can take the burden off over-stretched IT staffs.

DEVELOPING A FUTURE-PROOF STRATEGY WITH POLY

In this era of rapid technological innovation and change, flexibility is key. Customer expectations are evolving, platforms are changing, and the workforce as we know it is always shifting.

At Poly, we know flexibility well, providing organizations worldwide with guidance and innovative technologies that help them design meeting spaces their end-users will love. Our solutions are adaptable, reliable, flexible, and future-forward, so no matter how your workforce or business changes, you are assured that your technology investment exceeds expectations.

We provide guidance based on your unique needs and collaborative environments, whether you want to use BYOD, an in-room PC, or a dedicated appliance.

POLY SOLUTIONS GIVE YOU:

- A breadth of room solutions.
- Quality video and audio that deliver great end-user experiences, every time.
- Flexibility to work with any UC platform and adapt as your business changes.
- Scalability and security.

Learn more about Poly's room video conferencing solutions.

LEARN MORE

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