

Five Ways Web Conferencing Can Help You Build Your Business (and Get Your Life Back)

by (ARA)

Videoconferencing has worked its way into the everyday American business vernacular, making possible everything from run-of-the-mill weekly project reviews to virtual summits between heads-of-state. But, don't despair if you lack the White House's budget. It turns out that small companies seldom have an urgent business need for high quality videoconferencing, which takes expensive gear to give participants a good look into the eyes of one another. But many businesses, large and small, can benefit from videoconferencing's low-cost sibling: web conferencing. Companies use web conferencing to show customers a demo, run through a deck of slides, get their thoughts on a creative piece or go over a spreadsheet. Participants quickly forget about the distance between them. Talking over the phone while watching your screen makes everyone feel as though they're sitting by your side. You control what they hear and see. No one can skip ahead to slide ten while you're explaining slide two. Many small businesses have found that web conferencing lets them exponentially expand their sales territory. By adding web conferencing to their inside sales process, they can qualify and close new customers without the expense of traditional bag-carrying sales calls. Employees enjoy the side benefit of a better work-life balance. No more goodnight kisses courtesy of your Blackberry! Two years ago, Inera Inc., a small business near Boston that provides editorial and production solutions to the publishing industry, experimented with selling its products using a simple web conferencing service from Glance Networks (<http://glance.net>). "When we founded Inera 14 years ago, we didn't envision doing business globally, but Glance enabled us to expand worldwide to five continents without leaving our desks. It has also helped us become a more virtual company, offering employees the flexibility to work from home by using it to collaborate on projects," says CEO Bruce Rosenblum. Nearly anyone can host a web conference. All you need is a modest broadband-connected computer and a phone. Web conferencing can bring small businesses huge benefits almost immediately, by helping you to:

- * Look bigger than you are. The famous New Yorker cartoon, "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog," is true. With today's prices, even the smallest business can now host web conferences, just like the big boys.
- * Multiply your number of sales demonstrations and pitches per day. A bag-carrying direct sales person on the road might visit a few customers a day. But an inside sales person doing live web demos over the phone often can pitch that many in just an hour.
- * Train your new customers. Host a live weekly mini-webinar for them, so they get a warm hug from your staff while learning how to make the best use of your product or service. Post archived versions as a complete "online training" course they can review anytime.
- * Take your local business global. With a phone, computer and broadband, you can pitch anyone anywhere in the world - "on the fly!" Just pick up the phone.
- * Improve your lifestyle. Travel less and spend more time on the most important things in life, like tucking your kids into bed. Dozens of low cost web conferencing services are available and all offer free trials. Pick one or two that seem to fit your needs and give them a spin. A typical plan gives you unlimited sessions with up to 10 to 15 participants for about \$50/month. Because the services are delivered through your web browser, it's easy to shop around for the best match. Aside from the phone and email, there isn't another technology that can deliver so much business value for so few dollars.