

## effective meetings



# Meeting management

MEETINGS CAN SAP TIME AND RESOURCES LIKE NO OTHER ACTIVITY. BUT, AS **DAVE HOWELL** EXPLAINS, WITH THE RIGHT PLANNING, CONTROL AND THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY THEY CAN BE MORE PRODUCTIVE

**R**esearch has indicated that 25million meetings take place every day in North America, with half of them wasted because of less than effective meeting management. According to a survey conducted by Microsoft, on average nearly six hours a week are spent in meetings, with 69 per cent of respondents claiming they were not productive.

These statistics may not have a great deal of relevance to the small business community,

but meetings have in some instances become ingrained in small business culture just as they have in corporate enterprises.

### OBJECTIVES

"I am certain that everyone has left many meetings they thought were a waste of time," says Ben Hobby, general manager EMEA - BT Conferencing Video Business Unit. "There are two keys to a successful meeting - clear objectives or outcomes, and an

agenda. If you have neither of these, don't attend. With both of these agreed at the point of meeting initiation, you are at least aiming for potential success. It then requires proficient management during the meeting."

Continues Hobby: "I believe that, unless you prepare well for a meeting, you are going to fail in your objective. Meetings can be shorter and more disciplined through better preparation. I've never left a successful meeting and felt that I had over

CEO of web conferencing specialist MeetingZone. "It is important for everyone to know what the goal is, what's on the agenda and then the chair has to keep the meeting flowing. It's very sociable to get distracted into discussing everyone's holidays when you are trying to agree the operating budget. The chairman has a vital role in ensuring people turn up on time and conduct business efficiently."

Could the use of communications technology mean the end of the traditional meeting? Video conferencing and its big brother, telepresence, offer an opportunity for companies large and small to hold meetings with geographically dispersed sales teams, for instance.

The technology in use today is affordable, portable and, above all, user friendly. The fundamental components of your meeting should stay the same, but if you do need to use video conferencing platforms there are some interesting and potentially very useful technologies available.

For impromptu meetings that require a presentation, the BlackBerry Presenter could be ideal. Once the device is connected to a projector, the presentation can be run from your BlackBerry smartphone. WebEx also has a BlackBerry App that allows you to hold meetings via your handset. The same technology is available on the Apple iPhone and iPad.

Using Skype for video conferencing may now be commonplace, but with the new HD webcams from FaceVision the quality you can expect just took a quantum leap forward. In addition, Cisco has just released a new system aimed at the domestic market that's sure to find its way into the meeting rooms of small businesses. Umi TelePresence connects to an existing HD television and a broadband internet connection to create a video communications experience that is clear, natural and lifelike.

If money is no object, telepresence is now available in a compact form with the introduction of the Teliris NanoEx. "Our solution will bring a new level of efficiency and effectiveness to remote workers that will finally allow companies to affordably achieve a truly flexible working environment," says Marc Trachtenberg, CEO of Teliris. "While webcams and laptop video certainly serve their purpose for casual chats or quick showcases, the guaranteed realistic and natural experience that Teliris' Home

Telepresence accomplishes is essential for business to be conducted successfully from the home."

### EFFICIENT

There are some simple rules you can follow to vastly improve the efficiency of the meetings you hold. The list of attendees and agenda to be discussed should be clear and concise. If you are using a projector, always keep the presentation short and the slides uncluttered. You can also circulate the presentation to

*"With the new HD webcams from FaceVision the quality you can expect just took a quantum leap forward"*

attendees before the meeting to give them time to formulate any comments they want to make.

Cost is always a major factor. Try and keep your meetings short and to the point, as they can become costly if not kept in check. Try and avoid what Gregory Batchelor calls 'meeting mania' - each meeting should have a clear purpose and take place because they need to in order to develop your business.

Meetings should be run by an effective chairperson. Attendees should state their views concisely, with anyone that is waffling asked to be brief in the future. All too often decisions agreed in meetings are overturned or derailed by 'offline' discussions after the meeting has ended. These can often result in yet another meeting being called to discuss the same subjects. To prevent this from happening, always ensure everyone at the meeting is agreed on decisions made and an action plan is drawn up and reported back on.

It is unlikely that the format of meetings will radically change in the near future. New technologies offer platforms for global communication, but the basics of holding a productive meeting have not changed. **MM**

prepared. The amount of preparation is directly proportional to the success of the meeting."

The make-up of the meetings you call is vital to get right, says Gregory Batchelor, director of EMEA marketing at Arkadin, a global audio and web conferencing service provider: "One of the key issues is attendance. Often people important to the meeting will be missing, or people who don't need to attend will be brought into it as an oversight. If people are missing from the meeting, the discussion might be hampered by their absence and they will need to be informed of the discussion later on, most likely in another meeting.

"Conversely, if people are brought into the meeting unnecessarily, or forced to sit through a full meeting when they are only needed for a small part of the discussion, their time is being wasted when they could be working elsewhere."

Close attention must also be paid to how a meeting is chaired. "We have all been to too many time-wasting meetings where there is a lack of a clear agenda or poor meeting chairmanship," says Tim Duffy,



*Meetings can become costly if not kept in check*

