

Corporate Counsel Magazine: U.S. Firms Utilizing Innovative Technology as Videoconferencing Improves

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Gregory Gallo has been spending less time at the airport lately.

Instead of hopping on a plane for important meetings, the DLA Piper partner ducks into a high-tech conference room in the firm's East Palo Alto, Calif., office for a face-to-face with colleagues and clients hundreds or thousands of miles away. He can't shake their hands, but he can make eye contact, pick up on facial expressions, read body language and easily gauge the group dynamic -- things that the limitations of traditional videoconferencing systems made difficult to do in the past.

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The system has made it easier for more partners to take part in firm administration at Lathrop Gage, said Chief Executive Officer Joel Voran. Being active in firm management no longer requires time-consuming trips for in-person planning meetings. Now, all of the firm's monthly executive committee meetings are done via the system, and each of its 13 offices has that capability.

The 280-attorney firm decided to upgrade its videoconferencing technology in 2007 when it reconfigured the conference space in its Kansas City, Mo., headquarters. It purchased several different smaller enhanced systems from Polycom and has six designated rooms for videoconferencing in Kansas City, said Chief Information Officer Ben Weinberger. One room has a 150-inch screen; another has two 50-inch screens and an oval conference table that simulates in-person meetings.

The equipment for each room cost approximately \$9,000, although that does not include the costs of reconfiguring the rooms. The firm uses the system 900 hours per year on average, and that figure is on the rise, Weinberger said.

"I think we have a much better ability to communicate. A lot of the things you pick up during a conversation aren't from the words. It's from body language and things like that," Voran said. Read more ...