Video Conferencing Guide

Your expert guide to video conferencing
In this e-guide:

Investing in video conferencing technology? This e-guide pulls together all the information you need to make an informed purchasing decision! Discover articles on the latest in video conferencing standards and bandwidth requirements (as well as how to calculate them), survey results on which vendors your peers are considering for their video conferencing needs, and reviews of the top video conferencing products on the market today.

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)
Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability

Irwin Lazar, Nemertes Research

Irwin Lazar explains what video conferencing standards and protocols are and why they are necessary to enable interoperability and promote successful video communications.

Video conferencing standards and protocols are necessary to define common means for video encapsulation and session management. Encapsulation standards define how video and audio are captured, converted to digital format, transmitted between endpoints and decoded.

Signaling standards control session establishment, teardown and management. Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) is widely supported for video session management, though many older systems rely on H.323. Gateways and multipoint control unit (MCUs) can make SIP and H.323 work together.

Encapsulation protocols vary in terms of vendor support and performance. Popular encapsulation standards include the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) H.264, as well as VP8 for video, ITU G.711/G.722/G.729 for voice,
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

In this e-guide

Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability

How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements

Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?

Cisco Systems (Jabber)

AT&T (BlueJeans)

Avaya

Microsoft (Skype for Business)

In this e-guide

Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability

How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements

Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?

Cisco Systems (Jabber)

AT&T (BlueJeans)

Avaya

Microsoft (Skype for Business)

In this e-guide

Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability

How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements

Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?

Cisco Systems (Jabber)

AT&T (BlueJeans)

Avaya

Microsoft (Skype for Business)
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

Licensing and competitive considerations drive variances in video codec support. H.264 and H.265 require royalty payments for use. VP8 and VP9 are royalty-free, but competitors are reluctant to embrace these codecs, since they're controlled by Google, not natively supported in most video conferencing room systems and do not support hardware optimization in Apple mobile devices.

More recently, a new organization called the Alliance for Open Media was formed by leading video conferencing vendors -- including AMD, Cisco, Intel, Microsoft, NVIDIA and Vidyo -- to develop a royalty-free alternative to H.265 and VP9.

Varying encapsulation approaches are an obstacle for buyers wishing to integrate different products from different vendors or take advantage of WebRTC to enable video conferencing within browsers and browser-based apps. Vendors continue to perceive competitive advantage toward offering a "better-than-standard" service while supporting baseline interoperability for well-defined video conferencing standards.

Integrating systems that use different video codecs requires deploying an on-premises MCU or a bridging software platform like Acano or Pexip, a cloud-bridging service like StarLeaf, or a cloud video conferencing service like Blue Jeans, Cisco, Fuze, Videxio, Vidyo or Zoom. Any of these services will typically provide transcoding between codecs, but with additional cost and complexity.
How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements

Irwin Lazar, Nemertes Research

Image motion, frame rates and screen resolution often dictate video conferencing bandwidth requirements. The number of endpoints and concurrent calls are also key factors.

As demand for high-definition video conferencing grows, so does the need to provision adequate bandwidth to support video needs. A successful video conferencing implementation requires addressing quality, number of endpoints, multipoint control unit location and cloud-based virtual meeting room services.

A key requirement for a successful deployment of business video conferencing is ensuring sufficient bandwidth between endpoints to support high-definition video applications and room systems. Two parameters drive video conferencing bandwidth requirements: the bandwidth per video conference call and the number of concurrent video conference calls on each network link.
Determining video conferencing bandwidth requirements

Video conferences can require anywhere from 128 Kbps for a low-quality desktop endpoint, up to 20 Mbps for an immersive three-screen telepresence suite. Video conferencing bandwidth requirements are driven by the resolution and the ability of the session to handle image motion.

The table below provides typical examples of video conferencing bandwidth requirements, considering the specified resolution and frame rate. Frame rate determines the ability of the video conference call to handle motion, while resolution determines how many pixels are on the screen image -- and, thus, how much detail users will see in that image.

These video conferencing bandwidth requirements are per screen, so dual and three-screen systems may require additional bandwidth.
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

## Video conferencing bandwidth requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bandwidth</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
<th>Frame Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>384 Kbps</td>
<td>CIF</td>
<td>30 fps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>512 Kbps</td>
<td>4CIF</td>
<td>15 fps +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>768 Kbps</td>
<td>4CIF</td>
<td>30 fps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Mbps</td>
<td>HD720</td>
<td>15 fps +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mbps</td>
<td>HD720</td>
<td>30 fps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Mbps</td>
<td>HD720</td>
<td>60 fps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Mbps</td>
<td>HD1080</td>
<td>30 fps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~7 Mbps</td>
<td>HD1080</td>
<td>60 fps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Kbps: kilobits per second  
Mbps: megabytes per second  
CIF: common intermediate format*
In this e-guide

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- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

**HD**: high definition

**fps**: frames per second

Use these values as guidelines to assess network bandwidth. But remember to obtain specific requirements from your vendor, since bandwidth needs are typically affected by the choice of codec, compression and proprietary system capabilities.

Also, the video conferencing bandwidth requirements in this table are for the amount of traffic supported inside the Real-Time Transport Protocol (RTP) packet payload. The actual bandwidth on the IP network -- after adding RTP, User Datagram Protocol, IP and Ethernet headers -- will be about 20% higher. So, 1 Mbps video conference calls actually use about 1.2 Mbps of network bandwidth. I refer to these values as transport bandwidth (1 Mbps) and network bandwidth (1.2 Mbps) to avoid confusion.

To determine the right resolution and frame rate for your company, make sure users experience the video conference calls in the actual context where they will be used, such as the desktop, mobile device or conference room. Additionally, users should experience the video calls with the screens or projectors you plan to use, so you can determine if the quality is sufficient.

If end users are not comfortable with the quality, they will quickly resort to other methods of communication, such as a phone call or travel. Between quality and cost, there’s a tradeoff. So, while users may prefer high-definition 1080p 60 fps,
the cost of provisioning sufficient bandwidth to support conferences at that resolution and frame rate may be cost-prohibitive, especially in underserved parts of the world.

Estimating concurrent video conference calls

The next step is to determine how many concurrent calls each WAN link must support.

For small offices, with only one or two video conferencing systems and no desktop or mobile video conferencing, assume the two systems are running concurrently. For larger offices, estimate how many video conference calls occur concurrently based on your busiest meeting times. A helpful guide is to assume half of your conference rooms are being used, then adjust bandwidth needs based on actual usage.

If your organization has offices across multiple time zones, factor in time shifts. Map the call patterns onto the network topology and create a spreadsheet to track concurrent call assumptions and the bandwidth per call. A spreadsheet will allow you to modify parameters to create what-if scenarios.
Beware of the video conferencing bridge

The video conferencing bridge, or multipoint control unit (MCU), is a bandwidth hotspot. All video conferencing endpoints in concurrent multipoint video calls connect directly to the bridge. Thus, the bridge needs to be in a location that supports a high-bandwidth connection.

Increasingly, organizations are looking to cloud-based virtual meeting rooms to support a growing number of conferences without making additional capital investments in MCUs. However, cloud-based MCU services will place additional demands on your network for internet bandwidth.

New video conferencing strategies often put the bridge in a data center because it looks and smells like a server. But the best place for the bridge may be in a colocation facility near the core of the WAN service provider's network. Bandwidth is inexpensive at these locations, and since video conferencing call connections come from all parts of the WAN, the bridge would be in the right place to support many endpoints. This approach also scales well as video conferencing calls grow within the company.

Small companies normally just use the built-in MCU capability in some video conferencing endpoints. This approach works well for small conferences with two or three rooms, but it doesn't scale.
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

Multiple remote rooms connecting to the MCU in a small office room system will quickly eat up bandwidth. Here, again, cloud-based MCU services are nifty, because multiparty room conferences simply require each location to connect to the internet.

Managing bandwidth with call admission control

The last step is to make sure your video conferencing has call admission control (CAC).

The communications manager or gatekeeper is programmed to understand the network topology and how many concurrent calls are allowed on each link. If a new video conference call would violate one of those constraints, the call is denied. This mechanism ensures video conference calls get the bandwidth they need and maintain high quality throughout the call.

CAC is especially important for organizations that make heavy use of desktop and mobile video conferencing over the wireless LAN, since these applications can overwhelm a network if used heavily.
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

About the author

Irwin Lazar is the vice president and service director at Nemertes Research, where he develops and manages research projects, develops cost models, conducts strategic seminars and advises clients. Irwin is responsible for benchmarking the adoption and use of emerging technologies in the enterprise in areas including VoIP, unified communications, video conferencing, social computing, collaboration and advanced network services.
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?

In a recent survey, we asked 228 IT Pros in North America to identify which video conferencing vendors they were considering for purchase. Below are the top five.

![Bar chart showing top vendors being considered for video conferencing purchase]
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

Cisco Systems takes the majority lead, with 51% considering. Polycom comes in second at 30%, followed by a near three way tie between AT&T, Avaya, and Microsoft at 17, 16, and 15%, respectively.

What do your peers have to say about these vendors?

TrustRadius, the most trusted review site for business technology, helps buyers make better product decisions based on unbiased and insightful reviews. Below are a few reviews on the top video conferencing vendors and products.

**Cisco Systems (Jabber)**

A solutions engineer at a telecommunications company with over 10,000 employees rates Jabber a 9 out of 10.

**Likelihood to Recommend Jabber:** Jabber is well suited for instant calls, desktop sharing, and video call scenarios. For file sharing, it takes a lot of time and it even failed at 90%.

**Jabber Use Cases and Deployment Scope:** Cisco Jabber is one of the best unified-communications applications. Cisco Jabber lets you know about availability of contacts, instant messaging (IM), voice, video, voice messaging, desktop sharing, and conferencing. In our organization it is used as a communicator to contact employees (internal/external) and know their availability status whether they are away, available or in presentation mode.
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
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- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
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### Jabber Pros

- Individual Chat with History
- Calling internal numbers and also international numbers
- File Sharing, Desktop Sharing with access control
- Meeting info with WebEx Intergration
- Group Creation

### Jabber Cons

- Jabber needs to work on the Mobile Application Part - need to improve its lagging issue
- Phone setup issue should be resolved on the Mobile App
- ROI on Jabber Purchase

### ROI on Jabber Purchase

- A single communicator to call, chat, have a discussion, for file sharing, for desktop sharing, for video conferencing and WebEx meeting integration
- Virtual Meeting and conferencing saves unnecessary travel costs

### Jabber Alternatives: Skype for Business. Jabber with its features and ease of use made it the more popular and recommended one than Skype for Business
A systems administrator at a law practice with 51-200 employees rates Jabber a 5 out of 10.

**Likelihood to Recommend Jabber:** If a large company, with many offices, would benefit from instant chat style communication - or - if a company were going to put their entire communication system in the cloud and use WebEx - then this is a great product for you. If you're not a WebEx client and/or if your company culture won't embrace chat sessions, then there are other alternatives on the market that will likely meet your needs better without all the overkill and overhead... and at a MUCH BETTER price point. Cisco phone systems are solid and have great quality, but they are expensive to purchase, maintain, upgrade, license... it's a huge expense and today's market provides cheaper alternatives. When we purchased our Cisco phone system, there was nothing on the market even close. That's no longer true.

**Jabber Use Cases and Deployment Scope:** Jabber has been deployed for all of our users across the entire organization on their desktop/laptop machines for just over two years now. Initially, we installed Jabber because it was Cisco's upgrade to the old soft-phones (PC phones) for their Call Manager (now Unified Communications) system. Jabber would allow our users to VPN back to our office and use the Jabber client like it was their office phone, so their clients could dial their office number and reach them, dialing out would show their office number on caller ID, etc. It has other features of course, but this was our primary reason for using Jabber.
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

Jabber Pros

- In general, call quality is really good using Jabber. Of course it is dependent on your network or internet connection speed if used remotely, but it's much better than many other products we looked at under the same circumstances. Most of the time we can't tell when someone is working remotely over the VPN using Jabber.
- The user interface is easy to use and quickly adopted by users.
- The search function for contacts is quick and accurate.

Jabber Cons

- Federation (connecting Jabber to other businesses to see their availability, etc.) is spotty and only works under certain circumstances. There are different types of federation using different protocols for different types of systems and we usually find that no one else knows what type of system they have and it takes so much time to troubleshoot to setup. It's usually not worth it and we give up.
- The presence indicators (availability icons) only work about 60% of the time. They read your Outlook calendar and also determine if you're on the phone to automatically change your availability icons. They are often wrong - for most of my users. You can change it yourself manually too.
- Using the Jabber app on the iPhone requires the device VPN back to your system. If your UC system is in the cloud, maybe that's not a big deal to
anyone. All of our equipment and systems are hosted in-house, so having our iPhones have an open VPN back to our network requires more overhead for security and management than we anticipated. We're constantly testing to confirm everything is locked down as much as possible to avoid security issues. iPhones are not the most secure devices and due to the amount of personal use on those devices, it provides a prime target for malware to gain access to a network. Not many of our users choose to use Jabber on their iPhones anyway, because they have had instances where the carrier connection isn't so good and it won't hold a VPN stable.

**ROI on Jabber Purchase:** We have upgraded the back end Unified Communications side of Jabber annually. We have only upgraded the Jabber client twice. I don't think we've spent a significant amount of money or time on the Jabber client itself - nor have we found a ROI with any time or cost savings. Actually, I would venture to say that only about 30% of my users ever use it.

**Jabber Alternatives:** Skype for Business. Jabber with its features and ease of use made it the more popular and recommended one than Skype for Business

**Other Software Used:** Snagit, Symantec Client Management Suite, Forcepoint URL Filtering
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

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**AT&T (BlueJeans)**

A finance professional at an accounting company with 501-1,000 employees rates BlueJeans a 10 out of 10.

**Likelihood to Recommend BlueJeans:** It is great for remote employees to stay connected to offices

**BlueJeans Use Cases and Deployment Scope:** Used for one on one meetings, team meetings and company wide announcements. It solves the business problem of connecting those across different offices, states, and countries.

**BlueJeans Pros**
- Consistent quality
- Easy to setup meetings in Google calendar
- Great support

**BlueJeans Cons**
- More options for views
- Dual screen share option
- Chat notifications
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

**ROI on BlueJeans Purchase**

- Positive effect on communication, which can be the biggest issue within most organizations.
- Allows the company to hold company wide events, connect many locations and record them for those who cannot attend.
- Allows for easy meeting coordination with internal and external parties.

**BlueJeans Alternatives:** Skype. Skype did not have many features that were important for business use.

**Other Software Used:** NetSuite, Trello, Slack

A director at an education management company with 51-200 employees rates BlueJeans an 8 out of 10.

**Likelihood to Recommend BlueJeans:** BlueJeans is well suited for internal meetings. I think the software should pivot to be used as a conference line replacement package, as there is more utility in that mannerism with fluid participant availability.

**BlueJeans Use Cases and Deployment Scope:** We use BlueJeans as a means to mitigate the need for travel, and to increase the engagement in our regularly scheduled meetings that were previously just conference calls. It is being used in a variety of departments, from HR, IT, Product, E-Learning,
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

Academics, Operations, and Admissions. By having a platform that deploys easily on multiple devices, it enables a video component that was previously missing from our former meetings.

**BlueJeans Pros**

- Easy to launch
- Multiple access points, desktop app, mobile devices
- Screen sharing

**BlueJeans Cons**

- We have had technical issues on the Event platform where the meeting leader could not get their audio to engage and was on mute
- We would prefer if BlueJeans accounts were not tied to a named participant. Often times, folks travel and are unable to make regularly scheduled calls. If they are the meeting leader, it is difficult because the system is not designed to work like a conference line replacement.
- Lots of users have technical issues getting their mic selected, we have noted variable experiences on hardware throughout the organization.

**ROI on BlueJeans Purchase**

- At the time of writing, we have only been a paid client for less than 6 months and are still working on company adoption of the product.
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

- We have noticed a significant increase of engagement with the video component in team meetings, however many participants are hesitant to enable video.
- We plan to reduce travel and leverage the platform to mitigate smaller meetings.

**BlueJeans Alternatives:** Webex, Blackboard Collaborate, Join.me. The biggest reason that we selected BlueJeans is the reliability and accessibility of the platform. Our POTS conference lines are unreliable, frequently down, or have glitchy issues. We do not experience those daily pain points with BlueJeans. The accessibility from multiple devices helps with adoption.

**Other Software Used:** WebEx Meetings, Join.me, Blackboard Collaborate, GoToMeeting.
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

Avaya

An IT infrastructure and security specialist at an education management company with over 10,000 employees rates Avaya an 8 out of 10.

Likelihood to Recommend Avaya: Avaya voice systems are well suited for large organizations.

Avaya Use Cases and Deployment Scope: We use Avaya PBX Systems to provide telephone services throughout the entire School District. Our District consists of over 189 schools and an additional 20 ancillary sites, with over 20,000 employees. We use Avaya Modular Messaging for voice mail, Avaya Meeting Manager for conference calling and Avaya One X Attendant for our PBX operators. Each school site in the district has its own phone system, either an Avaya S8500 or Avaya S8300 System.

Avaya Pros
- Reliability, we are currently on an older Avaya Infrastructure and it is standing the test of time.
- Support, Avaya support has been very reliable.

Avaya Cons: Avaya could provide an easier to use Support website. It is hard for us to place correct Service Requests for support on the Avaya Website.
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
  - Cisco Systems (Jabber)
  - AT&T (BlueJeans)
  - Avaya
  - Microsoft (Skype for Business)

ROI on Avaya Purchase: Avaya has been a very good investment for our company. We are still working with the same Avaya Voice System for over the past 10 years. We are looking forward to finally being able to upgrade our phone system in the near future.

Microsoft (Skype for Business)

A platforms engineer at a hospital/health care company with over 10,000 employees rates Skype for Business a 10 out of 10.

Likelihood to Recommend Skype for Business: I really like the ability to do a screen share to help troubleshoot or see what a user is seeing on the screen. We are a large company and can’t just go to someone’s desk to take a look. With this feature, it is well worth it to take a look for your organization. It has come a long way in a short time.

Skype for Business Use Cases and Deployment Scope: We are currently using Skype for Business across our entire enterprise. It is used for meetings and screen shares for training and troubleshooting purposes as well as our primary business phone. So being able to use this product is really awesome. We had been using Cisco Jabber as our primary business phone but the service was not as robust as it was said it would be. Not saying that Jabber is bad it had...
its good things about it as well but it did not seem to be as stable as Skype for Business.

**Skype for Business Pros**
- Screen sharing for troubleshooting and training is a blessing. To be able to see what the users are experiencing is much better than not.
- Using the meeting request or personal rooms to start you own conference call is another great feature.
- Instant meeting now feature is great as well for impromptu meetings

**Skype for Business Cons**
- The phone part sometimes gets disconnected when you are online.
- The calendar feature could be a little better in providing information but it's not a big deal.
- The voicemail feature could use some updating but again, not a big deal.

**ROI on Skype for Business Purchase**
- I keep saying that the troubleshooting feature with screen shares has been a blessing
- The ROI is much better than the experience we had with Jabber
- No negative business impacts with this product so far

**Skype for Business Alternatives:** Lync and Jabber. Lync was pretty good and is still used in some locations and although Skype is an addition to Lync it has
those functions that we all used to use when Skype was its own. Using Jabber was not a good experience for our company. Not sure how it would have been if we were a smaller company. Jabber has a lot of features that are worth looking at but I would recommend Skype for Business.

An administrator at a research company with 501-1,000 employees rates Skype for Business an 8 out of 10.

**Likelihood to Recommend Skype for Business:** Skype for Business is great for instant messaging colleagues/partners in your office or internationally, and calling partners/colleagues. Skype for Business is less appropriate for holding webinars or presentations, although, I would like to work with our IT department to help us use Skype for Business in this manner because we’ve been having issues with WebEx connectivity.

**Skype for Business Use Cases and Deployment Scope:** Skype for Business is being used throughout my organization globally, including in our international offices with inconsistent internet access such as Adis Ababa, Ethiopia and Lusaka, Zambia. It has replaced normal Skype as our go-to video or audio only calls between offices, and instant messaging. It is easier to group colleagues together and share screens compared to normal Skype.
Skype for Business Pros

- Skype for Business is a great organizational tool to categorize your colleagues / business partners in groups.
- Skype for Business enables support staff to manage other users’ accounts.
- Skype for Business is linked to our organization’s Microsoft 365 account, so we can seamlessly request a Skype call.

Skype for Business Cons

- The ability to "host" meetings or events like you can on WebEx would be great.
- I would like to be able to have control of other participants’ options. For example, if I’m holding a meeting, I want the option of people being muted upon entry to the call so they don't disturb the presenter.
- I would like to more easily add people to the call and share screens more seamlessly.

ROI on Skype for Business Purchase

- Skype for Business has had a positive ROI on our organization, as we use it as the primary communication method to communicate with our offices globally (aside from email)
- I don't think Skype for Business (SFB) has reached its highest ROI potential because some of our offices and colleagues are still using Skype rather than SFB, but we are gradually transitioning organization-wide.
In this e-guide

- Video conferencing standards, protocols and interoperability
- How to calculate video conferencing bandwidth requirements
- Who are your peers considering for their video conferencing purchases?
- Cisco Systems (Jabber)
- AT&T (BlueJeans)
- Avaya
- Microsoft (Skype for Business)

- I believe SFB came free with our Microsoft 365, so it was no extra cost to the organization.

**Skype for Business Alternatives:** We used Skype as an organization for many years (and I have used Skype personally and professionally for years). Skype for Business has many more features, that are particularly beneficial for business. One helpful feature is that it pulled our organization contract directory into SFB, so it’s much easier to find colleagues compared to Skype. We can show and share presentations and use the whiteboard function. The SFB mobile app is also very simple and easy to use.

**Other Software Used:** WebEx Meetings, WebEx Event Center