



# AUDIO AND VIDEO PROS AND CONS



Tools  
of the  
trade

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## **3M** Meeting Network

How many senses are necessary for effective communication? Only one, like hearing?  
All five? How do you know when is it essential to make things or people visible, too?

Research has shown that effective trust-building and conflict resolution depend heavily on the visual component of face-to-face meetings. By contrast, distributing basic information or confirming the details of previous communication can be handled effectively by email. For distributing detailed information that includes graphics and text, using a fax works well and dataconferencing solutions work even better. But what about using audioconferencing or videoconferencing? Many people are unsure of the effectiveness of these technologies and how to choose between them. They each have unique advantages, so how do you decide which one will be most effective for your communication needs?

### **Audioconferencing pros and cons.**

An audioconference differs from a telephone conversation in that it involves more than two people in at least two locations. Audioconferencing may require special equipment or special services. Special equipment can be as simple as a speakerphone or as elaborate as meeting room microphones, speakers and multipoint “bridge” technology. Bridging services, supplied by telephone and communication services companies, allow multiple locations to dial-in to a single phone number to be linked or “bridged” into one auditory space.

### **Advantages.**

1. *Basic technology and services are commonly available.* Anywhere there’s a telephone, people can participate in an audioconference.
2. *Familiarity.* Most people are comfortable operating telephone equipment and have experience understanding and using conversational protocols on the telephone.
3. *Availability of special technology.* Special technology for supporting large groups and rooms has become increasingly available.

## Disadvantages.

1. *Requires participants to use new protocols.*  
When many people converse without the benefit of visual cues, it is difficult to manage turn-taking. Identifying the speaker can also be a problem. Successful audioconferencing requires participants to follow protocols like announcing who's speaking and asking if anyone else has something to say.
2. *Potential for feeling excluded.* When many people are in the same room conferencing with individuals in other places, those in the same room have the advantage of being able to see each other. Unless this imbalance is carefully monitored, remote participants may feel "left out" of the group.

## Videoconferencing pros and cons.

Videoconferencing allows remote participants to see and hear each other. Less common than audioconferencing, videoconferencing technology is rapidly becoming standardized. Many large and mid-size organizations now use videoconferencing, and affordable group videoconferencing systems are now within reach even for small companies.

## Advantages.

1. *Live, moving pictures.* Obviously, videoconferencing provides participants access to the visual data we rely on so much for nonverbal cues in communication. This is particularly useful during team formation and when dealing with sensitive or divisive issues.
2. *Seeing more than the people.* Conferees can also jointly view and discuss images from a document camera or computer, making the videoconference much more like a face-to-face meeting.

## Disadvantages.

1. *Requires specialized equipment.* Availability of standard and/or compatible videoconferencing equipment at all conference sites is not as likely as that of phone equipment.
2. *Cost of services.* Usually, the better the picture exchanged, the more bandwidth will be required. Instead of paying for one call between points, you may have to pay for multiple or upgraded phone lines to gain acceptable image quality.

*Make the meeting.*

## Related Reading

**Virtual Teams: Reaching Across Space, Time, and Organizations with Technology;** Jessica Lipnack & Jeffrey Stamps; John Wiley & Sons; 1997.

**Cybermeeting: How to Link People and Technology in Your Organization;** James L. Creighton & James W. R. Adams; AMACOM; 1997.

## Helpful Hints

For medium-to-large sized meeting rooms use an audioconferencing system with multiple microphones that can be placed throughout the room.

When including more than two locations into a conference, use a "multi-point bridge" service provider. They'll take care of many of the technical details for you.

Augment audio and video with dataconferencing to share documents, presentations and even images of product samples during a multi-location meeting.

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