Videoconferencing a "game changer" in economic growth

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The National Association of Counties (NACo) held its 76th Annual Conference and Exposition in Multnomah County, Ore. July 15-19, 2011. Several county officials, vendors and IT professionals attended the event to discuss policies and issues affecting counties nationwide and collaborate on ideas for shaping a bright future despite tough economic times.

In a session on how IT can prepare counties for future success, **Dr. Norman Jacknis**, director of Cisco's Internet Business Solutions Public Sector Group, touted the benefits of Internet videoconferencing. Jacknis proclaimed videoconferencing as a "game changer" that's only at the start of its global impact. In a recent **forecast** from the Cisco Visual Networking Index, business videoconferencing is reported to grow sixfold from 2010 to 2015 at a compound annual growth rate of 41 percent. Additional highlights from the report include:

- Global Internet video traffic surpassed global peer-to-peer (P2P) traffic in 2010, and by 2012, Internet video will account for more 50 percent of consumer Internet traffic
- 1 million minutes of video content will cross the global IP network every second in 2015
- Internet video is now 40 percent of consumer Internet traffic, and will reach 62 percent by the end of 2015, not including the amount of video exchanged through P2P file sharing
- Internet video to TV tripled in 2010. Internet video-to-TV will continue to grow at a rapid pace, increasing 17-fold by 2015. Internet video-to-TV will be over 16 percent of consumer Internet video traffic in 2015, up from 7 percent in 2010
- Video-on-demand traffic will triple by 2015. The amount of VoD traffic in 2015 will be equivalent to 3 billion DVDs per month
- High-definition video-on-demand will surpass standard definition by the end of 2011. By 2015, high-definition Internet video will comprise 77 percent of VoD

Jacknis stressed the need for Internet video and noted that 93 percent of daily communication is nonverbal. He reported that by 2030, the world will achieve a ubiquitous video communication standard. According to a study conducted by Nielsen and the International Data Corporation, the number of Internet video users in the U.S. will grow from nearly 150 million to approximately 180.5 million by 2015.

As videoconferencing continues its rise, physical proximity will no longer dominate communication. This also aligns with the ever-shifting shape of corporate America. As harsh economic realities make their mark, businesses are turning to technology to do more with less. Large organizations can no longer be relied on for significant job and economic growth. Instead, they are turning to global supply chains, outsourcing, contractors instead of employees, and global presence as opposed to one main location.

With the high cost of office space, many companies are implementing remote work environments with Internet video as a main source of communication. This not only cuts costs of office space, it reduces travel costs, eases interview processes, boosts employee retention rates, and allows businesses to recruit talent nationwide without a barrier of physical location. Increased productivity is also a benefit reported in many studies.

State and local governments are now starting to utilize video tools in procurement processes through virtual pre-proposal conferences. By not requiring interested vendors to attend an in-person conference to bid on a project, agency's can increase proposal submission rates and vendor participation. Vendors are more likely to partake in a recorded virtual meeting to avoid travel costs, and are less likely to protest a bid or send agencies repetitive email or phone inquiries.

Outside of business and economic advantages, more and more communities are looking to video tools to stimulate health care efforts. Jacknis highlighted Burlington, VT's Telecare for Rural Health Project, which provides a two-way interactive video and audio tai chi exercise class for seniors. Additionally, video technology is reshaping the medical field as diagnoses, consultations, and even surgery are being conducted remotely. With remote health care, patients can access specialists from around the globe, physicians can easily exchange expertise, and the number of patients seen can increase.

Further, there's no denying the obvious green appeal of video IT, with environmental benefits ranging from fuel

and greenhouse gas reduction to decreasing cost-of-living expenses.

As videoconferencing continues to shape the future, more and more state and local entities are looking to implement video tools to aid in daily operations. Here is a look at a few videoconferencing opportunities in the GovWin: Deltek Information Solutions database.

- Opportunity **60774**: On May 3, 2011, Alaska released a request for proposals (RFP) for professional services for a video technology interoperability systems study. This study will look at the practicality of rolling out video technology through the Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement business processes.
- Opportunity **71894**: The county of Los Angeles released a request for information (RFI) for a consolidated video conferencing purchase program on June 9, 2011, in which responses were due by on June 28, 2011. The county is currently reviewing responses in preparation for a formal RFP release.
- Opportunity **66798**: The state of Idaho's current contracts for video teleconferencing equipment and services are set to expire September 2011, and if all options are exercised, could extend to September 2013. GovWin is monitoring this project for any rebids or contract extensions, and will update upon release of new information.

Analyst's Take

Video technology is not only heating up in states and localities, it is on the rise worldwide. This growing effort results in a fiercely competitive vendor landscape. With this comes a decrease in product cost; therefore, it is essential vendors work to provide a solution that appeals to agency budget straps while offering a breadth of features. In closing his presentation, Jacknis said "local collaborations among business, academia, and government, and global collaborations with innovators around the world" are the keys to IT shaping a thriving future economy.

Agencies are looking for solutions with a wide range of benefits, including simultaneous webcam feeds, instant messaging, file sharing, VoIP, multiple live video streams, website sharing, and electronic whiteboard capabilities. Cloud-based solutions are also a plus as many government entities explore branching to cloud services. Lastly, the ability to interoperate with other vendor solutions will give your product a leg up in today's market, as will a solution that allows for significant on-screen movement without a declining frame rate.