



CLIENT ENGAGEMENT USING REAL-TIME VIDEO, THE NEW NORMAL

by Ron Rhodes

connext
GLOBAL SOLUTIONS



“When media changes, human relationships change.”
–Michael Wesch, media anthropologist.

The world has changed in ways we have seen and ways have yet to see. Since its December 2019, outbreak, the COVID-19 virus has, in some way, affected the lives of everyone. Global healthcare systems are under siege and nearing exhaustion. Economies stand nervously on the verge of an epic crash. Quarantines, restrictions, distancing and protection requirements have altered the routines of daily life. Many of us are forced to remain in our homes while entire industries shut down, driving unemployment to its highest level in generations.

Businesses now reactively plan for something called the new normal. Will people need fewer cars, take fewer flights, eat at home more often, do less impulse buying at the mall? Will there be less discretionary income and more debt for years to come? And what of the world of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO)? What becomes of the armies of headset wearing, cubicle sitting, back-office transaction processing workers, many of whom are located offshore? At this point, the answers are anyone's guess.

Like many in the BPO industry, we at Connex began 2020 operating from physical (bricks and mortar) sites. As the outbreak spread and quarantines were mandated, we used the advantage of our cloud infrastructure to rapidly move employees to a Work from Home (WFH) model. We have recovered some of our home-based workers where practical, but remain two-thirds WFH and are functioning seamlessly.

A distributed company is one in which the majority of employees work from wherever they are comfortable and/or productive. As we look to the future, one thing seems certain, companies like ours will be operating on a distributed basis for quite some time. The good news here is that we can do this with minimal impact on our communication, culture, or client engagement. How? Let me tell you a story.

As I remember it, the client wore a French trilby style party hat, glittering with silver sequins, during his surprise birthday party in the Honolulu office. The stacked layer cake was well iced and eclectically candled. The smiles in the room were offered with unmistakable Hawaiian sincerity, all appropriate for the moment. We sang the usual birthday song and when the cake was sliced, my taste buds began to anticipate a late morning treat, but that wasn't to be. Why? Because several team members and I were participating in a Hawaii birthday celebration from one of our Client Service Centers in the Philippines, some 5,427.90 miles (8,735.36 km) away.

The festive collaboration was quite routine for Connex. It was enabled through the Connex-to-Client window, a two-way configuration, using digital cameras and closed-circuit television (CCTV), Connex clients use to maintain real-time audio and visual connection with their offshore team members. The Connex-to-Client window is a value-added feature of the Connex service suite. It assists in the facilitation of a production-level partnership between the client's internal team and remote team members working offshore.





So, what is Connex? Connex Global Solutions Inc. is a back-office Business Process Outsourcer (BPO) with operations based in the Philippines. The overwhelming focus of Connex is to service the Small and Mid-sized (SMB) markets which, while not a traditional target for larger BPO companies, has a growing need for on-demand resources and true service collaboration. This is especially true of the Small Business segment, being more susceptible to cutthroat competition, erratic industry change, and sudden economic turbulence which might be driven by unprecedented disasters like the current COVID-19 pandemic. Connex instantly extends a client's technical capabilities and geographic reach, offering a continually innovative approach to local talent acquisition, Lean Six Sigma process improvements, skilled local management, and state-of-the-art business technology. Since launching its initial back-office applications for a title and escrow company in 2014, Connex now provides an increasingly diverse scope of support. This includes, but is not limited to, medical claims processing, CPAs and accounting support, software and web programming, graphic design and marketing support, systems engineering and multi-tier technical support, reservations specialists, customer engagement professionals, real estate, title and escrow, data analytics, HR, payroll specialists and more.

The Connex-to-Client window is a natural extension of the Connex service partnership. It helps build trust and develop a unique work culture between globally distributed personnel. In a November-2009 paper by the Institute for the Future, entitled, The Future of Real-Time Video Communication, the writer maintained that:

“Small business services will greatly benefit from easy and inexpensive access to clients. From personal shoppers to real-time counseling and consulting, to live how-to and instruction assistance, small and large businesses will use real-time video to enhance the personal touch with their clients.”

Starlight Networks in the early 1990s. Since that time CPUs have become more powerful and sufficient bandwidth capacity, increasingly more obtainable by consumers' commercial enterprises. Digital video cameras are now sold, affordably, as stand-alone peripheral devices or embedded in laptops, tablets, and smartphones.

The timing of these developments corresponded with the emergence of centralized telephone customer contact organizations or call centers and, eventually, the trend towards outsourcing call center and back-office work to BPO service providers. In the early 1980s, BPO companies took advantage of the labor markets and infrastructure of US cities like Omaha Nebraska, and Ogden Utah. By the late 1980s, outsourced applications began to move to India and to the Philippines, starting in 1992.

The challenge commonly faced by captive centers and BPOs alike is two-fold. First, there is a perceived loss of control by prospective clients. No one would treat your customers the way you would. Then there is a perception that, over time, customer interactions would become more transactional and less intimate. That loss of intimacy would extend itself to functional departments within the prospect's company. The good news, however, is that we are experiencing the evolution of text-Web interactions into a robust rich-media-Web. For private consumers, real-time video will:

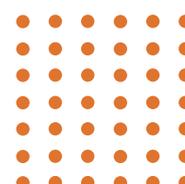
- Create new traditions, practices, and habits of communications—transforming holidays, special events, and personal relationships.
- Enable high-engagement interaction with businesses, family, or associates.

For commercial entities, real-time video will:

- Increase the flexibility, and efficiency of companies, regardless of size.
- Expand the possibilities of true customer engagement (CX), as well as for improved internal and external collaboration.
- Redefine office space, employee location assignments, and business travel requirements.

In her book, Content Rules, Ann Handley suggests the use of video to show behind the scenes at your company.

“Businesses can show what goes on in their day-to-day world that people don't see but might be interested in. What about showing, for example, how a popular product goes from concept to rolling off the assembly line? Something that seems completely every day to you could be exciting and fresh to your fans.”



Massachusetts-based Insite Motion Media offers this:

“A video featuring a creative performance by your own staff is a great way to showcase your company’s culture and promote your business without having viewers feel like they’re being advertised to.”

The Client-to-Connex window is our way of taking advantage of available technology and operationalizing these ideas, offering our clients a unique approach to intraday partnership. We get it. Outsourcing vital business functions, impacting your customers, is difficult to contemplate. This is especially true to a BPO that is thousands of miles away. You want to see us, know us and work with us as if we were in the next room.

For Connex, the plan is simple. Good plans need to be. 1) We will prioritize the challenges of our clients, positioning ourselves as a partner, facing this new reality with them, rather than a vendor needing things from them. We will go out of our way to say yes to anything they ask of us. 2) We will listen to, care for, and take no risks with the health of our employees. Driven by these two priorities, we will redefine ourselves as dynamically as we are required to. Real-time video interaction has come of age and will be a big part of everything we do going forward.

