

'Return on Collaboration' Rises
as Yardstick for Businesses When

Evaluating Shift to Online Communication Tools

Web, mobile technology expand collaboration beyond
9-to-5 workday, spur employees to share ideas and increase
productivity while protecting work-life balance.



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The ROC Concept

In a world where doing more with less has become a business survival mechanism, collaboration remains critical to success. Collaboration is now a daily requirement for organizations of all sizes as they extend the global reach of their products. The trend applies not only to Fortune 1000s but also to small- to medium-sized businesses (SMBs), from single owners to operations with less than 500 people.

Face-to-face meetings are often seen as a critical part of the collaboration equation, historically requiring expensive travel within a global enterprise or to meet customers. But flying and commuting both generate costs that can add up quickly.

With the rapid adoption of social media by both consumers and businesses alike, more professionals are looking to technology to make connecting remotely more efficient. Companies seeking an edge in 2010 should get acquainted with the idea of “Return on Collaboration,” or ROC. ROC is essentially the benefit companies realize from giving employees the tools they need to collaborate efficiently and effectively. Today’s collaboration technology includes Internet Protocol (IP-based) applications that provide presence information, share documents and presentations, allow immersive video conferencing, and, ultimately, enhance unified communications.

“Today more than ever before, organizations are putting a sharp focus on their abilities to maintain performance, while getting the highest yield possible out of their people and collaboration technology investments,” according to a recent Frost & Sullivan report.

That report also said that among companies that deployed collaboration tools, 72 percent reported better business performance.

Collaboration: A Daily Requirement

More efficient collaboration and more productive meetings will be critical points to monitor as companies decide how to connect their thinkers. Already, workers report spending 19 percent of their business days – eight hours of a 40-hour business week – in meetings, according to research by The Futures Company.

At PGI, part of our charge is how to understand if the return on collaboration concept is real and attainable. A recent implementation at a large software company was able to show real benefits from looking at collaboration as a whole system vs. separate pieces—and putting the user experience front and center.

This company’s employees around the world were adopting the technologies in a siloed fashion and were finding them increasingly cumbersome to use. Set-up took forever—registering to get an account, waiting for a booking confirmation, scheduling the conference and then copying and pasting to get everything in one place so the invitation could be e-mailed – all for a 15-minute meeting.

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Increasing Productivity

Not a good scenario for a company that was relying more and more on online conferences to meet customer implementation timeframes and other key demands. In addition, the company had growing concerns about the security of its patchwork conferencing system. So they set a goal to standardize the way its employees, customers and partners collaborate—ensuring everyone would meet the same way in a branded, secure environment. And they smartly understood that they needed an easy-to-use solution that its people would readily embrace so that various departments wouldn't seek their own vendors for online conferencing purposes.

This company decided to use PGi to create one system, manage it and support it. A greater ROC—Return on Collaboration—is precisely what the company gained. Some top level metrics include:

What 'Return on Collaboration' looks like

- > Increased productivity by reduced average meeting time from 46 to 37 minutes
- > Faster start-up time for meetings—what used to take 7-10 minutes now takes a minute
- > Increased collaboration—from 80,000 meetings a month to 300,000
- > Across-the-board travel costs reduced by more than one third

Further, the company believes its employees' quality of life has improved because they don't have to hop on a plane as often. It's a softer metric, but one just as important, for anyone who has spent time waiting on an airplane.

The average domestic business trip in the U.S. was about \$1,054 in 2009, according to research by American Express Business Travel. Additionally, the U.S. Census reports that Americans spend about 100 hours commuting every year. And throughout the U.K., workers devote nearly 22 million hours every day to commuting, equivalent to about \$416 million worth of work, according to a survey by the Trades Union Congress, a federation of trade unions.

But the global economic slowdown and a changing workforce mean that business travel, in some cases, limits the ability of organizations to convene multiple stakeholders. More than ever, technology is a valuable way to bridge offices, regions and viewpoints. According to Econsultancy, which provides advice and insight on digital marketing and ecommerce:

- > Facebook claims that 50 percent of active users log into the site each day, which would translate to 175 million users every 24 hours.
- > Twitter now has 75 million user accounts, including 15 million active users.
- > LinkedIn has more than 50 million worldwide members and is increasing at a rate of nearly 1 million members a month.

Meeting Misery Magnified:

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Collaboration Moves from Boardroom to Living Room

In the past, businesses communications had been siloed. Collaboration once had been limited to the office; now it reaches many in their living rooms at home.

An employee may be on the phone and in the course of the call receive an instant message or e-mail. Colleagues have an expectation of ongoing dialogues. But the discussion happens not just in the office. It happens in the home. It happens with friends. It happens across all kinds of modes and mediums. Parents know that they're just as likely to approve a project from their office desk during the work week as they are on Saturday at their kid's soccer game.

Functionally, the 9-to-5 workday has officially gone out of business. Technology's role is to help facilitate the transition so that workers – otherwise known as people – can convert higher productivity into personal time back. Increasing efficiency across personal venues is another way to evaluate ROC.

Professionals are busy balancing work and life. Technology, these professionals say, can be a lifeline. A majority (54 percent) say collaboration tools help them gain work-life balance and a similar number (52 percent) say communications technologies help them gain control (Frost & Sullivan).

And they don't have to be part of a multinational behemoth to do it. The ease and simplicity of a collaboration solution is within reach of an SMB, even as small as a sole proprietorship.

Many Already Examining ROC

Collaboration through communications technology creates better business performance. And whether they call it ROC or not, many organizations, especially SMBs, already focus on the ability to maintain high levels of performance through collaboration. And while conventional wisdom once held that collaboration tools exclusively relied on hardware and network requirements, innovations in IP-based tools makes certain that has no longer the case.

The concept of ROC captures the broader concept of improvement realized when functional collaboration emerges relative to the overall amount of money invested in that functional area. A fundamental requirement for collaboration is communication. Conceived in this way, collaboration through any platform enables people to share what they're working on and what they're thinking about.

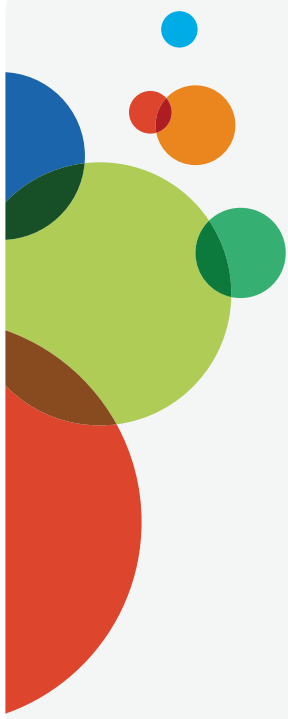
While collaboration technology addresses the very tactical response of saving travel and operations costs, it also contributes to the strategic outlook of industry direction and corporate positioning.

Return on Collaboration

Workers want to collaborate in ways that are productive, engaging and fun. As communication technologies advance, we will see more products and services that replicate the benefits of face-to-face meetings in a virtual environment.

As businesses contemplate the right collaboration solutions, they need to first focus internally and understand how and why they hold meetings. One way to begin is to evaluate the frequency of meetings. Another way to start is to evaluate the kinds of meetings held, anything from traditional sales meetings, staff meetings, reporting meetings to webinars.

By turning the lens inward, decision-makers can match their metrics for meetings success with the many functional applications available. Many companies of various sizes already are doing this and once executives realize their teams could be 50 percent more productive by using collaboration technology, they become more open to exploring tools that could be uniquely adapted to drive both organizational and personal success.



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About Us

The world collaborates with PGi. Our advanced meeting, conferencing and collaboration solutions energize people and organizations to connect more meaningfully and work together more productively. PGi is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia with operations in 24 countries worldwide.

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