



## Telepresence in my pocket

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The world has taken a number of baby steps on the road to effective video conferencing. A new offering from US company Vidyo has opened the possibility of real telepresence for everyone.

Sometimes, an industry flounders for a long time to find the perfect solution to the agreed problem. So it is with video conferencing.

Inexpensive, flexible, high-quality, mobile.

Most readers will agree that there is no video conferencing solution that can attract all of those terms. We've looked at simple Skype video systems that fail on the quality (and probably the mobile) aspect.

Alternately, the huge resource demands and buy-in cost of the Cisco telepresence systems ensure that probably only the 'high quality' component is fully achieved.

iWire has experienced the Cisco solution on one of Tata Communications' [facilities](#) in Singapore and was very impressed with the quality that could be achieved with a 20Mb/sec connection and hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Enter a small company called [Vidyo](#). Founded just 5 years ago by current President & CEO Ofer Shapiro along with Avery More and Alex Eleftheriadis the company of just 100 employees is turning video conferencing on its head.

According to Shapiro, "Video conferencing should be as accessible and spontaneous as any other form of business communications. One of the most often heard complaints about videoconferencing is that, despite all of the new products, it's still too difficult to use. Compared to traditional dedicated appliance-based offerings, Vidyo's executive desktop solution delivers this long-awaited ease-of-use for one-tenth of the price of any comparable product. The simplicity and intuitive design of the VidyoPortal™ graphical user interface on a multi-purpose touch screen computer finally puts telepresence quality video communications at an executive's finger tips."

Based on a centralised video portal, the Vidyo suite of products will permit a quality image to be delivered to just about any network-connected device.

At a media event in Singapore, the company demonstrated excellent quality full-screen conferencing on a 24" touchscreen monitor attached to the Internet via a 3G card. The fully-configured screen is available for around \$US1,000.

The system obviously included the ability to share screens (for slide-shows or interactive drawing tools) as well as a variety of split-screen modes for multiple participants.

Then we see the piece de resistance.

The same image was delivered to a participant via a Google Nexus One Android-based phone. Shapiro hinted that the iPhone (and presumably the iPad) would be coming soon. He also indicated that although other smartphone platforms would be supported, he had doubts regarding the ability of blackberry devices to contain sufficient processing power.

This means that a conference participant could be anywhere in the world.

Telepresence in everyone's pocket!

Based on their own codec (called Scalable Video Coding – SVC), the Vidyo system offers a highly compressed, but equally high quality video stream for all manner of devices. In addition, the system offers 128 bit AES encryption for those security-conscious users.

There is also a gateway to communicate with other platforms (Polycom etc) however Shapiro noted that "80% of customers ask for it, but only 2% actually use it." Why would you? The cost-per-seat of the Vidyo product is so low that the other systems can be quickly phased out.

As the system is maturing, additional uses are becoming evident. For instance the newly announced [VidyoHealth](#) which, amongst other applications, permits easy-to-use remote medical consultations for stay-at-home elderly people.

Clearly such a system must be very easy to use (the patient may-well be impaired in some way) and offer the flexibility needed by the consulting physician or nurse. And it is.

Commenting on the ease of use compared to far too many other systems, Ofer Shapiro joked that "this was probably the first time a video conference system actually lowered someone's blood pressure!"

Ideal for organisations requiring a low-cost universal solution, the Vidyo product avoids the need for highly expensive specialist telepresence suites and instead brings the conference to the user.

*The author travelled to Singapore as a guest of NetEvents*