

Tata launches hosted telepresence

Tata Communications has launched a global hosted and managed telepresence solution, based on Cisco TelePresence. And it is bringing a new twist to the telepresence story: support for the hosted telepresence service will be provided by a series of Tata group companies.

This new flavour of telepresence is an interesting one. Tata Communications intends to provide a hosted infrastructure, connectivity, meeting management, a concierge service, and booking and scheduling tools. So it presents itself like many existing flavours of telepresence, but it distinguishes itself from other managed services by the hosting element of the proposition. By hosting the service on Tata's network, the call manager and telepresence manager applications sit in the network, reducing the complexity on site and the cost to manage these applications. Tata Communications' managed service also facilitates interoperability between existing Cisco telepresence meeting rooms, both private and public.

Among other managed services providers, only AT&T to our knowledge is offering a similarly hosted service.

Tata Communications is targeting communities of interest with its new videoconferencing offer. By being the single point of contact it can work with suppliers and customers in tandem to provide a cost-effective solution to telepresence.

One of these communities of interest is the Tata group and its partners. Tata Communications has so far set up a number of rooms within the Tata group. It has also introduced a pay-per-use telepresence solution in the Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces chain. The pay-per-use solution will enable businesses to use five rooms in Boston, New York, London, Mumbai and Bangalore. It has also set up four public rooms for the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), which are situated in Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad.

There are two ways to look at this. Tata doesn't have any big showcase paying customers, and is hedging its bets about whether telepresence is a commercial standalone prospect. Or it could be a very tough proving ground for managed telepresence; Tata companies, and the Tata board, could be especially demanding. If it can succeed in providing successful services to the conglomerate then it would be a good indication that it is possible to provide the same service elsewhere.

At the very least, this solution represents a new option for a more affordable managed telepresence solution. Equipment costs may still be prohibitive for some enterprises, but Tata Communications is bringing a different business case to the table by introducing a hosted service.

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