



## NEWS

# Chambers' Telepresence Vision Sign Of Demand For Collaboration



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Videoconferencing's been an elusive tech dream. This time, it'll plug into other collaborative tools

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Cisco CEO John Chambers is always on the lookout for the next killer app. "Every customer we've shown it to just goes, 'I've gotta have this,'" Chambers says excitedly about his latest pet project. President Bush got a demo during his visit to Cisco's headquarters last month.

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What's this must-have thing? Next-generation videoconferencing, known as "telepresence." Video meetings have been promised for decades, but they're still pretty much limited to occasional business functions. The broadband network, however, is ready to handle videoconferencing now, even if employees still aren't so sure. The Web is all about instant messaging, Web conferencing, blogs, wikis, streaming video--all platforms for exchanging ideas. So why shouldn't these apps be made better and simpler, combined into a more "real" communications experience? People need better collaboration tools on the job, and video in some form is going to be part of the mix.

Chambers' message is intriguing in part because video's been so tantalizingly out of reach for years. Today it's either ultra-high quality--a Hewlett-Packard and DreamWorks partnership will outfit videoconferencing studios, if money's not a big obstacle--or depressingly low end. Chambers' telepresence dangles the



promise of a high-end desktop app that's as easy to use as E-mail.

The pressure is on IT teams to deliver better collaboration. U.S. gas

Videoconferencing's been

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prices are back up to around \$3 a gallon, with no sign of a drop, giving companies an incentive to replace travel with rich Internet collaboration. And government officials are warning municipalities and businesses to plan for a widespread flu outbreak, including keeping people separated from each other if necessary. If there ever was a time to get people communicating online without denying them the benefits of physical proximity, this is it.

linked to bulky gear and high costs. New offerings must blend with phones, E-mail, and IM for companies to give them a shot. Cisco's Chambers says telepresence is the ultimate goal.

Sacha Lecca, Chambers photo by Bloomberg News

The message at the Interop trade show last week went far beyond video, as Microsoft showed off Live Communicator and Cisco hawked Unified Personal Communicator, both of which combine voice, IM, data, and video in a PC interface, letting people move from one to another easily. Smaller vendors like Interwise unveiled new versions of conferencing software, while others claimed new levels of interoperability among their technologies for advanced collaboration. Many of the offerings make much of presence, the ability to share a person's availability for calls or messages.

Skype shows how expectations for collaboration are changing. The voice-over-IP startup, acquired by eBay in October, already lets people make free voice and video calls over the Internet, and the beta software it launched last week expands support for group conversations. One option flashes participants' photos on the screen as they speak, and another pulls in people for a group voice chat. Also new are Skypecasts--live, moderated voice conversations for groups of up to 100 people. And this is from a free consumer app.

### Working In Unity


There must be a better way to collaborate than the hodgepodge of options most knowledge workers skip among today. Three-fourths of 811 attendees surveyed at Interop say the ability to communicate by voice, IM, E-mail, fax, and video in an integrated fashion could significantly improve how their companies do business, and 58% plan to invest in unified communication. The Radicati Group estimates that the market for unified collaboration tools, which was \$469 million last year, will grow to \$939 million by 2009. Proctor & Gamble is an example of where things could be heading. The consumer goods company is offering Microsoft's Outlook E-mail client, Communicator instant messaging software, Live Meeting conferencing service, and SharePoint document-sharing portal to as many as 100,000 of its workers (see "[Selling Soap, Razors--And Collaboration](#)," Nov. 14).

See John Chambers talk about telepresence

CD&L, a package delivery company with employees in more than 100 U.S. locations, just began rolling out Web conferencing and a VoIP application that includes E-mail and unified voice. CIO David Kronick says he'd be interested in software that combines presence, IM, conferencing, and other collaborative apps in a single offering, helping the company eliminate phone tag and E-mail trails. "To quickly and efficiently create ad hoc conference calls and meetings, with all the tools and info available to deal with the issues, would be of great benefit," he says.

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