

# Cisco Assures Video Conferencing with Prime Collaboration Manager

## Event

In April 2011, Cisco Systems introduced a new management product called Cisco Prime™ Collaboration Manager with capabilities for assuring reliability and quality of IP videoconferencing services when using Cisco's range of IP videoconferencing technology solutions. The new product is intended to augment the Unified Communications Management Suite (UCMS) of solutions, and will support the full range of videoconferencing settings, from basic point-to-point to high-end, multi-party telepresence deployed in the enterprise. The initial release is for the enterprise, but Cisco announced plans for support of MSP and carrier environments in future releases. Cisco Prime Collaboration Manager has completed extensive field trials and FCS is scheduled for early Q2 of 2011.

## The Promises and Pitfalls of IP Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing is not a transparent technology in the enterprise, but rather one that can be both transformative and highly disruptive. The business drivers for videoconferencing can be very compelling, most particularly in terms of improving the efficiency of internal collaborative work processes across geographically distributed organizations and as a real and highly cost-effective alternative to business travel. Cisco Systems, who leverages this technology extensively across its own organization, also claims they have seen it open the door to unexpected levels of accelerated innovation and improved customer relations, both of which contribute positive long-term value. Initially, video conferencing systems have been cost prohibitive for the masses, and were limited to either select boardroom deployment or even outsourced, but the advent of IP-based options running over a common, converged data/voice/video network have changed that. As video conferencing as a whole becomes more viable in the enterprise, high-end telepresence systems will be joined by larger numbers of lower-quality videoconferencing, fueled in part through video enabled devices such as laptops and tablets.

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But in order for video conferencing to deliver promised business values, IT organizations must also be certain that they will be able deliver high quality of experience for those using the systems. This is important for all types of video conferencing, but none more so than telepresence, where multiple HD displays and multi-channel audio requires the careful management of networking and endpoint resources. In order to plan properly, both network bandwidth and prioritization needs must be accommodated. And for supporting live use and troubleshooting issues, diagnostic information needs to be available not only from endpoints but also from the delivery infrastructure.

The challenge for networking, engineering and operations teams is that they lack end-to-end visibility into the videoconferencing applications and the resources that are required to deliver them. Current solutions for monitoring videoconferencing consist of point solutions that can provide bits and pieces of this information, but fall short in tying endpoint assessments with the delivery infrastructure. Furthermore, most are designed to deliver insights after the call/session has completed, but cannot help reveal what is happening in real time, during the session. The result is a piecemeal approach

and consequently, IT teams have been forced to cobble together a mix of network and VoIP/video monitoring tools from amongst a handful of point solutions and ad hoc homegrown tools. The problem with this approach is that it provides a very fragmented view of what is happening during a videoconference session, making it difficult to assure consistent performance. In order to effectively troubleshoot video streaming issues the route needs to be traced as the video is streaming to know exactly what network path is taken and what devices are traversed. Otherwise, after the fact the trail goes cold, usually resulting in unresolved issues that are likely to recur.

## Cisco Prime Collaboration Manager to the Rescue

Cisco has recognized this gap from both their own experience with video conferencing as well as that of their customers and drew on their depth of knowledge and technology for delivering network-based services to create Cisco Prime Collaboration Manager, a software solution designed to help those deploying Cisco IP videoconferencing technology. The features and functionality are specific to managing, monitoring, and administrating videoconferencing and include:

- End-to-end service monitoring for Video sessions
- Visual path trace of sessions in progress
- Real-time fault, troubleshooting and diagnostics
- Inventory and usage reports
- Operator controls to prioritize sessions for monitoring
- Historical analysis of past sessions and quality
- Inventory management and reporting

All of these capabilities can be used either by personnel who are dedicated to support videoconferencing technology deployments or those responsible for broader IT infrastructure.

Perhaps one of the most compelling features of Prime Collaboration Manager is the visual/graphic path tracing, which can identify all infrastructure elements in the session delivery path. Classic network management tools will provide visibility to the entire network infrastructure, but are not currently designed to trace the route of running video streams down to the specific devices that are being traversed. This is a unique feature for a video domain management solution to do and Cisco goes even further by revealing specific hop-by-hop and device-by-device performance data if

any of those path devices are Cisco elements configured to support MediaNet. With MediaNet, Cisco network devices can relay specific details on performance metrics such as jitter, latency, and packet loss at the level of granularity of each video/audio stream, and by displaying these metrics directly on the same view as the endpoints, operators can immediately recognize if quality issues are due to network issues or the endpoints.

The initial release of Prime Collaboration Manager is intended to bring videoconferencing assurance to internal enterprise IT teams that must support Cisco Telepresence deployments. Future releases will expand on this to include multi-tenant capabilities (for service provider settings) as well as add support for other Cisco collaboration solutions such as the former Tandberg videoconferencing product lines (to be added mid-2011.) Prime Collaboration Manager and Cisco's Telepresence Management System (TMS, formerly Tanderberg Management System) fully complement each other, and when deployed together will provide a complete range of lifecycle management including not only end-

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to-end monitoring, but also configuration, provisioning, scheduling, etc. Support for WebEx Web conferencing will be added later with additional plans to support desktop, tablet (Cisco Cius), and other video phones in the coming year.

## EMA Perspective

With the arrival of ubiquitous, highly reliable IP networks, the cost of deploying videoconferencing, even high-end telepresence, is dropping making the technology more compelling for organizations of all sizes. And beyond those systems designed specifically for the workplace, video-enabled devices from the consumer marketplace are now commonplace and are creeping, slowly but steadily, into positions of business relevance. As interactive video and videoconferencing become the norm, ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES® (EMA™) analysts believe that they cannot be treated as separate entities. They tap into key networking equipment and resources, and so have a direct impact on the network. IT departments need tools that integrate videoconferencing management into mainstream operations, alongside all other network-delivered services and applications.

Cisco's new solution, Prime Collaboration Manager, is connecting the dots. Built from the ground up for the specific purpose of converging the management of videoconferencing and delivery substrates, it is not a presentation layer over an existing product, but a solution designed to tap into the power of the Cisco infrastructure. Prime Collaboration Manager will be indispensable as a standalone option for those deploying Cisco videoconferencing solutions for the asset management, real-time path analysis, and reporting features. But the solution really shines when used in conjunction with the Unified Communications System Manager (UCMS), TMS, and MediaNet-enabled Cisco network infrastructure devices. Collectively, the Cisco solution will help IT departments not only better manage videoconferencing equipment, but also provide IT teams with a much deeper understanding of what is happening along the path so they can troubleshoot problems as they happen, while also doing a better job of understanding the resources needed to ensure adequate end-user experience. This is a major step in the right direction to make videoconferencing and telepresence a reality in the corporate enterprise.

### About EMA

Founded in 1996, Enterprise Management Associates (EMA) is a leading industry analyst firm that provides deep insight across the full spectrum of IT and data management technologies. EMA analysts leverage a unique combination of practical experience, insight into industry best practices, and in-depth knowledge of current and planned vendor solutions to help its clients achieve their goals. Learn more about EMA research, analysis, and consulting services for enterprise IT professionals, lines of business users, and IT vendors at [www.enterprisemanagement.com](http://www.enterprisemanagement.com) or follow EMA on Twitter ([http://twitter.com/ema\\_research](http://twitter.com/ema_research)).

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