Cisco CMR Sidekick

Cisco IT Methods

Introduction

While it has been easy to recognize the collaboration value of Web and video conferences, setting them up hasn't been so easy. Previously, we had a traditional conferencing environment, where the host needed to schedule the meeting rooms, identify the participants and send meeting invitations, and reserve the necessary video conferencing resources. If the meeting time changed, the host needed to do these things all over again. This effort made users reluctant to host conferences, which meant that Cisco was likely losing the benefits of online collaboration over video.

Many of these hurdles disappeared when we implemented Cisco Collaboration Meeting Rooms (CMR), both the cloud and premises versions. CMR Cloud is a video collaboration service that combines WebEx® Personal Rooms and the cloud-based WebEx Video Bridge into a user's virtual, always-available, personal meeting room. CMR Cloud gives our users a way to start an unplanned meeting whenever they need it.

The CMR Premises implementation offers similar capabilities, but the service uses our internal Cisco® videoconferencing infrastructure.

The personalized collaboration meeting rooms are very popular with Cisco salespeople, who often use them for impromptu conferences that connect customers with our technical experts. These users want the CMR experience to be easy and efficient, so Cisco IT has developed the CMR Sidekick tool to help users share, join, and manage their personal CMR meeting rooms. Cisco IT used the Conference Control API within Cisco CMR to build this custom application, and Cisco employees found it so useful that Cisco Advanced Services is making a customized tool like this available to customers.

"As users made the transition from scheduled to impromptu online meetings, they wanted a way to share their personal meeting room information that would be as easy as sharing their email address," says Manny Garcia, member of the technical staff in Cisco IT. "We also wanted to improve the workflow for communications about CMR meetings by simplifying the user's communications tasks and improving the overall experience for all meeting participants."

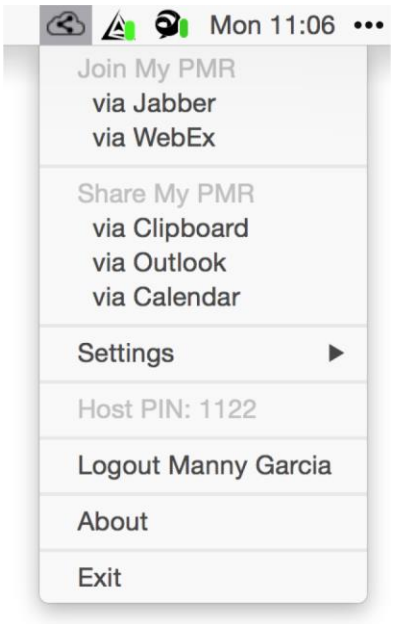
Deployment

The CMR Sidekick application helps users easily perform the two most common conferencing tasks: Joining meetings and sending access information to participants. This application, available to both PC and Apple users, appears in the desktop tray for quick startup.

From the CMR Sidekick menu, a user can join their personal meeting room via their Cisco Jabber® client or via a WebEx session in a browser. (Figure 1) The user can also send meeting information to other participants via an Outlook invitation, a shared calendar, or a clipboard link that can be pasted into an email or instant message. The CMR information is formatted correctly for each message type.

CMR Sidekick also displays the user's PIN, which is required to access the personal meeting room. This feature avoids support calls for resetting a PIN that a user has lost or forgotten.

Figure 1. Cisco CMR Sidekick Menu



In addition to Sidekick, Cisco IT has developed other tools for use with Cisco CMR, including:

- **Directory.** An interface with our Active Directory simplifies meeting invitations. We have also added CMR room information to each user's directory listing, which supports a "click-to-connect" feature that other employees can use to join a CMR meeting from any browser or endpoint.
- **Cisco Jabber integration.** During a call using Cisco Jabber, users can invite someone to join their personal CMR room for a quick online conference. (Figure 2) We created a custom Jabber tab for this feature and starting the meeting means just clicking a button.
- **Templates.** Standard templates for invitations and related conferencing messages are available for users to quickly customize with their meeting information.

Figure 2. Access to a CMR Personal Room within Cisco Jabber

Deployment Design

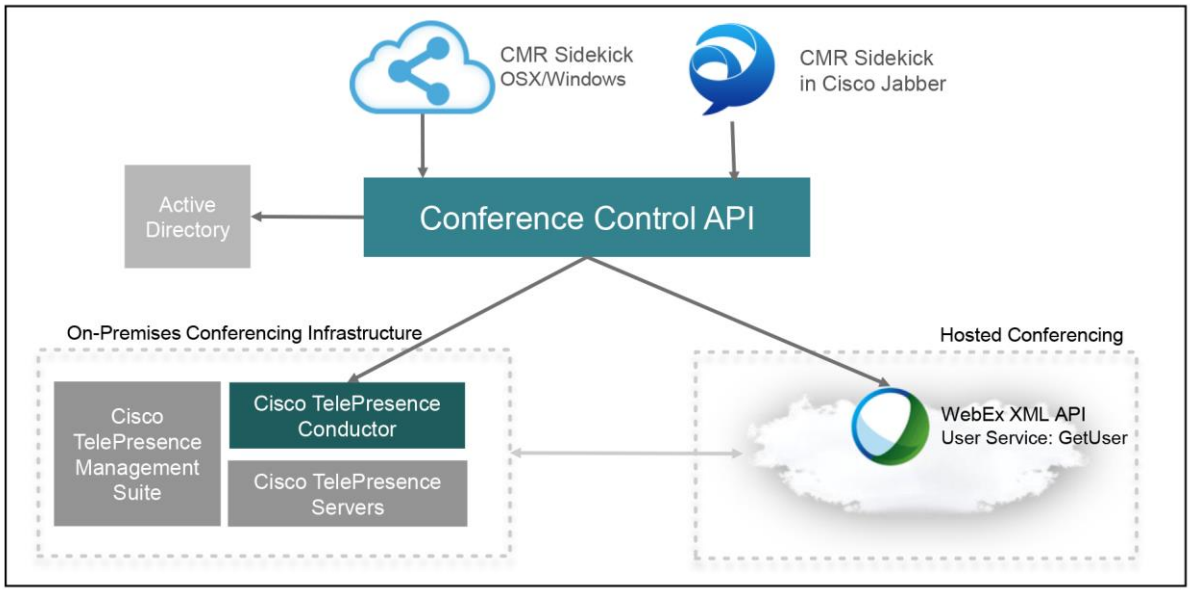
Figure 3 shows how the CMR Sidekick communicates with our on-premises conferencing infrastructure and the WebEx cloud. These connections are made through a Conference Control API, developed by Cisco IT to provide a simple interface for applications to manage videoconferences. This API also manages communications with the employee listings in Active Directory.

For an on-premises CMR deployment, the API manages communications with the Cisco TelePresence® Conductor that orchestrates the servers hosting TelePresence and the Cisco TelePresence Management Suite.

For the WebEx cloud-hosted conferencing, the Conference Control API communicates with the XML API from WebEx and the user service to correctly identify meeting hosts.

“Although the API connections to the on-premises and cloud deployments are very different from each other, the user experience is very much the same for both conferencing services,” says Garcia.

Figure 3. Cisco IT Deployment Design for CMR Sidekick



User Adoption

The need for a client like CMR Sidekick was validated by strong adoption by early users. For those who are active meeting hosts in our ACE program, 80 percent downloaded the CMR Sidekick client and used it for at least one meeting.

Next Steps

The Cisco AS developed Sidekick application shows the power of customization using WebEx and Cisco product APIs to solve unique use cases. While these types of applications use WebEx APIs in their development, end user issues due to these purpose built application are not supported by WebEx product, technical, and customer success support teams. Application development teams need to provide end user support for their purpose built applications. WebEx does provide API support for the application developer through Cisco DevNet (https://developer.cisco.com/site/webex-developer/develop-test/try-webex-apis/).

Cisco Advanced Services will offer development of similar tools with custom branding for Cisco customers, especially for on-premises Cisco CMR deployments.

For More Information

Cisco Collaboration Meeting Rooms

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