

personal technology

The Skype's the Limit

BY LAURA HAIGHT | PHOTOGRAPH BY NILL SILVER PHOTOGRAPHY

Eye contact, a winning smile, a firm handshake: These have been the tools of the deal. But technology is changing the way business does business and today's handshake is a communication protocol between networks and eye contact a virtual interface. The future, once imagined by Gene Roddenberry and Issac Asimov, is here.

Businesses in the upstate are finding the evolution of technology is fundamentally changing the way they do business.

Skype "played a huge role" as Firestarter Spike Jones at Brains on Fire put together a presentation for Amplify 2009, an innovation and thought leadership conference in Sydney, Australia, last June. With a 14-hour time difference and budget-busting air fare, BoF and Aussie-sponsor AMP used Skype to plan the program and work out logistics.

Accessibility, an easy-to-use interface, oh – and did we mention – it's free, have made Skype a "medium of choice" for many. "It's what everyone knows and understands," says Jones, who uses it for podcasts and interviews.

Phil Yanov, technology blogger and leader of the GSA Technology Council, sees Skype as the video conferencing starter kit. Independent consultants whose bread and butter is personal interactions will definitely benefit from taking Skype for a test drive. "Play with it. Figure out how it works. Everything will get better – you can upgrade your microphone, upgrade your camera for a better experience," he says.

One thing you can't do, Yanov cautions, is create a relationship with remote tools. "... (it's) is a great way to communicate among established teams," he says, but recalls a company asking advice on using video or web conferencing for sales calls. He suggested they back off that idea: "You can't establish a relationship on such tenuous stuff."

But for businesses with remote offices, web or video conferencing is a tremendous asset.



Kevin Laird is an engineer with Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood, a 300-person engineering firm based in Montgomery, AL, and serving the southeast. The Greenville office is a small outpost (“but growing!” Laird says) that uses high-end video conferencing and web-based technology to keep in touch with the home office.

For the past seven or eight months, he’s had one to two online conferences a week. “It’s pretty cool, we can have a landscape architect in one office, an electrical designer in another office, all having a design meeting, and it be productive,” he says. It’s “a great benefit to our clients because it brings the whole level of expertise of the firm to each office.”

Skype and various other web conferencing tools can be affected by network lockups, delays, jittery images and signal loss – all things we’ve come to accept as a necessary evil. But when communication clarity is critical, high-end video conferencing may be the way to go. At Eye2Eye – a video conferencing service in Greenville – court depositions and job interviews



Video conferencing at Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood's Greenville office.

are two of the bread and butter clients. “It’s a better quality, higher bandwidth. And when quality matters, your desktop webcam isn’t going to do it,” notes Eye2Eye’s Susan Wade.

Making expertise, training and development more accessible and affordable is a major advantage. Deb Sofield, a Greenville-based executive speech and presentation coach, who works

with clients and associations all around the world, uses Skype and Oovoo, a video tool that allows multiple connections, to conduct training and coaching sessions. “Sometimes it’s a little disappointing when they say, “Do you just want to do this on Skype,” and I say “No, I’ve always wanted to see Slovakia!”

Sofield conducted training for women in politics in Slovakia recently as part of a conference all done on Skype. And she uses video conferencing when coaching clients on their presentation and speaking skills.

Similarly, the Social Media Club of Greenville, in November hosted a Bahrain student discussing YouTube and social media’s role in combating torture and abuse in her country. Originally,

» executive lifestyle

it was intended to be in person, but her entrance to the U.S. was denied. "So we scrambled and got her on Skype," says SMC president Trey Pennington. It's just another example, he says, of opening "doors that would have been immovable two years ago."

If you're planning on using Skype or another video tool for business, bear in mind the developing Skype-iquette.

Do not wear a white shirt, warns Sofield, you'll wash out on the video.

Be careful of your environment and your presentation. Clear your desk of clutter and make sure your webcam is not looking out the window behind you. And although you may be wearing shorts, make sure you've got a suit jacket and tie on!

Be careful with gestures. Sofield notes there can be a 3-second delay and the picture can be out of context with the audio.

Eye contact! Look at the camera not at the screen, Sofield says.

Behave yourself, Pennington advises, "I am amazed at how negative people can be as soon as they have a computer keyboard."

Want to avoid unwanted Skype invitations? Spike Jones advises you keep your client turned off unless you have a scheduled meeting. (For those with home offices that also avoids getting caught at your desk in your PJs!) ■



Skype-iquette

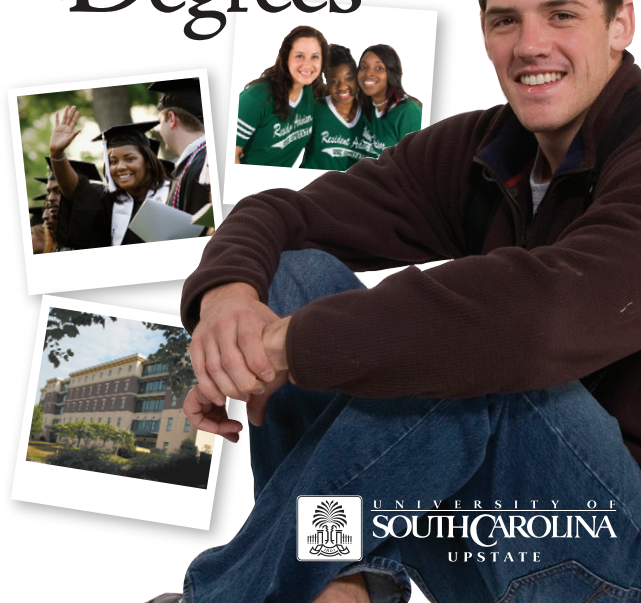
Keep it professional

Ditch the clutter

No hand tricks

Eyes on the camera

Inspiring the Upstate by Degrees



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH CAROLINA
UPSTATE



www.uscupstate.edu

Growing in South Carolina



This year, Collins & Lacy celebrates 25 years of providing legal services to South Carolina.

Now in Greenville, Collins & Lacy brings its experience in more than 20 practice areas to the Upstate. When you seek attorneys who know, seek Collins & Lacy.

Collins & Lacy
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Attorneys who know

www.collinsandlacy.com

COLUMBIA
1330 Lady St.,
Sixth Floor
Columbia, SC 29201
P: 803.256.2660

GREENVILLE
37 Villa Road,
Suite 500
Greenville, SC
29615
P: 864.282.9100

MYRTLE BEACH
1500 Highway 17 N
Suite 204
Surfside Beach,
SC 29575
P: 843.477.0500