

Deploying Skype Room Systems and Surface Hub devices in meeting rooms

Because effective meetings are fundamental for every information worker to be productive, Microsoft IT strives to provide an engaging, high quality, highly reliable meeting experiences in every one of our 13,000 conference rooms worldwide.

In an effort to achieve those goals, we studied meetings in 65 countries/regions to help us understand what our employees wanted from a meeting and what was frustrating them. By doing so, we identified three key elements of meeting satisfaction:

- In-person attendees must be able to start a meeting instantly. There should be no complicated cables to connect, inputs to switch, or devices to configure.
- All attendees—in-person and remote—must be able to hear and be heard clearly and reliably.
- Remote attendees must feel like first-class participants in the meeting.

Next, Microsoft IT worked with Skype for Business to create meeting room experiences with Microsoft Surface Hub and the next generation of Skype Room Systems that achieved those goals. Microsoft Surface Hub and the new Skype Room Systems devices from Logitech, Crestron, and Polycom, are designed to transform every meeting space — not just executive and specialized work spaces, but meeting spaces of every shape, size, and purpose—to conduct more efficient, higher quality meetings.

Better meeting spaces with Skype for Business

Microsoft and partners such as Logitech, Crestron, and Polycom offer a family of technologies that bring the new Skype for Business meeting experience into meeting spaces of all shapes and sizes. Microsoft IT is designing its meeting strategy around two solutions.

The next generation of Skype Room Systems

We are in the process of bringing high quality meetings to the majority of our meeting spaces—including the largest, most complex spaces—with the next generation of Skype Room Systems, which is a scalable, cost-effective way to upgrade an existing meeting space to a full HD audio, video, one-touch-join Skype for Business experience. Microsoft partners Logitech, Crestron, and Polycom have announced new Skype Room Systems, with a broad array of audio / video peripherals, providing many options that fit a variety of rooms and use cases while delivering a consistent, easy-to-use experience.

Microsoft Surface Hub

We meet the needs of teams who need unparalleled ink and touch front-of-room collaboration capabilities with [Microsoft Surface Hub](#).

Skype Room Systems and Microsoft Surface Hub are complimentary devices in a meeting room portfolio that have consistent, high quality, highly reliable meeting experiences, no matter where they meet.

Start meetings faster

Joining a meeting quickly and without problems shouldn't be rocket science. Yet for years this simple goal has eluded not just common conference rooms but expensive, high end solutions as well. Joining a meeting quickly remains one of the three top user pain points for enterprise employees.

That's why both the next generation of Skype Room Systems and Microsoft Surface Hub enable "one-touch join" in every meeting room. Employees see their scheduled meetings prominently displayed and can start them with a tap. If they haven't scheduled a meeting, they can easily invite attendees from the console or add the room to an existing conference call.

Hear and be heard

Skype for Business meeting room solutions help ensure high quality audio for both in-room and remote attendees.

Hard-wired and preconfigured

In most conference rooms of the past, if employees wanted high quality digital audio, they had to connect their PCs to the conference room telephone with a USB cable, adding additional steps and delays.

By contrast, Skype for Business meeting room devices are connected directly to the network so they don't require a connection to a PC. This helps to provide a high bandwidth, preconfigured audio experience with fewer dropped calls, and less jitter and lag. In addition, when employees join a call on Skype for Business from their PC, their audio is automatically muted to prevent annoying echoes.

One experience, many options

Every meeting room has unique characteristics, and it's important to choose devices that work best with those characteristics. The next generation of Skype Room Systems offers a variety of peripherals from Logitech, Crestron, and Polycom that enable a familiar experience across a variety of spaces.

Microsoft IT sets device standards based on the size of the room:

- Cost-effective speakerphones, such as the Logitech Connect, for small rooms (two to four people)
- Powerful center-of-table devices such as the Polycom RealPresence Trio for medium-sized rooms (six to fourteen people)
- In-ceiling integrated audio solutions for large rooms to reach multiple rows of meeting attendees
- Audio devices are connected directly to—and are controlled by—the next generation Skype Room System console, so employees don't need to worry about learning how to use different devices.

First-class remote attendees

Employees often feel like second- or third-class citizens when dialing into a conference call. They can't see who's in the room, are left twiddling their thumbs when someone works at a whiteboard, and in-room attendees often forget that remote attendees are even on the call.

Skype for Business meeting room solutions change the game by giving remote attendees a seat in first-class.

Video that's always on

Microsoft IT meeting studies revealed that meeting attendees rarely turn on video. For this reason, Skype for Business meeting room solutions are designed to start video automatically with preconfigured video devices. When video "just works," remote attendees benefit from seeing people interacting, and without the help of people in the meeting room. Not surprisingly, Microsoft IT has seen dramatic increases in video usage after implementing Skype for Business meeting room solutions.

Content sharing for everyone

When meeting participants need to collaborate, seeing and interacting with meeting materials can be just as important as seeing and interacting with meeting participants. Skype for Business meeting room solutions make sharing content simple. When employees want to project, Skype for Business meeting room solutions automatically share the projection with remote attendees. Conversely, content shared with the Skype meeting is automatically projected in the meeting room.

Microsoft Surface Hub offers an unparalleled whiteboarding experience by enabling meeting participants to collaborate by writing with colored ink on a large, 4K ultra-high definition, touch-enabled display and then save and share that work when the meeting ends.

Surface Hub also adds Inkback™, by which any markups done on the Surface Hub screen appear in the file on the device you're using to project, and Touchback™, which lets you control your connected laptop, tablet, or phone from the Surface Hub touchscreen. With Surface Hub, you can also natively run Office applications, run Windows 10 apps

that are optimized for large-screen collaboration, and save whiteboard content to OneDrive or send it to participants by email at the end of a meeting.



Figure 1: A Skype Meeting Room configured with Microsoft Surface Hub

Planning large-scale meeting deployments

If you are outfitting not just a single room but tens, hundreds, or possibly even thousands of meeting rooms, choosing the right solution is challenging. You may be worrying about how to:

- Develop an efficient capital planning process.
- Structure your deployment program to drive quality and consistency.
- Build a support and operations plan for your technology portfolio.
- Create change-management strategies to help employees adapt.

Microsoft IT has found that answering these questions is a critical step toward achieving a large-scale transition of the meeting experience.

Capital planning

Microsoft IT considers two scenarios when planning capital for broad scale meeting space upgrades:

- New construction and periodic lifecycle refreshes of legacy technology
- One-time technology upgrades to existing rooms

New construction and lifecycle refreshes

Microsoft IT and business planners allocate budget for all new construction and for regularly refreshing outdated equipment in meeting rooms. A rolling, four-year (25 percent per year) refresh cycle gives us a predictable capital allocation for meeting technology and the ability to continually update meeting spaces with the latest technology.

A primary advantage of Skype for Business meeting room solutions is that as AV hardware standards and capabilities evolve, the software-based user experience remains consistent. That means employees don't need to learn different technologies just because one meeting room's equipment was installed at a different time than another's.

One-time upgrades

Skype for Business meeting room solutions—and the next generation of Skype Room Systems, in particular—comprise an attractive opportunity to upgrade an existing meeting room's experience without replacing legacy AV equipment. Skype Room Systems can be added to an existing room at very low cost, with configurations starting at less than \$2000, meaning that many meeting rooms can be upgraded outside the normal lifecycle refresh cycle, in much the same way that a conference telephone can be upgraded without replacing the projector.

To ensure rapid adoption of Skype for Business meeting room solutions worldwide, Microsoft IT made sure in advance that subsidiaries worldwide planned for this upgrade.

Deployment program

Providing a consistent meeting experience across a worldwide enterprise is a daunting task. Part of the reason for this is that different sites may implement technology differently, and with inconsistent quality. Microsoft IT, working with our partners in Microsoft Real Estate and Facilities, have developed a standards-based system to ensure as much consistency as possible in all of our meeting rooms.

Room and site classifications

Classification enables us to design a consistent set of meeting standards that can be applied globally across varying regions and levels of investment.

We begin by classifying rooms by size, purpose, and seating capacity. Every meeting room in our global portfolio belongs to one of the following classifications:

- **Focus rooms** (two to four people) and **team rooms** (six to eight people) are unscheduled meeting spaces dedicated to a team's daily use. They allow the team to meet on-demand throughout their work day.
- **Small** (six to ten people), **medium** (ten to fourteen people), and **large** (fourteen to eighteen people) **conference rooms** are scheduled meeting spaces that host a variety of meeting types, often between multiple teams.
- **Extra-large** (20 or more people) and **multipurpose rooms** facilitate large, formal presentations with large groups. Extra-large rooms may have a center table with two rows of seats. Multipurpose rooms have movable seating for very large group activities and presentations. Such spaces need custom, integrated audio and advanced room controls.

After we classify rooms, we classify *sites* based on business criticality, number of employees, geographic location, and other factors. Our guidelines also classify sites by the appropriate level of investment.

Deployment standards

We deploy all meeting rooms according to a set of global design standards for each site and room classification. Deployment standards include full architectural and technical specifications, as well as a quality checklist for integrators in the field to complete to ensure consistent deployment.

Sometimes facilities planners request deviations from standards to accommodate specific concerns. Our standards teams handle these requests using a deviation governance process. Reasonable requests are approved, and sometimes even contribute to the development of future deployment standards.

Technology pilots

Microsoft IT has extensively piloted all Skype Meeting Room solutions to ensure they represent a meaningful improvement to our meeting experience:

- **User experience:** Users find the technology easy to learn and use, and they appreciate the benefits it offers.
- **Deployability:** In partnership with Microsoft Real Estate and Facilities, we design our pilot programs to provide a clear deployment specification for technology that fits our budget and integrates well with existing standards.
- **Supportability:** Our support teams are able to manage the technology even when it is deployed globally, with a goal of improving our support with capabilities with such as self-healing systems and proactive alerts.

All candidate meeting technologies go through a pilot process before they become global design standards. We begin with a prototype design in our labs. Next, we deploy the prototype design in a small number of conference rooms, both at headquarters and in the field. Then, we evaluate the solution for user experience, deployability, and supportability. If the technology improves the overall meeting experience, we add it to our standards.

Microsoft IT works with the engineering teams throughout the pilot process to drive our requirements into the development of each Skype Meeting Room solution, so that customers benefit from the work we've done as well.

Support and operations

As part of the pilot process, our support and service engineering teams continually look to improve supportability in our meeting spaces.

Today, the ability to discover meeting room problems before users experience them is limited. Except for rare managed environments with an AV technician on-site to prepare a room and troubleshoot problems, most organizations rely on "reactive support."

With Skype for Business meeting room solutions, we have a goal that when users walk into a conference room, they can be confident that all systems will work correctly and will deliver a quality experience. If there's an issue, it can be detected and resolved before users encounter it. Support personnel are alerted about failures and problems are either addressed automatically or someone is dispatched to fix problems before anyone sees them.

Skype for Business meeting room solutions use standard Microsoft management technologies such as Microsoft System Center, Microsoft Intune, and Microsoft Operations Management Suite, so our support teams are using the same familiar tools that we use to manage and support our employees' computers.

Change management

Helping users adapt to changes in meeting rooms can be difficult. Users often have little time or patience for reading documentation or even for preparing for a meeting in advance. Although Skype for Business meeting room solutions are designed for ease of use, when deploying to thousands of employees worldwide, change management challenges inevitably occur.

Training and documentation

We announce changes to meeting rooms by e-mail to employees who work nearby. Given the simple and intuitive nature of the user interfaces and connection methods for Skype for Business meeting room solutions, that is usually sufficient.

However, we have also developed a short course called "Meeting Masters" to teach employees about Skype for Business meeting room solutions in greater depth. Our goal is to get at least one person in each group or team to take the course. Meeting Masters graduates can then share their knowledge about how Skype for Business meeting room solutions work and offer best practices, tips, and tricks to their colleagues when they participate in meetings.

Effective signage

Signs in rooms are often ignored but are still helpful, especially in the first few weeks or months after deployment. We have found that three locations are best for sign placement:

- **On the outside of the door.** Our experience has shown that people tend to notice the sign and learn about the new meeting solution not when entering the room, but when they are walking past the room. This is a great opportunity to develop basic awareness.
- **On the table.** Put a sticker right on the table, next to the Skype Meeting Room touchscreen. Users naturally look there when trying to connect, so it's a great place for a few basic instructions.
- **Next to the projection surface.** The other place that people look is to the front of the room where the image is projected, so putting a sign there is also effective, especially when it has a single, clear message.

Meeting room signs should be very simple and very clear. Direct the user to perform simple actions. Provide an easy-to-type link to the meeting room web pages to provide additional details.

For more information

[Microsoft Surface Hub](#)

[Skype Room Systems](#)

[Crestron Next Generation Skype Room System](#)

[Polycom audio video solutions](#)

[Logitech SmartDock](#)

[Skype for Business](#)

[Devices certified for Skype for Business](#)

[Miracast wireless video connection](#)

[Successful meetings with Skype for Business](#)

[Managing Skype Room Systems and Surface Hub devices](#)

[Planning and supporting meetings in a complex global enterprise](#)

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