
Communicating in a travel restricted world

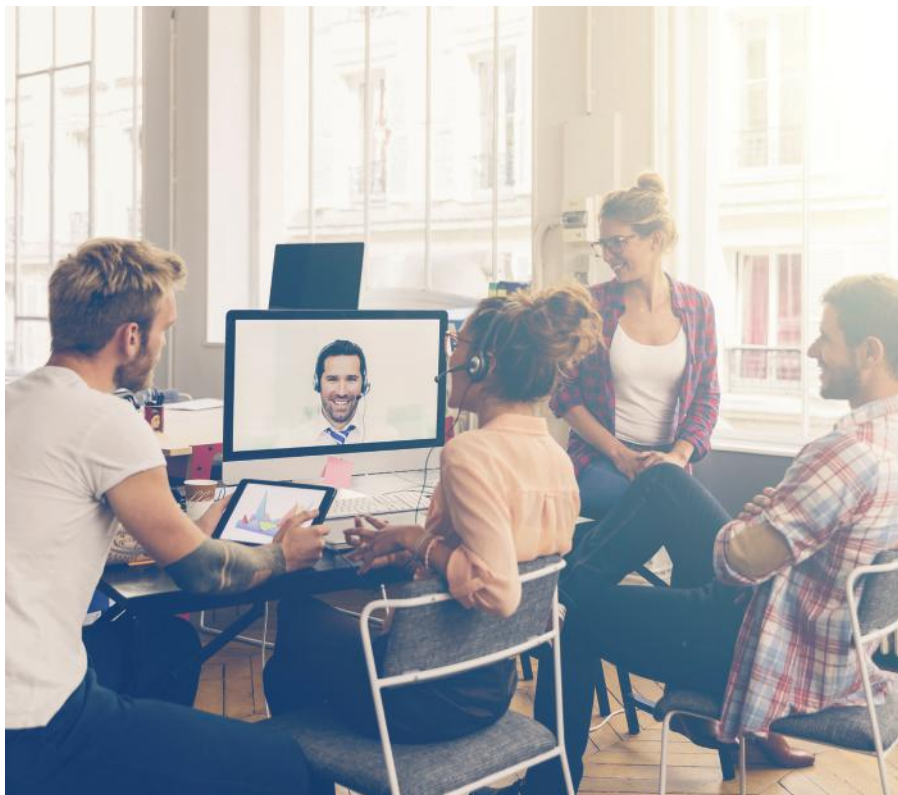
During 2020, specialist influencing & communications firm Ogilvie Ross has continued its European expansion with the development of major client projects in Frankfurt, Helsinki, Stockholm and Amsterdam with Barcelona coming online by the end of the year.

As global travel becomes more difficult, a significant amount of their work is now carried out using one to one and small group video conference calls. Business Comment asked managing partner, John Ross, if he had any suggestions to help businesses become more effective using online meeting platforms.

"For those organisations and teams where people are working remotely, the need for appropriate communication skills is greater than ever. The impact of social distancing and remote working means that we can no longer pop over to someone's desk for a quick chat or grab a couple of people for an informal meeting. We are now relying on technology for a lot of our communication. That technology whether it is telephone or video places an extra layer into the communication that needs to be worked with and is something that we have been getting more and more questions about.

Whilst there are a great many issues to think about when planning formal presentations or multi-person online meetings, if you follow these three simple principles, you will be in a good position to maintain effective online communications.

1. Allow more time – when we speak to people face to face, there are many non-verbal signs that allow us to judge the pace of the conversation. In a virtual situation, these are at best difficult to pick up. When making important points or getting responses from people you need to be prepared to stop speaking for longer than will feel comfortable. This silence will allow more time for the listener to process what you have said and respond.
2. Listen very carefully – interruptions and misinterpretations become much more problematic with remote communication. So really listen, concentrate on what is being said and how it is being said. Just because there is no sound coming from the other side, does not mean they are finished their train of thought.
3. Ensure that all attendees can speak – on a simple level, get all the attendees to say something at the start to make sure they can hear you and that you can hear them. During the meeting, it is your responsibility to ensure that those who want to contribute can. Use names and direct questions. Don't expect people to interrupt to make their point. In face



to face meetings we can physically see and understand when it's appropriate to speak. This is not as easy when you are not actually in the same room.

As part of Ogilvie Ross's expansion, they have recently appointed Colin Harper, former head of Police Scotland's Hostage and Crisis Negotiator Unit, as a communications associate. Colin added, "Having the ability to really listen is the key to great communications. Focusing on what you hear (not what you want to say), is key to learning about the other person and making them feel heard and valued. These skills are commonly known as active listening"

Colin added "Applying active listening techniques can be life changing. After working with people on the best ways to actively listen, I consistently received feedback, highlighting how these new skills had transformed the way they connect with others and strengthened personal and business relationships. Active listening can turn negative dialogue into

positive conversations. It builds trust and understanding, no matter who you may be engaging with.

In summary, John added "As we move forward, what was local business will take on many of the same communication requirements as doing global business. There will be far less travel and a greater dependency on technology to meet and do business with customers. This will require a change in people's communication skills and a real investment in active listening".

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