



Broadcast

Daily Use

- Video interviews with remote guests for daytime TV series

Solution

- Polycom HDX 8000 and HDX 9000 room telepresence solutions
- Polycom RMX 1000 conference platform
- Polycom Converged Management Application (CMA) server and client
- Polycom Video Border Proxy (VBP) firewall traversal solution
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Results and Benefits

- High quality – and often HD – video connections with remote guests
- Dramatically improved reliability, virtually eliminating ruined segments due to poor or failed video connection
- Can operate with any video conferencing endpoint, and achieve quality video connections over limited bandwidth
- Savings of \$250,000 per season
 - \$200,000 in saved satellite truck and uplink costs
 - \$50,000 in saved travel costs for guests)

With Polycom, *Dr. Phil* and *The Doctors* Gain Reliability and Flexibility – and Save \$250,000 a Year

When Dr. Phil McGraw admonishes guests on his TV talk show to “Get real,” he’s asking them to be honest about their behaviors and motivations. That kind of clear communication is trademark Dr. Phil, and it’s a big reason the hit syndicated series has a devoted international following.

But after years spent agonizing over unreliable, low-quality video links with remote guests, McGraw and his producers were ready for an intervention of their own. They had a communication problem, and they knew it.

“There was always a high expectation of failure,” recalls Rich de Michele, executive in charge of production for Dr. Phil and the show’s hit daytime spin-off, *The Doctors*. “We were always just waiting for audio problems or the video to drop out, or for the call itself to just drop. And at some point, it always did.”

Despite spending weeks working directly with senior executives from various videoconferencing providers, the show’s producers never managed to land on a reliable video communications solution. “It always seemed to work great in rehearsal, and then as soon as we got ready to roll tape, it fell apart,” de Michele says. “It was horrible.”

Then in 2009, the Dr. Phil team began working with Polycom to cure its video communications ills once and for all. “We immediately saw the difference in working with Polycom,” says Tom Baird, director of engineering for Dr. Phil and *The Doctors*. “The other providers gave us a spec sheet. Polycom came in and worked very hard to provide us with just what we needed. It couldn’t have been smoother.”

At the start of the fall 2009 season, Baird worked with Polycom to deploy a telepresence infrastructure capable of delivering an experience worthy of broadcast TV. Once the Dr. Phil crew made the necessary network upgrades to integrate a high-definition (HD) video conferencing network with its own broadcast environment, the show was ready to make Polycom its default channel for interviewing guests in remote locations.

Meanwhile, in an adjacent soundstage at CBS Paramount Studios, the team at *The Doctors* wanted in. The show is hosted by a panel of practicing physicians who focus on medical, health, fitness and nutrition topics. Part of each episode is spent answering questions from viewers, with some pre-

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Rich de Michele, Executive in Charge of Production, Dr. Phil and The Doctors

recorded and others handled live over telephone. But with the new Polycom video communications infrastructure the show shares with Dr. Phil, The Doctors can interact with more guests over lifelike video.

Elevating the Viewing Experience

“We always prefer to interview guests using video,” says de Michele. “It elevates the viewing experience. But that’s only if it works well. And with Polycom, it does.”

Both Dr. Phil and The Doctors are equipped with their own Polycom HDX telepresence systems. In a shared control room, Baird’s team relies on a Polycom RMX conference platform and Polycom Converged Management Application (CMA) to manage calls between both shows. “We sometimes have to make changes quickly while we’re taping shows,” says Baird. “With the shared infrastructure, it’s easy.”

To ensure a quality connection at all times, the team set up its own T3 line outside of the internal IT network at CBS Paramount. At first, production executives arranged for remote guests to be interviewed from Polycom offices throughout North America. That ensured both Dr. Phil and The Doctors could display remote guests in HD video and audio – and in the process, deliver a vast improvement over the choppy, failure-prone solutions of the past.

But with Polycom CMA Desktop Client software, which turns any broadband-connected computer into a videoconferencing station, the two shows could interview guests located virtually anywhere. Now, both shows ship preconfigured notebooks and digital cameras to guests prior to their scheduled interviews. The software’s intuitive, click-to-dial, IM-style interface makes set-up a snap for guests.

To enable remote connections without impacting the studio’s firewall, Baird added the Polycom Video Border Proxy (VBP) firewall traversal solution. And simple call management is another big plus for a crew that shoots several episodes a day. “We sometimes need to quickly end one call and start another,” says Baird. “With Polycom, we can reconnect a call in 10 seconds. Previously, if a call was dropped, we might never get it back. Polycom gives us a level of stability that’s outstanding, even with the laptops.”

An Open Platform Means More Options

Because Polycom offers open standards-based solutions, the shows’ producers also can interview remote guests who may have access to another provider’s videoconferencing system. For Dr. Phil, The Doctors, and organizations around the world, that provides flexibility and protects investments.

Producers also can achieve broadcast-quality video connections more frequently thanks to Polycom’s support for the H.264 High Profile standards-based video compression technology. The new technology reduces bandwidth requirements for even HD video conferencing by as much as 50 percent.

“Polycom gives us three things we didn’t have before: Quality, reliability and flexibility,” added Baird. “And those are the three things we needed most.”

Saving \$250,000 a Season

De Michele says interviewing guests over video saves Dr. Phil about \$50,000 per season on travel alone. “If we didn’t interview them over video, we’d have to fly them in, and cover hotel, meals and other costs,” he says. “And the guests may lose up to three days of work just to appear on the show for a few minutes.”

The new infrastructure also offers flexibility – and along with it, even greater cost savings. For instance, when he’s not taping episodes of The Doctors, Dr. Travis Stork is an Emergency Room faculty physician at Vanderbilt Medical Center in Nashville, Tenn. “Now when Dr. Stork is in Tennessee, we can use Polycom to communicate with him through a laptop or desktop system. Prior to Polycom, getting a stable connection would have required us to roll a satellite truck at \$7,500 to \$15,000 a trip,” says de Michele, who estimates that last year, the two shows conducted 20 satellite uplinks. That’s roughly \$200,000 in costs that neither show will need to shoulder again, thanks to Polycom.

Eventually, de Michele and Baird want to enable video calls with multiple guests at once. “Polycom offers another tool I can give the production crew to craft their show,” says Baird.

For now, however, the crews behind Dr. Phil and The Doctors are happy that remotely interviewing guests is no longer a high-wire act. “The mood in the control room was very tense before Polycom came along,” says Baird. “Now it’s routine. People know it’s going to work.”

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