



Polycom video conferencing solutions consistently deliver return on investment for BNP Paribas Fortis (hereafter referred to as Fortis Bank)

Polycom video conferencing solution has been the mainstay of the European bank's communications platform to deliver travel cost savings, increased efficiencies – and the flexibility to adapt to the changing shape of the organisation.

The Challenge

To unite all the disparate businesses within the European bank's rapidly-growing empire with a common, standardised communications platform that would be easily scalable to cost-effectively accommodate the company's changing circumstances.

The Solution

A commitment to the Polycom videoconferencing solutions beginning with Viewstation4000 and upgrading over the years as the technology developed to VSX3000, VSX7000 and VSX80000 before migrating to HDX4002, HDX7000 and HDX8002 and CMA.

The Results

The Polycom solutions has delivered a proven ROI through savings in travel costs, increased efficiencies and accelerated business processes over the years. It also demonstrated flexibility and scalability in the face of rapid changes in the bank's status throughout the 2008/09 recession.

As with many financial institutions around the world that were confronted with the international financial crisis of 2008/09, Fortis Bank has undergone a complete metamorphosis. These dramatic changes have seen the European Bank divest itself of several of its businesses, restructure its activities and change ownership.

What began life in 1990 as a merger between two Dutch and a Belgium insurers, grew rapidly through the acquisition of various banking operations, into the Fortis Bank Group that greeted the 21st century as a European-based, multi-national insurance and banking operation. Consequently, rapid globalisation in the early years of the 21st century drove a review of its far-reaching communication requirements which progressed apace until the 'Credit Crunch'.

"Rapid growth through mergers and acquisitions brought with it the need for an efficient, simple and cost-effective form of communication that would link our various operations not only within Benelux, but throughout the rest of Europe and the world," explained Fortis Bank Infrastructure & Operations Team Manager, Frank Vandamme. "We needed to develop a common communication platform that fulfilled the interactive requirements of geographically disparate work groups and deliver an immediate communications solution; often on an ad hoc basis."

As a result of the directives of its Global Direction Committee, which demanded a substantial savings in the growing burden of travel costs, followed by a subsequent market analysis by a senior ICT management team, Fortis Bank agreed on a communication strategy based on video conferencing technology.

Vandamme continued: "At that time, in 2002, video conferencing was coming of age and offered the traditional benefits of savings on travel costs as well as travel time. We reviewed several systems and adopted the Polycom solution for immediate implementation throughout our operations."

For Fortis Bank, this meant installing Polycom's original ViewStation4000 family of single screen boardroom units. The 4000 systems enabled Fortis Bank business workers to enjoy collaborative meetings that could be quickly and easily arranged and presented.

From the outset, Vandamme and his colleagues were operating against preset targets involving the quality and efficiency of business meetings as well as travel cost and carbon footprint reductions. It wasn't long before these benefits were apparent to Vandamme and his colleagues.

"Not only were we finding that video conferencing was replacing business travel and passing on immediate travel cost and time savings," Vandamme added, "but we were also seeing a welcomed secondary benefit in improvements in the quality of meetings via video conferencing."

"Return on investment has been achieved within one year of implementation across several business units."

Frank Vandamme Fortis Bank, Infrastructure & Operations Team Manager



The original ViewStations were soon upgraded to the Polycom VSX7000 (single screen) and VSX8000 (dual screen) systems and a whole raft of personal desktop video conferencing machines were installed on key managers' desks throughout the Benelux operation. These high end units contributed significantly to the rapid uptake of video conferencing as an indispensable business tool throughout the Fortis Bank organisation.

Over the years, more than 250 individual Polycom systems were installed at Fortis Bank worldwide – 150 of these within the Benelux operation alone.

In fact, video conferencing on the Polycom systems swiftly became the default means of liaison between work groups within Fortis Bank where face-to-face meetings were seen as too expensive, too time-consuming and too disruptive. Even on those occasions where face-to-face meetings were deemed essential, the Polycom video conferencing facility became a valuable adjunct in terms of ad hoc follow-up meetings for correlation and confirmation.

"We already have proof that the investment in Polycom's videoconferencing systems have achieved substantial time and cost savings throughout the organisation. Not only has return on investment been achieved within one year of implementation across several business units, but we are also going a long way to reaching our targeted reduction of our carbon footprint!"

In this sense, therefore, video conferencing has enhanced every aspect of the meeting and collaboration requirements of the Fortis Bank operation at every level.

"By 2007, we had installed a Polycom ReadManager SE200 management system to simply the increasingly complex scheduling demand being placed on the network," Vandamme admitted.

The sophisticated Polycom ReadManager management system is an all-in-one tool that offers an integrated conference management, scheduling, and gatekeeper functionality. Its scalable, add-as-you-grow approach delivers conference management for the smallest to the largest networks with a single, common directory source which just suited Fortis Bank perfectly.

One scenario where Polycom's video conferencing solution has become the standard form of meeting occurs twice weekly between credit managers in different markets. Credit prices have to be tracked and agreed on a regular basis to ensure the profitable trading of these commodities between banks. Video conferencing has enabled these virtual meetings to be quickly and easily set up and conducted in a face-to-face environment conducive to informal discussion and rapid agreement.

"We are assured that Polycom will be working with us, and for us, integrating systems for a long time to come"

Frank Vandamme Fortis Bank, Infrastructure & Operations Team Manager

Then along came the 2008/09 recession and suddenly the investment in a Polycom video conferencing strategy took on a different aspect. Suddenly, it made even more sense to be flexible, costs-conscious and efficient. With its historic commitment to Polycom secure, Fortis Bank continued with a communication strategy that could be leveraged to adapt to any eventuality.

In 2008 Fortis Bank continued with a planned migration to Polycom's high definition (HD) video conferencing technology. This involved the personal HDX4002 desktop model as well as the high end HDX7000 and HDX8000 single and dual-screen boardroom ranges.

The HDX8002 is an impressive, dual screen, mobile unit for large rooms of up to 40 people. Capable of sharing data, voice and video over IP (Internet Protocol), HDX8002 delivers high quality, high definition video and audio communications performance.

In fact, while this high density migration continues apace, the most recent investment in Polycom video conferencing technology has involved the implementation of Polycom's CMA (Converged Management Application) solution. With the take-over of Fortis Bank by European bank, BNP Paribas, given the go-ahead in April 2009, this versatile unit can, if wanted, be used to centrally connect and manage disparate communication systems across both organisations – bringing together all video conference rooms and desktop resources into one, powerful easy-to-use application.

"Our commitment to Polycom technology has held us in good stead throughout our recent turbulent history and it shows every signs of supporting our communication needs for a while yet," claimed Vandamme. "In the face of the BNP Paribas take-over, we are even more reassured that Polycom will be working with us, and for us, integrating systems on both sides of the corporate fence for a long time to come."

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