

CONFERENCE CALLS

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Product Updates

It's VoIP To You!

Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) has rocked the telecom world and Forum Communications is set to rock the teleconferencing world with SIP collaboration.

Voice over Internet Protocol provides more flexibility, more productivity and more options. A world leader in reliable, affordable on-premise web and teleconferencing technology since 1991, Forum Communications offers a full line of conferencing solutions from Enterprise and Global conferencing to SMBS systems that grow from 8 ports, all with internet administration included or available. The new releases appeal to companies that are already implementing VOIP, and fit equally well in a legacy telecom environment or an IP/PSTN hybrid environment.

The Consortium II is available now with VOIP-option this Fall. Expand to 480 ports with more powerful administrative functions, quick pages and enhanced maneuverability. One touch access for conference users, MP3 files and podcasting for conference call playback, provides enterprise-wide, affordable conferencing for every one and every department in the corporation. Well-known for its advanced system features and durability, the latest Consortium release includes proven productivity tools, like email reminders and reports, View and Control screens, Outlook and Lotus notes scheduling.

Conferencing helps everyone, it should be accessible to everyone. Do you have an employee or a manager who could not benefit from increased productivity? Very few managers would answer "yes" to that question. Forum Communications makes web and teleconferencing affordable to offer as a "birthright" tool, similar to email, voicemail and the telephone.

The BLAST-911 conference server is designed for larger corporations who prefer to host their own internal conference service and who need on-premise, regional or international text and voice messaging. The BLAST-911 is LINUX-based with your choice of VOIP, T1, E1 or PRI connections, with voice and web conferencing in one solution.

For more on 2006 product releases, click on Consortium II, BLAST-911 or CONFER SE. Visit our Booth in San Diego at the Internet Telephony Expo for more about Forum's VOIP options.

Pod-Conferencing in Your Future

Podcasting is taking off in higher education, with professors and administrators realizing the value of posting audio programs on the internet for students to listen to at their leisure. The phrase combines "iPod" and broadcasting," but you can use a computer, iPod or any kind of mp3 player to access, download or listen to files.

Already prevalent in the business and news world, podcasting is perfect for publishing recorded conference sessions. Suppose a professor has a class via teleconference that they wish to make available to students on-line. Typically, they would record the conference session, and send out a message to their students telling them to dial into the bridge to playback the session. Or the end user would export the recording to MP3, publish it on a web page, then send out an email with the address of the web page.

Contact Forum if you are interested in the pod-casting application for your conference calls.

Value & Variety

In the current booming economy there are unprecedented opportunities for businesses to maintain aggressive growth. Teleconferencing is a practical, secure, and economical business tool, available 24/7. More feature and connectivity options bring the best value to market. Businesses can identify and quantify how instant collaboration technology benefits individual departments and business units.

Business Process Control continues to demonstrate the shortcomings of the dinosaur in the corporate infrastructure. Communications are particularly stretched beyond capacity. This was demonstrated in business and government response to the hurricanes and flooding in New Orleans. Newer, smarter, quicker ways of doing business challenge us at every corner. The answers are out there, but what is your business doing to bring those answers, especially conference collaboration, in house?

If you would like more information on integrating voice and web conferencing into your business process and updating your network infrastructure with affordable new collaboration technology, contact Forum Communications at 972-680-0700 or use our online contact form.

Mediator II

Lawyers, mediators and arbitrators were fascinated by the secure sidebar conferencing functions of the Mediator II that Forum Communications recently introduced at the ABA Conflict Resolution Conference (Atlanta, GA) and the Texas Association of Mediators Conference (Austin, TX). Forum is the only company to provide the technology to hold secure sidebars and re-join the conference call in seconds, without hanging up and having to re-build the call group.

From contract negotiations to collections, corporate to family law, conflict resolution is a very specialized niche. Members were enthusiastic to see and test the new system which is ideal for both metro and rural areas, where distances can cause travel expenses and delays. Court-ordered mediation continues to be a growing trend across the country. The legal industry is also seeing growth in web marketing and out-sourced referral and marketing services.

Telecommuting Up Again

At a recent hearing, Office of Personnel Management Chief, Linda Springer said that although the government has made considerable strides in recent years in promoting telework, more needs to be done. A recent survey found the percentage of workers telecommuting has increased from 19 percent to 41 this year, according to the 500 employees surveyed. Rep. Tom Davis (R-Va.) has recently criticized the federal government for lagging behind the private sector in promoting telecommuting options for skilled workers.

A recent article in Fortune magazine commented on "connected workspace" and "workforce mobility" - new phrases for the concepts that are more attractive to workers and employers.

Hewlett-Packard expects to reduce real estate "occupancy" expenses by \$230 million dollars using virtual collaboration via broadband, wireless and telephone to stay connected across distances. Additional benefits of telecommuting include reduced air pollution and traffic, and increased productivity.

Webinars, Can You Afford NOT TO?

The evolution of the Internet is changing how we interact. A web presence is essential for any business, even most teenagers have a personalized html and/or blog for sharing ideas. Cell phone companies advertise the ease of texting, "pix-ing" and instant conferencing. Direct mail and spam blasts are screened so tightly that their predictable low return has been slivered into even smaller return percentages.

Web Conferencing is Hot! Webinars, web demos, web collaboration? all are distinct names for ways of using web sharing for B-to-B and consumer education. The travel industry, investment companies and churches have long realized the value of peer pressure and group enthusiasm to influence human beings. Web conference is an evolving media: Everyone is doing it.

That can be both a positive and negative. Competition for your time and attention goes up. But it also becomes more essential to use this tool to keep up with your competitors. Contact Forum Communications at 972-680-0700 to schedule a webinar demonstration.

Best Practices for Collaboration

Integrating corporate cultures, total cost of operation, convenience and productivity are major concerns when upgrading your legacy hardware or technology paradigm, or when undergoing a merger.

These are the same key points identified when selecting an automated voice conference system. Not limited to voice alone, the latest collaboration tools include web conferencing. Demand for web and voice conferencing continue to grow, as web conferencing continues to absorb dedicated video conferencing market share.

A recent article in Communications News magazine identified how difficult it is to identify true corporate costs for all types of conferencing because departments buy conferencing as they need it, decentralizing the buying power and service quality. Purchasing a centralized, on-premise conference browser or server that can support both voice and web conferencing makes conferencing a "birthright" service, like voice mail and internet access - something that is accessible by EVERYONE in your organization.

The cost-limitations imposed by per minute conference calls limit the availability to the executive caste or elite departments, only. On-premise conferencing makes conferencing a universal resource that increases the productivity and improves communication for all areas or operations, customer support and leadership. The most competitive corporations know that bringing conferencing in-house is a "no-brainer," with immediate savings in both efficiency and replacing existing conference subscriptions.

What resources does your organization provide today?

Web conferencing uses the internet to share documents and white boards to enhance team effort into a powerful, collaborative solution. Subscriptions are charged per person, whether the resource is utilized or not. You can select a hosted service (which will be monitored and saved,

jeopardizing the integrity of your meeting and ideas) or an on-premise browser-based system (for best value and total control).

Video conferencing allows people to talk face to face with the help of special equipment. They are expensive and require participants to go to specially equipped video conference locations. From a technical standpoint, the audio quality is not good and requires back-up audio channels. Because video is so expensive to update, companies with video conferencing may have technology with outdated standards, and compatibility issues often create problems and delays.

Audio conferencing is simple, inexpensive and gets the job done at no extra frills. This is a valuable asset whether companies are starting out or already spend thousands of dollars monthly for conference calls. Participants require only a telephone, be it a mobile phone, a soft (VoIP) phone or landline. On-premise conference technology do not include monthly or annual subscription fees, and systems are available in enterprise and SMBS sizes, including web conferencing and web administration, and with dial-out/blast dial functions, robust user/admin functions or simple "meet-me" conferencing options.

Improving Emergency Response

"Preparation through Education is less costly than learning through tragedy." --Max Mayfield, director, National Hurricane Center.

Turning a negative into a positive, or at least into a learning experience, is a sign of true leadership. With the current upheaval in FEMA reorganization in Washington over emergency support to the storm-ravaged Gulf Coast last year, there are many lessons to be learned from the immediate and post-emergency response efforts. The spotlight on communications and network infrastructure has provided lessons for many businesses and government agencies.

WE GOT SOME THINGS RIGHT!

- Coast Guard and NORCOM anticipated support needs; and acted swiftly to move the Control Center out of harm's way to St. Louis.
- Agencies maintained focus on the primary mission of Search & Rescue, with or without communications support.
- Military aircraft brought in widespread transponder nodes to support an 18-mile internal cellular telephone network.
- USCG brought in staff from other regions, so locals could handle their own family emergencies.
- Support Command teams from Fort Hood utilized their disaster-relief experiences in Iraq to help the Gulf Coast.
- Wartime dialogs between governments helped in coordinating between local government & private agencies.
- Mobile command centers & wireless IT technology were delivered by C-130, complete with power generators.

WHAT DID WE LEARN

- Situational Awareness is a term not even used in the private sector until the military implemented their response.
- Unity of command and incident reporting did not fail, it never existed.
- Too many delays were caused by people & politics.
- Protocols for mutual support coordination were lacking; no way to coordinate multiple resources efficiently.
- Communication infrastructure failed - required radical means to restore or replace outdated

technology during the crisis.

-- Redundancy and replacement technology were neither pre-planned nor pre-budgeted.

MOVING FORWARD

Two areas that we know need to be strengthened in both our local and national planning are Responsiveness and Accountability.

Conference bridges demonstrated their utility during both rescue and rebuilding phases:--
Maintaining daily contact with rescue teams, team members and agencies

- Tracking personnel and safety status
- Staying connecting with priority resources and "Hot Spots"
- Logistics support, fleet status and internal communications
- Instant contact with vendors and subcontractors to expedite delivery and support
- Connect remote control centers with on-site personnel with federal agencies
- Re-assess and assign priorities in real-time
- Collaboration beyond borders.

As a nation we need to focus on our frail & vulnerable information infrastructure. In an age when affordable, birthright collaborative technology exists, it must be included in plans, exercises AND budgets. We also need to assure power for communications in those plans and budgets.

Small airfields and local communities especially lean on outside support, since the emergency plan & support programs in place are locally focused. Resources are different: radio frequencies become overcrowded; cell service may be unreliable. Limited city and volunteer budgets result in limited response equipment and limited funds for upgrading communications equipment. Training programs are often limited to medical and fire programs, without extended emergency event management skills.

From experience we have learned how important it is that command centers are smoothly operated by trained agency personnel in the future. We've also seen that conferencing and collaboration tools like the BLAST-911, the ALERT Plus and Forum's large enterprise servers can easily be integrated into intelligence, decision-making and command functions whenever, wherever and whatever the crisis or strategy may require.

At a recent IT Leadership Conference, Dr. Elizabeth McDaniel, of the National Defense University summed up our country's needs best, "The qualities that will distinguish the next generation of government leaders are defined in part by the new uncertainties leaders face in government. Chief among the new requirements for government leaders are having the ability to be agile in the face of uncertainty, innovative in the face of complexity, passionate about an agency's mission, and being transformational rather than transactional in approaching the work of government."

Eye On The Border

With President George W. Bush sending National Guardsmen to assist Border Patrol, more eyes are looking at funding for Bush's \$1.3 billion Secure Border Initiative.

Congressional committees say they want to see a strategic plan for the Secure Border Initiative before approving the funding. Rep. Harold Rogers asked, "How do you know that items such as

\$100 million in technology and \$51 million in desert tactical infrastructure are needed? When presented with questions like this, we apply a simple formula: "No plan equals no money." "

Rogers also said the government has spent millions on "elaborate border technology that, eventually, has proven to be ineffective and wasteful," such as the Integrated Surveillance Intelligence System and America Shield Initiative. He refers to the SBI as just another three-letter acronym for failure.

Tapping Existing Contracts for Future Emergencies

The Office of Federal Procurement Policy is heading up the development of a database for emergency response contracting. The Homeland Security Department and the General Services Administration are collecting information on existing contracts that agencies could buy products and services through in emergency situations.

The need for the database is part of the lessons learned from the government's problems with hurricanes Katrina and Rita last summer. One government official complained that employees initiated new contracts because they didn't know what was already in place. The agencies are also developing an online list of federal experts who can respond during emergency situations. Maintaining current government contacts becomes even more critical for channel partners and manufacturers, as trust and reliability continue to weigh purchasing decisions.

The Mail Must Go Through

The U.S. government is a major user of teleconferencing technology for business and planning meetings, and as you would imagine, for emergency communications. The U.S. Postal Service in Washington DC and other regional locations across the country utilize Forum Communication's systems to support their conference calls.

Because of the versatility and durability of the Consortium Conference Server, post office officials were able to utilize teleconferencing around the clock during the hurricanes and floods that struck the southeast last year. Their conference system allowed this critical agency to provide support for the remote mail processing stations, postal employees and customers. For technical details on the new 2006 Consortium II, please forward your requests to us, or click on Consortium II.

Local & State Agencies

After several years of conservative fiscal spending, state and local government offices are facing pent-up demand for technologies, and IT spending is expected to go from \$50 billion in 2006 to \$72 billion by fiscal 2011.

The rebound in spending will impact hardware infrastructure for data and voice communications, as well as the workforce. The government watch group that did the study predicts that the next 10 quarters will focus on border defense, homeland security, professional services and healthcare.

Two major Midwestern cities have appointed new technology chiefs:

Hardik Bhatt moved up from the Deputy director of IT in the Emergency Management office to Director of Business and Information Services in Chicago.

Andrea Casselton is the new CTO for St. Paul Minnesota, after many years with US Bank.

Way-To-Go Web Conferencing

Wainhouse Research, an industry leader, recently identified three areas to consider when replacing your existing ASP service with an on-premise web conferencing server:

- 1) overall effectiveness
- 2) ease of implementation
- 3) immediate return on investment.

Web conferencing solutions from Forum Communications provide several strategic advantages for your company.

Forum WebMeet B delivers on-demand web conferencing. Availability, coupled with easy initiation and unlimited usage make the web conferencing browser an obvious solution to add to your in-house network. WebMeet B runs on industry standard hardware/OS platform and supports industry standard conferencing algorithms. Easily integrating into other workflow applications (calendar, email/texting, reporting and attachments), in-house web collaboration provides additional security for shared documents, white boarding, chat and shared desktop applications. According to the study, 80% of web conferencing users feel the return on investment is obvious and find it easy to justify bringing web conferencing in-house.

Small Business Spending Goes Short

The Energy Department has fallen short of its small business prime contracting goals in four of the last five years. According to the GAO, the agency set its small business contracting goal at 5 percent in 2001, but only awarded 2.89 percent of its contracts to small companies. In 2002, the department lowered its goal to 3.7 percent, and still missed, achieving only 3.11 percent. In 2003, Energy passed its goal of 3.7 percent, by awarding 4.08 percent of all its contracts to small firms. The department increased its 2004 goal to 5.06 percent, and fell short by at only 4.18 percent. Last year, the department failed to achieve its 5.5 percent goal, with only 4.15 percent of all projects going to small companies. The Energy Department spends more than \$20 billion a year on goods and services.