



The reality of e-meetings in SA today

Find out how mobile technologies and internet engagement platforms such as e-meetings are redefining the fundamentals of client and staff engagement for local professionals and SMMEs

The number of devices connected to the Internet worldwide is increasing exponentially. 80% of these are mobile devices. In South Africa, PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates that 77.8% of local consumers will have Internet access in the next four years. 90% of access will be via mobile devices.

This mass digital migration to mobile technologies is transforming the way businesses communicate and do business internally and externally. As such, embracing mobile technologies that support mobile-enabled business processes are, therefore, crucial to the strategic, operational and financial success of businesses.

One of these mobile technologies that are transforming business process is e-meetings. These meetings take place over a digital platform such as web-based meeting software, allowing individuals and groups anywhere in the world to meet and interact. It delivers so many clear-cut business benefits that it is no surprise that e-meetings are fast gaining traction in the business world.

The benefits of e-meetings

- Allow for 'face-to-face' client interactions via Internet-based video, anywhere, anytime
- Provide a more personal interaction than emails or telephone calls
- Enhance service for today's fast-paced, mobile and digitally-enabled clients
- Offer a 'greener' alternative by minimising carbon emissions generated by travelling
- Generate significant cost savings – in some cases up to 50% of travel costs
- Boost staff productivity - e-meetings take up less time with efficient agendas and outcomes

Digital meetings are forecast to make up more than 50% of engagement with clients and predicted to become a key strategy for professionals and SMMEs. This uptake has grown so much that local legislation has been forced to keep pace, Changes now allow companies to enter into contracts electronically with additional application ranging from electronic signatures to digitally enabled board meetings.

The challenges

Given the business benefits of e-meetings and the general familiarity of staff and clients with options such as Skype, Hangouts and Facetime, why aren't more companies harnessing this technology?

Common challenges include a lack of information, the fear of technology, the cost of mobile data, limited broadband access and corporate infrastructure and firewalls. However, professionals and SMMEs can overcome these challenges with a few action steps.

Making the right choice about e-meetings

- Be proactive rather than reactive when harnessing the benefits of e-meetings
- Speak to technology experts to understand the different e-meeting options available - don't be afraid to conduct your own research if need be
- Confirm what works for your specific business and your clients
- Understand the costs, the savings and the productivity enhancements that can be achieved
- Look for the right software application that can add further functionality, such as digital signing capacity, on-screen document authentication, real-time document amendments, and meeting recordings.

Embracing internet based technologies such as e-meetings will allow you to reap the benefits of reduced costs, increased productivity and the ability to meet rapidly changing client engagement demands.

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