



Technology Labs

Accenture Virtual Corridor

An always-on virtual meeting space for distributed organizations

With globalization, organizations face greater challenges in collaborating across geographically dispersed locations. Team members can no longer run into each other in the halls, pop by each other's cubicles or chat by the water cooler. Instead, they must rely on existing technologies that often fail to enable simple and natural collaboration.

"When was the last time any of us jumped on a plane just to say hello to a team member on the other side of the world?" says Luke Hughes, Director of Human-Computer Interaction Research for Accenture Technology Labs. "Today, we have to painstakingly schedule formal collaboration events like videoconferences and Web meetings, which require configuring firewalls, IP addresses and so forth."

Despite the ease of communication the Internet has brought us, setting up these technologies can be complicated and time-consuming. As a result, we're often reduced to scheduled conference calls with emailed meeting materials.

"Instant messenger enables impromptu meetings to some extent, but it's still a very thin channel compared to meeting face-to-face," Hughes explains.

In answer to this need, Accenture Technology Labs has developed the Virtual Corridor. This always-on video conferencing unit is a simple solution that connects corridors between two locales. At Accenture, the Virtual Corridor connects the Labs' Chicago and Palo Alto facilities. Team members in Palo Alto who are sitting in their office can overhear an interesting technical conversation in the Chicago hallway—just 10 feet away—and get up and join in the conversation. For Accenture teams in India, the Virtual Corridor enables collaboration across two locations in traffic-heavy Bangalore, helping them save valuable time while providing an easy-to-use, virtual, in-person meeting space.

Always On, Always Connected

The Virtual Corridor uses HDTV-quality, Internet-based video-conferencing; however, the innovation is not the technology itself but its always-on availability. Because the videoconferencing technology does not require any configuration, the corridor is always available—just like a physical meeting place. Additional webcams on each side of the corridor provide peripheral vision of the other locale's adjacent hallways so that users are aware of who might be nearby, just as if they were there in person. Furthermore, unlike complicated collaboration technologies, the Virtual Corridor does not require any training: Users simply walk up to the wall and talk to someone on the other side. It's completely natural.

Accenture has extended this simple concept of digitally connected spaces beyond the water cooler model. A short distance down the hall from the Virtual Corridor resides the Virtual Office. In this case, two offices are connected in Chicago and Palo Alto in a similar manner to the Virtual Corridor, but with the added ability to close doors for a private conversation. People meeting at the Virtual Corridor who wish to continue their conversation in private can therefore move over to the always-on Virtual Office to continue their discussion behind closed doors. Additionally, an always-on white board in the Virtual Office enables users to bring their USB-carried presentation, insert it into the board's dedicated PC and walk everyone in the office through their materials.

"One of the central principles of Accenture's Human-Computer Interaction R&D is to enable people to use technology in a completely intuitive manner to enhance their productivity. In this case, the technology facilitates the natural ways in which people collaborate face-to-face, which is usually impromptu—at the moment of impulse or encounter," says Hughes.

From improving the way people work, to cutting costs and saving time by reducing unnecessary travel, to enabling management to better connect with employees, the Virtual Corridor is one example of how Accenture's research in collaborative technologies can help companies achieve high performance with their global workforce.

About Accenture Technology Labs

Accenture Technology Labs, the dedicated technology research and development (R&D) organization within Accenture, has been turning technology innovation into business results for 20 years. The Labs create a vision of how technology will shape the future and invent the next wave of cutting-edge business solutions. Working closely with Accenture's global network of specialists, Accenture Technology Labs helps clients innovate to achieve high business performance. The Labs are located in Chicago, Illinois; Palo Alto, California; Sophia Antipolis, France; and Bangalore, India. For more information, please visit our website at www.accenture.com/accenturetechlabs

About Accenture

Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company. Committed to delivering innovation, Accenture collaborates with its clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments. With deep industry and business process expertise, broad global resources and a proven track record, Accenture can mobilize the right people, skills and technologies to help clients improve their performance. With more than 133,000 people in 48 countries, the company generated net revenues of \$15.55 billion for the fiscal year ended Aug. 31, 2005. Its home page is www.accenture.com