

Talking to screen cuts costs

Retailer Pick n Pay has reduced the number of flights it makes by more than 20% since it set up video conferencing facilities at its head offices 18 months ago, saving on costs during the downturn and helping to lower its carbon footprint.

Bronwen Rohland, Pick n Pay's sustainability director, says video conferencing had major benefits.

She says the retailer now had 12 such facilities that link it to its regional offices and to suppliers, as well as across the world.

She says the technology held benefits in that it boosted productivity and lowered staff stress levels, as company representatives did not have to spend additional time at airports or on flights.

By using video-conference calls, staff could speak to three different parties at once and one could show Powerpoint presentations, with the quality of the images very good.

"In the smaller rooms it's like looking into someone's eyes."

Polycom, a supplier of video conferencing equipment, says there is an increased interest in moving to the technology.

Dan Engel, Polycom's regional sales manager, says more companies were looking to invest in the technology now because of the downturn, with many existing customers seeking to increase video conferencing facilities.

He says video-conferencing had come a long way since the 1980s when it was first developed.

High-definition (HD) television screens and increased bandwidth have seen the quality increase significantly in recent years.

Engel says Polycom had also experienced an increase in sales from local small and medium-sized companies through a package the company has aimed at this sector.

The package, offered through a local distributor, is priced at R3000 a month over 36 months and includes a flat screen, ADSL line, cabinet and video-conferencing equipment.

Engel says products aimed at large companies can cost between \$7000 to \$28000 per video conferencing unit. "The return on investment is one of the best in the industry in the IT space."

Engel says that video-conference calls did away with the costs of car rental, flights and accommodation attached to a business trip.

Source: Business Day

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