

AccessGrid vs. Video conferencing (H.323)

Access Grid a solution to collaboration?

Access Grid is a open source and completely free software solution for your computers to enable remote video, audio, and application collaboration via a data network. Many university and research facilities are currently using this technology to enhance their ability to collaborate with each other and with people from all over the world. I was asked clarify the differences between Access Grid and conventional video conferencing and the following is a excerpt from my email reponse:

“I want to clarify that Internet2 is simply a very large network pipe that is capable of transmitting at very fast data rates. Internet2 is simply the transport mechanism for collaborative technologies such as videoconference and Access Grid.

The advantages of conventional videoconferencing (h.323) are:

1. More accessible : Many university and corporations have these units already in place
2. Simpler to setup : Modern videoconference equipment have become appliances that you can simply hookup to a monitor
3. Proven technology : H.323, H.264 are standards
4. Can be better in quality : If new VC technology is used, along with higher bandwidth (> 768KB/sec)
5. Audio quality will be higher due to on-board echo cancellation technologies and more advanced codecs that can handle full duplex audio.

The disadvantages of conventional videoconference are:

1. Can be expensive : Average price for simple setups are be around 4000.00

2. Multi-point conferences are not readily accessible unless you have or know someone that has a MCU (Multi-point controller), MCU can be very expensive (10K or more)

Videoconference resource: <http://www.videnet.gatech.edu/cookbook.en/>

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The advantages of Access Grid Video conferencing are:

1. Cost substantially less : it requires only a computer, microphone, capture card, and camera. The software is free. Cost of everything else can be alot less depending on how you implement the video capture (via USB camera or via capture card)
2. Massive Multiple Point connection : Up to 20 different locations can be involved in a single event, Briding service is essential free.
3. Universities and research facilities have adopted AG : Many are getting grants to build AG nodes.

The disadvantages of Access Grid are:

1. Compatibility : Free technology have bugs and configuration of systems might require more time and effort, hardware and software compatibility are a concern
2. Can be more complex to setup : requires more technical support, large venue rooms will require more complex equipment
3. Accessibility will be limited to sites that have AG setup

AG resources: <http://www.accessgrid.org> , <http://www.accessgrid.org/software>

Setting up a AG can be easy and simple. I currently have one setup using only a Logitech USB Webcam, a PC, and USB headset with Microphone. If you would like to setup something similar to what I've done, I can definitely help in that matter.

Hope this clarify some of your questions regarding these two collaborative technologies. Let me know if you have any questions.

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