Eight Most Common
Audio Conferencing Problems

Modern businesses rely on audio conferencing for success. Even though audio conferencing may not seem like a vital part of a business' daily operations, high-quality, uninterrupted audio conferencing is a crucial component of a business' success. Poor quality during telephone conversations or group presentations can make or break a business' reputation and interfere with its ability to complete daily tasks.

Audio conferencing affects every area of business. From customer service to investor relations, poor audio quality is associated with a lack of professional competence. In order to prevent these problems, it's important to be aware of how and why audio conferencing goes wrong and the effect of such problems on the reputation of a business.

Volume Control Issues

Volume control problems are a major cause of audio conferencing difficulties. According to Vanderbilt University, volume control is the most common cause of audio difficulties.

1	Low Volume

Often, presenters have the volume set too low on their broadcasting software. It is important to run sound checks and resolve volume control problems prior to beginning a broadcast. This problem can affect businesses in several ways:

- Customers calling in to a customer service line get frustrated because they cannot hear the customer support representative very well.

- People attending a sales webinar cannot hear the presenter and develop a negative impression of the company as a result.

- Managers attending an audio conference with consultants can't hear and don't heed important advice.

- Investors attending an informational call about a business are unimpressed due to audio problems and choose to invest elsewhere.

2 | Audio Noise

Audio noise can be a serious problem as well. Most teleconferencing services do not have the ability to automatically block out background noise. Background noise can muffle important points a speaker is trying to make, distract listeners, and interfere with their ability to follow the conversation.

Audio noise is particularly problematic for a business' reputation. Callers will judge businesses critically if there are extraneous noises in the background, which may cause potential customers and current clients to negatively perceive the offending business. Investors and executives also are reluctant to waste time with calls that contain too much noise to hear easily. This problem can be partially solved by using the "mute" function on audio conferencing software to mute participants' microphones when they are not speaking. Meeting organizers should ensure they are in a quiet location where they will not be disturbed before beginning an audio conference and should ask participants to do the same.

Audio Transmission Issues

In some cases, incorrect settings on audio conferencing software can cause problems while transmitting audio. Improper audio transmission can make it difficult to understand or follow a presentation, causing participants to lose focus and become frustrated. These types of issues tend to reflect badly upon a company; customers, clients and investors may think the company does not care enough to correct audio problems or that it is attempting to save money by using cheap software that does not work properly.

3 | Audio Delays

Some audio conferencing providers automatically delay audio for a few seconds between speech and broadcast. This is purposeful; it helps prevent feedback and other audio problems. However, sometimes glitches in audio software create additional delays. This leads to long lags between one person's comment and another's response. This is problematic for businesses because people tend to view audio delays as evidence of slowness or incompetence. Audio delays may be caused by having more persons on the line than the service can handle.

4 | Line Noise and Feedback

Crackling or clicking sounds on the line cause serious audio difficulties similar to those caused by background noise. This type of problem happens because some audio conferencing services cannot automatically block participant devices that are causing audio problems. Thus, if a participant calls into the audio conference via the same device on two separate lines or places his or her device too close to their microphone, the audio conferencing software does not block the resulting noise.

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5   Hollow Sound

Another common problem when using an audio conferencing service can be hollow sound, often described as sounding as if a speaker is in a tunnel. This problem occurs because the audio conferencing software does not process sound coming from multiple microphones correctly. When several people are speaking at once, the audio conferencing software's audio delay function misfires, causing sound to become hollow and distorted.

Hollow audio is often more difficult to hear; even if it is clear enough, the strange way it sounds can be distracting to listeners. Hollow audio gives the effect of speaking with someone who is driving through a tunnel. This can make managers and sales people appear distracted and unprofessional. Customer service reps, in particular, need to avoid this problem so that customers feel they have the rep's full attention. Fortunately, this problem is fairly easy to solve. Conference presenters can use the audio software to mute participants' microphones when they are not speaking.

> When several people are speaking at once, the audio conferencing software's audio delay function misfires, causing sound to become hollow and distorted.

6   Audio Echoes

Audio echoes produce similar effects to hollow audio; the speaker becomes hard to hear and sounds far away. Echoes can be distracting to both the speaker and the listener. Speakers sometimes have difficulty continuing with a speech when they hear themselves echoing. This problem can be disastrous for webinars and sales presentations, as smooth delivery of information is vital for demonstrating professionalism and converting prospects to sales.

Audio echoes occur for a similar reason to hollow sound: if two or more people in a room call in to the same conference, the software does not cancel out the echo from one participant's phone to another's. To avoid this issue, have all co-workers who are participating in a conference call from one line rather than having multiple active lines in the same room.

Problems Related to Service Operation

In some cases, audio conferencing problems are due to settings that are set by the service provider.

7   Using Loud or Offensive Hold Music

When setting up an audio conference, presenters sometimes forget to consider hold music–the music that plays while the caller waits for the next available representative. Loud hold music can turn people off before they even talk to a company representative. Whether setting up a customer service line or an informational webinar for investors, it is important to ensure hold music is sufficiently soft.

Equally problematic is choosing the wrong music. It is important to avoid music that contains offensive language or controversial messages. It may be best to choose classical, jazz or other instrumental music to avoid this possibility.

8   **Failure to Unmute Participants as Needed**

Many conference leaders mute participants when they are not speaking. In webinars and other group audio conferences, this is a good practice to get into because participants may create background noise that is distracting. However, it is vital to unmute people at the proper time. If participants cannot speak and be heard, they will become frustrated and leave the call. This problem can also cause other participants to consider a company to be unprofessional. It's recommended to use a vendor that has options that allow participants to unmute themselves when needed.

Conclusion

When one's audio conference service fails, whether from poor usability to line noise, the potential ramifications for businesses can be detrimental. One mistake may easily be written off as a unique occurrence; however as service failings compound, it is essential to consider how your business may be affected. These behaviors can lead to problems that indicate a lack of professionalism–something businesses cannot afford–whether they are talking to current customers, potential customers, investors, employees or managers.

Even when businesses aren't in the business of audio conferencing itself, it is still a crucial tool that every business uses to communicate their product and vision. With the proper audio conferencing service in place, companies can focus on the business at hand.

To learn more about how common audio conferencing issues are impacting your business, contact ReadyTalk at sales@readytalk.com.

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