

Unforeseen Value Found in Videoconferencing System

With a clang, a cell door opens at the Madison Street Jail in Phoenix. A defendant walks out, escorted by a Maricopa County Sheriff's Officer. It's time for the defendant's arraignment in the Town of Guadalupe. But instead of heading for a courtroom that is miles away, they take a short walk down the hall to a conference room.

Across town, Judge Victor Ortiz also passes up the courtroom, instead striding into a Guadalupe conference room where he sits down and conducts the arraignment – via videoconference. This scene is repeated each week on Tuesdays and Fridays at the Town of Guadalupe.

"When the MAG videoconferencing unit was installed in our town, we were aware that some other cities were using videoconferencing for court proceedings," said Guadalupe Court Administrator Marilyn Trujillo, explaining that Maricopa County, Mesa and Scottsdale assisted Guadalupe in getting started with videoconferencing in their court.

Victor Ortiz, Guadalupe's Magistrate, said the videoconferencing system offered a valuable opportunity. "Our experience has been very positive. I'm glad we went to it. The transition has been very smooth and we had lots of help from the County Sheriff's Office, from MAG and from our staff here in Guadalupe. We have saved a great deal in transportation costs and jail fees. Conducting arraignments via videoconference also provides greater security for the officers."



Defendant being arraigned via videoconference.

More than 100 defendants have been arraigned via videoconference since April. Guadalupe now arraigns about 90 percent of its defendants through the MAG Videoconferencing System. Cases requiring victim testimony are done in person at the Guadalupe courtroom. Sentencing is also done in person.

By using the MAG Videoconferencing System, Guadalupe is reducing the number of vehicle miles traveled and doing their part in improving air quality in our region. Guadalupe Town Manager Tom Morales had not anticipated the value to be found in using videoconferencing. "Using videoconferencing for our court arraignments has been a success. We are very happy with it," he said.

Thousands of Miles Saved by RVS in First Year

The results are in! In the first year of usage for audio and videoconferencing, member agency staff saved 3,823 hours, \$175,985 dollars and 24,044 vehicle miles were not traveled. MAG is also tracking the air quality benefits of Regional Videoconferencing System (RVS) use.

"We are very excited that our member agencies are making use of this new technology. They are using the Regional Videoconferencing System to attend MAG meetings, consultant meetings, conduct member agency job interviews and court arraignments. In fact, for the fourth quarter of FY 2003, the number of member agency initiated videoconferences increased 175% from the previous quarter. This is a positive trend toward even

greater videoconferencing usage in the future," said Heidi Pahl, MAG Telecommunications Planner.

"The total number of RVS participants has nearly tripled from 484 participants in the first quarter to 1,378 participants in the fourth quarter of FY 2003. The number of participants is both the off-site participants and those at the designated host meeting sites who attended in person. Two-thirds of the videoconferences were within the MAG region. Approximately 20% were out-of-state participants and the remainder were out-of-region but within the state," reported Ms. Pahl.

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"Hollywood Squares" Multipoint Videoconference a Success

At the quarterly Videoconference Site Coordinators Meetings in August, 43 people from MAG and MAG member agencies participated in a live multipoint videoconference. Staff from **Apache Junction, Carefree, Cave Creek, Fountain Hills, Gila Bend, Gilbert, Glendale, Goodyear, Guadalupe, Litchfield Park, Peoria, Queen Creek, Scottsdale, Tempe, Youngtown, and Valley Metro** experienced firsthand how multipoint videoconferencing can look and feel like a regular meeting.

MAG staff demonstrated **multipoint videoconferencing** where one can view multiple sites at the same time, as seen in the graphic. Technically called **continuous presence**, this type of multipoint videoconference is like "Hollywood Squares" because the screen is divided up into four quadrants with a different site in each quadrant. If there are more than four sites participating in the continuous presence videoconference, one quadrant can be designated as voice activated which means the quadrant view changes to the person at the site that is speaking. The person speaking must talk for at least five seconds in order for the system to switch to that site and show the person on the screen. The people at any remaining remote sites not shown in the assigned quadrants would only appear when they speak to the group. MAG staff then demonstrated the panoramic screen and full screen mode of viewing the remote participants in a multipoint videoconference. Joan McIntosh, Human



Resources Administrator for the Town of Fountain Hills said, "It was great to see a multipoint videoconference and learn how different video sites interact during a meeting."

RVS Site Coordinators meetings are held quarterly for videoconference site coordinators and backup site coordinators. The meetings are conducted via multipoint videoconference to encourage and demonstrate usage of the RVS. All MAG member agency staff and guests are welcome to attend the meetings. The next Site Coordinator meeting will be in November 2003. For more information, contact your RVS Site Coordinator or the RVS Office at (602) 452-5095.

RVS Focus Groups Sound Off

This summer, members of three focus groups of current and potential MAG Regional Videoconferencing System (RVS) users took an hour out of their day to sound off about "How To Improve the RVS." The focus groups were part of the implementation of the new RVS Marketing Plan and included MAG staff committee liaisons, RVS end users and MAG committee chairs. The three groups were asked to identify challenges and concerns in using the RVS by MAG committees as well as by MAG member agencies. Then the groups suggested solutions to help people feel more comfortable with using the RVS.

The focus groups represented a broad cross-section of RVS users, including Council members, City/Town managers, department directors, professional staff, non-MAG participants, and MAG staff committee liaisons. Thirteen MAG member agencies and 10 MAG committees were represented in the focus groups. A total of 27 people participated in the focus groups.

The results of the focus groups show that the majority of the respondents (50%) emphasized continued education and awareness activities to promote RVS usage. Thirty percent focused on specific technical and logistical solutions to enhance the videoconference experience. Ten percent suggested additional training for new staff members and elected officials and another ten percent had other comments and suggestions not related to the previous three categories.

Based on these suggestions, MAG staff is implementing several activities and tools tailored to the priorities of the focus groups. Additional input is being garnered from the RVS Marketing Group as well as the RVS Site Coordinators from the MAG member agencies. The goal of the marketing efforts is to significantly increase and sustain RVS usage among all MAG committees and MAG member agencies. Additional ideas and suggestions are welcomed.

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