Kollective

YOU ONLY GET ONE SECOND CHANCE

6 REAL WORLD FIXES FOR FAILED ENTERPRISE VIDEO

Envision this unfortunately common scenario: Your CEO is scheduled to deliver a strategic message via live video to thousands of employees around the globe. She begins to talk, but as the broadcast continues you realize that not everyone can access the livestream. Employees are emailing their frustration. The help tickets are piling up. And a significant portion of the audience is missing out on vital communication from the top executive.

Many organizations bought into the dream of live video in the first part of this decade, only to live out similar nightmares of hardware trouble and livestream problems. Instead of capitalizing on the power of live video, companies have resorted to workarounds—whether it's gathering crowds in remote locations to watch one livestream or sending out recorded videos for those who couldn't connect.

The good news? The problems of your livestream past don't need to define the video future for your company. The key is understanding the historic challenges and where you may still have trouble. Then you can proactively address problems and tee up your next generation enterprise video program for true success.

Corporate communications *is* video

If you're not already using video, it's time to start. Corporate video use is on the rise—and for good reason.

71% of companies with 100+ employees use video to communicate with them.

72% plan to increase the use of video for employee communications.

90% say that video plays an important or somewhat important role in their organization.

76% say video has improved communication with remote employees.

Source: Engaging Employees with Video, Ragan Communications

WHEN LIVESTREAMS GO WRONG

When it comes to successfully delivering live video across multiple locations, many factors come into play including the A/V equipment, the distribution platform, your network's bandwidth capabilities, server connections and more. Hopefully, your live video is seamlessly distributed every time. If that hasn't been the case, it's important to determine what has gone wrong so you can take the steps to ensure the same issues don't plague you in the future.

THE TROUBLE

Not enough bandwidth

One of the most common causes of video trouble is bandwidth limitations. This plays out in a couple different ways. Sometimes IT or production teams change the network to prioritize the livestream, and end up inadvertently slowing down business transactions. People get the livestream, but the business suffers. In other cases, bandwidth availability varies by location. One region may receive the stream with no problem, while another is crowding 50 people around a screen in a conference room and hoping for the best.

THE FIX

Often organizations have planned for email, cloud computing, web servers and more to use up their bandwidth. But they neglect to account for video. If this sounds familiar, start by uncovering the ways your organization is consuming bandwidth. Then determine how much bandwidth is available, including between far flung locations and the nearest proxy server. Buying more bandwidth is always an option, though it's often expensive and the process can be complicated if you're dealing with hundreds of locations and multiple providers. A solution like Kollective's peer-to-peer network helps by dramatically reducing the overall impact video has on your bandwidth. That way you can broadcast livestreams and still conduct business as usual.

THE TROUBLE

Equipment and encoder mishaps

Problems with the cameras, microphones and encoders can all lead to a failed live video event. Each piece of equipment needs to updated and connected properly. Complicating matters is the fact that many video setups are a conglomeration of equipment purchased over years by various people. There's no industry standard for exactly what to use; instead production teams inherit equipment, often selected by staff who may no longer work for the organization. The documentation may be scant or missing. So when things go wrong at a hardware level, it's challenging to determine where to look or what was the cause.

THE FIX

Each organization has a unique system with its own components. Broadly, your team should understand and document how all of your hardware is connected and works together. Create a checklist of equipment to test before each event. And have backup mics, lights, cables and other key components in case something fails during the stream. If you need help with an extra set of experienced hands. Kollective can help.

THE TROUBLE

Individual access problems

Sometimes users' inability to access live video is related to what's happening with them and their device. For example, if employees are using Internet Explorer as their browser, they need a Flash plugin in order to stream live video. Other issues may be outdated applications, authentication issues between the device or user and the content delivery platform, or even simple user error.

THE FIX

Moving to Windows 10 will make the Flash issue moot; otherwise instruct employees on where to find the plugin. Also consider a video distribution platform such as Kollective, which provides real-time, livestream analytics. You can then monitor buffering and re-connection attempts during the event, and proactively reach out to people having trouble. If it's often the same issue, a pre-written email sent during the livestream can help the audience connect and reduce ensuing complaints.

THE TROUBLE

Being human

Sometimes the culprit behind a livestream failure isn't technical, but human error. Someone made a mistake and the broadcast suffered. If you've investigated technical, equipment and network issues, then go back to your documented event process and make sure everyone did what they were supposed to do.
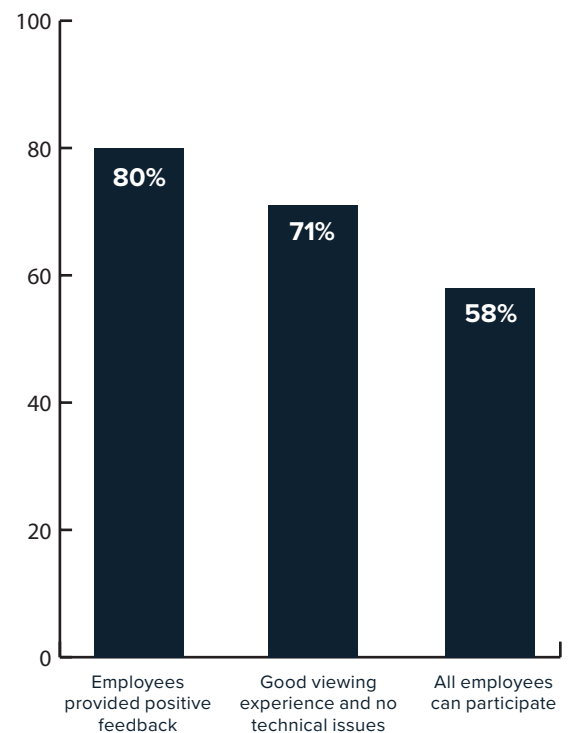
THE FIX

Again, pre-event checklists can help prevent mishaps. Also create a culture that allows for people to admit how they may have caused a problem, and build out a plan for ensuring the mistake doesn't happen again.

What makes a successful live stream?

Enterprise communication and IT professionals ranked the top three factors that contribute to a successful live video event:

1. Employees provided positive feedback (80%)

2. Good viewing experience and no technical issues (71%)

3. All employees can participate (58%)

Source: Engaging Employees with Video, Ragan Communications

PREPARE FOR ENTERPRISE LIVESTREAM SUCCESS

Once you've determined what went wrong—then you can focus on how to do video right. Follow these five steps to launch a video program that gets support from the C-suite and reliably reaches employees wherever they're located.

1 CULTIVATE BUSINESS AND IT CHAMPIONS.

Successful enterprise video programs have support from the business and IT. Both are key players in the success of the company's video program—with IT providing the vital technical expertise and the business side driving use cases that most benefit the organization. Educate your champions about the importance of video as a communication and engagement tool. This way they can reiterate the value to the C-suite and ensure that the company continues to dedicate the time, staff and budget needed to deploy high-quality video.

2 PROACTIVELY ENGAGE VIDEO STAKEHOLDERS.

In addition to identifying champions, when you're relaunching a video program you also need to engage all the stakeholders. As noted, IT and corporate communications are likely candidates. But also reach out to all teams and roles who have a vested interest in video working well. These may include HR, finance and the leadership in remote locations. Give these stakeholders the opportunity to voice their concerns, outline how those will be addressed going forward and ask about their unique video needs.

PRO TIP:
If you're selecting a new vendor, provide your stakeholders with the opportunity to ask questions and learn more about next generation livestream technology. Kollective's team includes production and technical experts with decades of experience and knowledge regarding producing successful live video events.

3 UNDERSTAND YOUR FULL NETWORK TOPOLOGY

This is such a critical—and often overlooked—component to the success of your video distribution. Some organizations know the geographic boundaries of their network. They may understand the technical boundaries such as the location of their proxy servers. But the key is understanding the network end-to-end so that you have a complete picture of exactly how the livestream travels from where it's produced to where it's consumed. To fully map your network topology, consider:

- What kind of MPLS/VPLS network do you have between locations?

- Do all of your locations have their own local internet access?

- Are you leveraging proxy servers? If so, where are they located?

- How many LAN links does a location connect with?

This is a complicated, but worthy endeavor. Building out your network topology provides your organization with clues to where your livestream may be vulnerable to failure. It also informs your conversations about bandwidth and potential bottlenecks across the network.

PRO TIP:
Excavate the existing documentation regarding the components of your network. Make sure it's updated—or if needed, create your own topology map that documents your network end-to-end.

4 TAKE TIME TO TEST

Whether you're new to livestreaming video or simply renewing your efforts, testing your system before you go live is important. Doing so not only helps uncover potential problems, but it also allows you to plan for how to react in the moment if things do go awry during a broadcast. Your pre-event testing should include:

- The production equipment including lights, cameras, microphones, projectors, monitors and anything else vital to producing the video.

- The front-end system for creating, managing and storing the livestream.

- The video delivery platform.

- The endpoints for the live video—for example, a laptop in a remote office.

Kollective offers a Network Readiness Test, which assesses the capabilities of the network, and provides added confidence for your livestream events.

PRO TIP:
Task someone with monitoring the event analytics during real-time and spotting when issues may be cropping up for viewers. Video distribution platforms such as Kollective provide in-depth, real-time analytics regarding buffering, viewer connections, total views and more. That way you can proactively connect with users having trouble accessing the stream and get them back on track before the event is over.

5 RE-TELL YOUR VIDEO STORY

With video—and most everything else—people are more apt to remember mistakes than successes. If your company had trouble with live video in the past, then you want to get employees back on board with the idea that video is convenient, effective, and above all, works. To do so, consider rebranding your live video access page or site. Use different colors or customize the page to your company so that your audience doesn't associate past trouble with the current solution. Provide an easy way for employees to ask questions or connect with the help desk for support if they need. Make sure that the communication to employees about how to access the new livestream is clear and simple. Lastly, have patience. You may need to reiterate that the system works, but after a few successful livestreams the new pattern will be clear—and the rest will be history.

6 ANALYZE AND IMPROVE

Debrief after events on what went right and what needs improvement. We've noted that analytics can help in the moment, but they also offer helpful insight after the fact. Track how many people accessed the livestream, how long they watched, and when they left.

In addition to technical factors, also take time to evaluate the success of the content. Consider: Were viewers engaged throughout the entire event? Were people dropping off at a specific point? Are there ways to improve the quality of the content in addition to maintaining the quality of the delivery?

PRO TIP:
Be strategic on how you integrate video into your other communication channels and platforms. Embedding videos within a web portal page shows that video is important to the company's communication plan.

PRO TIP:
Enterprise video is a team sport—and you need video delivery partners who understand what it takes to be successful. Collaborate with vendors who understand how to scale video, and who can help you launch and then continuously improve your livestream efforts.

Live video for the enterprise remains a powerful and increasingly indispensable tool. Don't let past experiences hold your organization back from realizing the vast potential of video at scale. Instead, evaluate your challenges and then launch a thoughtful live video program that provides the engagement and communication benefits you want—without any of the trouble.