

## Soaring airfares, warming prompt global videoconferencing

Soaring airfares and concerns about emission levels are prompting companies worldwide to replace physical trips of their executives with high-end videoconferencing.

Telecom firm Vodafone, for example, saved over 13,500 flights per year and used videoconferencing to reduce its carbon footprint by over 5,000 tonnes.

Similarly, electronics giant Philips, with an estimated 270,000-tonne carbon footprint due to business travel, has introduced videoconferencing to its internal online travel booking system, including information about the benefits.

Videoconferencing is being used in 3,500 locations and studio bookings have more than doubled in the past year. Meeting candidates through videoconference is now by far the preferred mode for recruitment, according to Lisa Honan of Eyenetwork, which brokers for third parties.

Users of Eyenetwork surveys report productivity gains by avoiding such troubles as traffic, airport queues and jet lag for journeys to meetings that may only last an hour or two.

They also report shorter project completion times.

'Once a perk, business travel today is increasingly stressful and frustrating to workers and a lot of it is now seen as a chore,' said Honan.

'Human resources departments of large firms represent top users of high-end videoconference technology today, finding it a simple and economical way to narrow a field of key personnel candidates before flying in finalists,' said Honan.

'As the price of energy sends travel costs skyward, however, we see growth in facility rentals from all corporate divisions.'

Topping the list of corporate videoconference uses are job interviews; court witness and expert testimony from distant locations and business-to-business product development meetings.

'Obviously, many business trips are unavoidable but the trends we see are clear and decision-makers are more critical of travel in an era of rising costs and social environmental responsibility. More business travellers are asking: 'Is this trip necessary?'

Experts calculate that 1.4 billion tonnes of atmospheric carbon dioxide per year (two percent of global carbon dioxide emissions) were caused by aircraft in 1990, with predictions of four billion tonnes by 2050, or three percent of total UN mid-range carbon dioxide projections for that year.

The World Travel and amp; Tourism Council (WTTC), meanwhile, estimates business travel constitutes about 20 percent of the global total.

A one-third cut in such travel today would reduce carbon dioxide emission by about 120 million tonnes - roughly equal to the national emissions of France, Greece and Denmark combined.

Reducing travel also lowers environmental impacts in other ways, including fewer taxis, car rentals and hotel stays. A taxi from central London to Heathrow airport, for example, emits about seven kilograms of carbon dioxide.

And the financial cost of business travel is huge - the third-biggest budget item for many firms, behind personnel and information technology. The WTTC estimates US business travel spending at \$179 billion, followed by second-ranked Japan at \$64 billion.

Business travel involving India and China destinations is booming. The Chinese fleet of aircraft is predicted to grow from about 860 today to 4,000 by 2020.

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