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Quality's New 'Definition'

Videré Conferencing has carved a profitable niche.

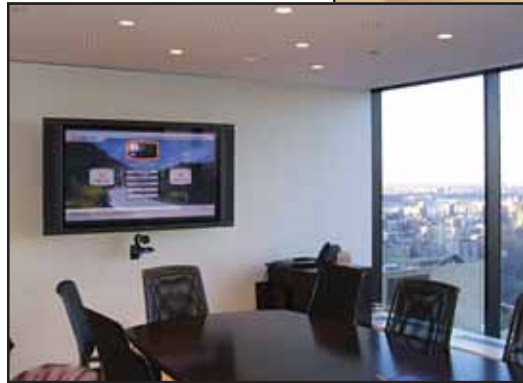
By Dan Ferrisi

Videré Conferencing, Inc., an innovative systems integrator that was founded in January 2002, distinguishes itself with its focus on high-definition and its tendency to seek out the most demanding, quality-conscious conferencing customers. The firm, which has 25 employees and more than 250 customers, is based in Quincy MA, with branch offices in New York City and Cleveland OH. Our point of contact is John Swoyer, general manager with the New York office, who joined Videré about two years ago. He outlined what makes the firm unique, the types of work on which it focuses and where the industry, in general, is headed.

Something that sets Videré apart right from the start is its dedication to, and concentration on, videoconferencing. Swoyer and the firm's three founders—Todd Luttinger (president), Bill Benoit (sales operations) and Steve Cogliano (chief technology officer)—boast years of videoconferencing experience, equipping them with an uncommonly astute technical perspective. Swoyer commented, "We understand Polycom, Tandberg, VTEL and now, of course, the HD side from the LifeSize perspective. We do videoconferencing as a core competency, but we do it with an AV integration flair." It is a LifeSize



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direct reseller, a Platinum Level Tandberg reseller and a Gold Level reseller of Polycom.

For Videré, the key word in every project is "quality." According to Swoyer, "We focus on environments where videoconferencing is as close to mission-critical as we can possibly find." Originally, Videré was focused in the legal market because, according to Swoyer, "law firms just had no tolerance for any type of network or videoconferencing equipment failures." In the last year, Videré has enjoyed success with private equity firms. Swoyer commented, "Once again, these firms *demand* quality of service or, as we call it, 'quality assurance,' as it pertains to videoconferencing. The videoconferencing simply *must* work." Healthcare, too, has been a strong sector.

However, the New York City office needed to differentiate itself in the highly competitive metropolitan-area market. "High-definition became the obvious answer," Swoyer said. He recalled that, visiting a Best Buy 15 months earlier, there was a crowd of people waiting to get into the HD boutique area, whereas everywhere else traffic was free flowing. At that



Videré has delivered its services to a broad range of quality-conscious clients.

Videoconferencing brings the world directly to companies' boardrooms.

point, he realized the extent of the HD "craze," and saw the opportunity to carve out a profitable niche for his branch office.

Explained Swoyer, "So what I started to do, about that same time, was brand Videré's regional efforts as a high-definition videoconferencing solutions provider. I really wanted to differentiate New York with an HD focus. And it worked, because a lot of people who were looking for HD would come to Videré." Of course, due to the availability of its HD solution, this made LifeSize instrumental to the firm's success. By Swoyer's estimates, the New York office is doing 70% to 80% high-definition work.

He mentioned that, in his view, the overall AV industry has driven videoconferencing's rapid adoption of HD. After all, given the amazing array of flat panel, widescreen displays currently on the market, people's expectations have changed dramatically with regard to image quality. "All these executives have HD at home, and they want to know why it isn't being done with videoconferencing. They want an equal experience at the office. You very

quickly grow accustomed to it," he said. Now that an equal experience is available in videoconferencing, the entire technology, in a real sense, has been given a second chance to make a good first impression.

Asked about his company's most interesting market growth segment, Swoyer again cited the private equity sector. One of New York City's most prestigious Park Avenue private equity firms had about 20 legacy videoconferencing endpoints before Videré took charge. Now, according

to Swoyer, "This particular firm has one of the largest networks of high-definition endpoints installed in the country. This currently is LifeSize's largest high-definition videoconferencing implementation."

The firm sought a high-definition solution that could scale to 40 or 50 sites. "So, spending \$250,000 or \$300,000 per room was not a way to scale," he laughed. This particular group had an extremely demanding environment, with essentially no margin of error—precisely the type

of project in which Videré thrives. And, in Swoyer's mind, only HD could achieve the desired results. Now, the company uses the technology and videoconferencing consistently, and it has been highly successful. "In essence, it's our perfect customer," Swoyer declared. "Demanding customers like this are a true testament to Videré's value proposition."

He added, "As a company of 25 people, we've been doing tremendously." Videré's growth has been significant. "Just during 2006, for example, it was over 30%." For the first couple of years, the firm actually had 100% growth. What's more, Videré has 30% to 40% more staff this year than last. At this point, the company has well over 250 customers.

Swoyer wants to make sure that, if Videré grows substantially, it doesn't lose its distinguishing characteristics. "In the not-too-distant future, I envision Videré as a \$30 to \$40 million company. We'll scale what we have right now to just simply being better." But, he admitted, it's a tricky proposition. "The quality aspect that we've really attacked has to be scaled appropriately, because you don't want to dilute your expertise." He wondered aloud if, in two years, the company might have 60-plus employees. In such a scenario, Swoyer stressed that the growth would have to be organic, with a sharp focus on maintaining quality and niche in all respects.

Swoyer closed with some general industry observations. "I think AV has a great future," he said, "because we're basically in this stage of reboot. Whether it's a flat panel display, rear-projection system or a front-projection unit—whatever it might be—the fact is that everything is migrating toward high-definition." He added that, in his view, this "reboot" is a tremendously significant industry evolution. He said it's a great time to be part of the videoconferencing market, concluding, "This is what the industry has been promising for the last 15 years—something *this* compelling." ■

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