StarLeaf

Skype for Business Migration Strategies

Connecting meeting rooms

Whitepaper

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Overview

Migration strategies for seamless connectivity: Skype for Business and the world of meeting room video systems.

Microsoft dominates the desktop, and Skype for Business is fast becoming the most widely-used single vendor unified communications platform. However, as the enterprise implements Skype for Business, it hits a seemingly impossible barrier to realizing complete video communication and collaboration. There is no easy or elegant way for existing video conferencing equipment to seamlessly integrate with Skype for Business. This leaves the enterprise facing the challenge of what to do for their meeting rooms.

There are choices, but with each one comes a possible trade-off that may or may not be acceptable. In addition, there's no right or wrong answer to migration; what works for one organization may not be appropriate for another. Cost and complexity, in all cases, must be considered.

This paper sets out to address what the available migration strategies for video calling and conferencing are, and how interoperability between Skype for Business and professional video systems can be achieved for inter and intra company calls. In a pragmatic approach we look at:

- Doing nothing

- Bridging the gap

- Leverage current meeting room systems

- Making the switch

- One world, one experience

Doing nothing

A 'Do nothing' strategy means that both the video conferencing rooms and Skype for Business are maintained in parallel, as two separate communications silos. This approach will only be viable if the business has no interest in connecting desktops to meeting rooms, and where there are no plans for remote workers, distant teams or business partners to meet over video with others based in local team meeting rooms.

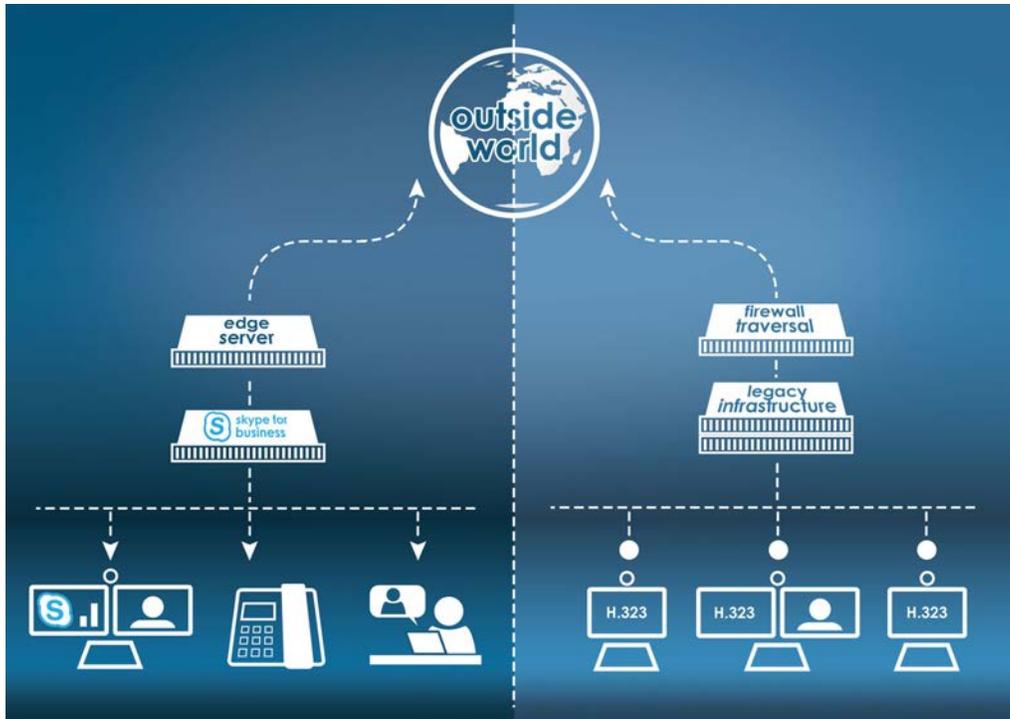**Figure: 1.**   Parallel, discrete communications silos

Figure 1 illustrates a typical scenario, which is repeated throughout a global organization and which may also have a mixed UC set up that includes other vendors such as Cisco and its CUCM.

Unfortunately, the 'Do nothing' approach leaves the organization running and maintaining two very distinct environments that simply cannot talk to each other. The limitations and support burden of this approach will overshadow any perceived cost-saving benefits.

Bridging the gap

The world of video conferencing has grown up around the H.323 standard, which is intended to provide compatibility between video conferencing systems. Therefore, different manufacturers' systems built around this standard should be able to talk to each other.

Yet, and despite the widespread adoption of H.323, connectivity between different manufacturers' systems can be problematic. Furthermore, you cannot rely on native H.323 connectivity with Skype for Business because the built-in H.323 capability (in the shape of the VIS server) is extremely limited. This leaves those organizations with a mixed vendor environment, or those that want to connect to others on different systems, no choice but to buy into infrastructure or services to solve interoperability. This is no different for Skype for Business users, where one way to achieve interoperability is through the introduction of third party cloud video conferencing services. Alternatively, businesses can choose to utilize on-premise video network infrastructure that can host meetings between users of Skype for Business and H.323 systems.

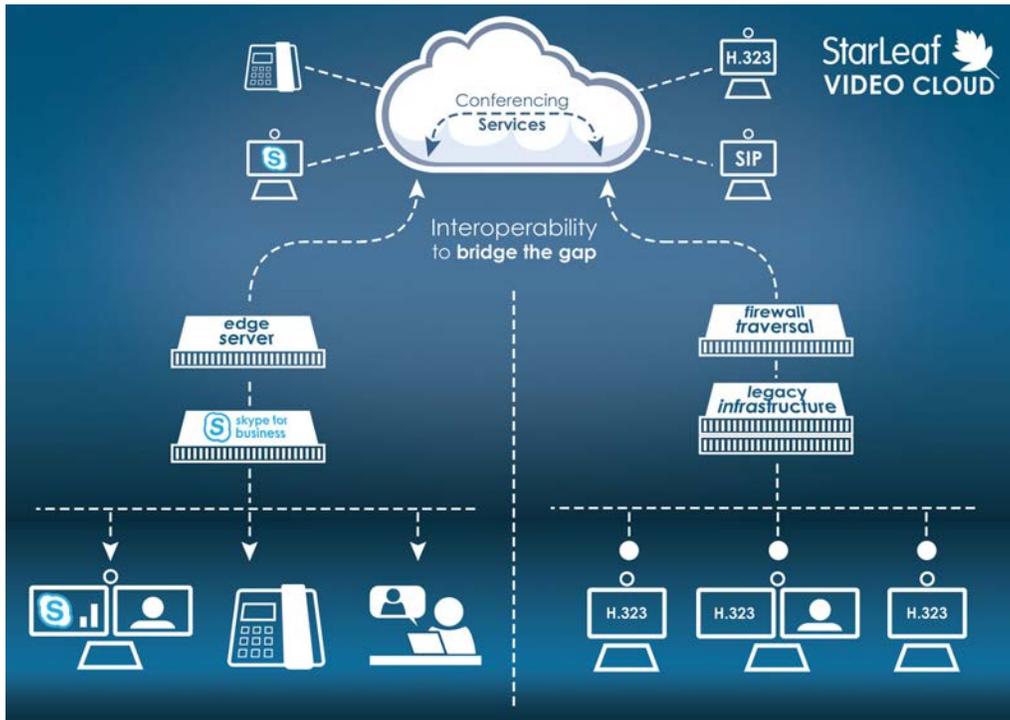**Figure: 2.**   Bridging the gap

Figure 2 illustrates how to bridge the gap between Skype for Business and legacy H.323 meeting room systems on a scheduled meet-me basis. Here, both Skype for Business and pre-existing meeting room systems can benefit from scheduled conferencing cloud services. Such video clouds provide a host of features including:

- Online scheduling
- Integrated calendar invitations
- Outlook and Google mail integration
- Recording
- Security and privacy for all calls

- Data protection compliance
- Interoperability covering any hard or soft endpoint including; Skype for Business, Cisco, Lifesize, Polycom, StarLeaf etc.
- Global audio dial-in

On the plus side, with this set-up there is no need to buy any additional equipment. Video cloud services are typically subscription based and bring the benefits of scale, fail safe redundancy, organization-wide accessibility and reliability.

The limitation here is that there is no direct video calling between environments. The video cloud acts as a bridge and the end user continues to maintain its internal network infrastructure, necessary to support the interworking of the H.323 systems. This approach is comparable to audio conferencing, where everyone is delivered dialing instructions and calls into a bridge at a pre arranged time. A conferencing service will only work for environments where there is no need for spontaneous point-to-point video calling or ad hoc conferencing between different technologies.

Leverage current meeting room systems

It is possible to retain existing room systems, and obtain both conferencing and direct point-to-point video calling while dispensing with legacy video infrastructure. To do this, all existing video conferencing room systems need to be registered directly with the video cloud.

This simple step removes the need to own and maintain complex infrastructure and will deliver a range of features that exceed those previously available. The StarLeaf video cloud provides:

- Secure calling with encryption for all media and signaling
- Direct calling for all, and specifically for calls between Skype for Business and H.323 endpoints
- Direct calling from both environments to any other external party on any video endpoint
- Bi-directional screen sharing
- Scheduled conferencing that includes global audio dial-in
- Firewall traversal
- Endpoint monitoring
- Usage and performance reporting
- Management dashboard
- Full redundancy
- Compliance with regional data protection legislation

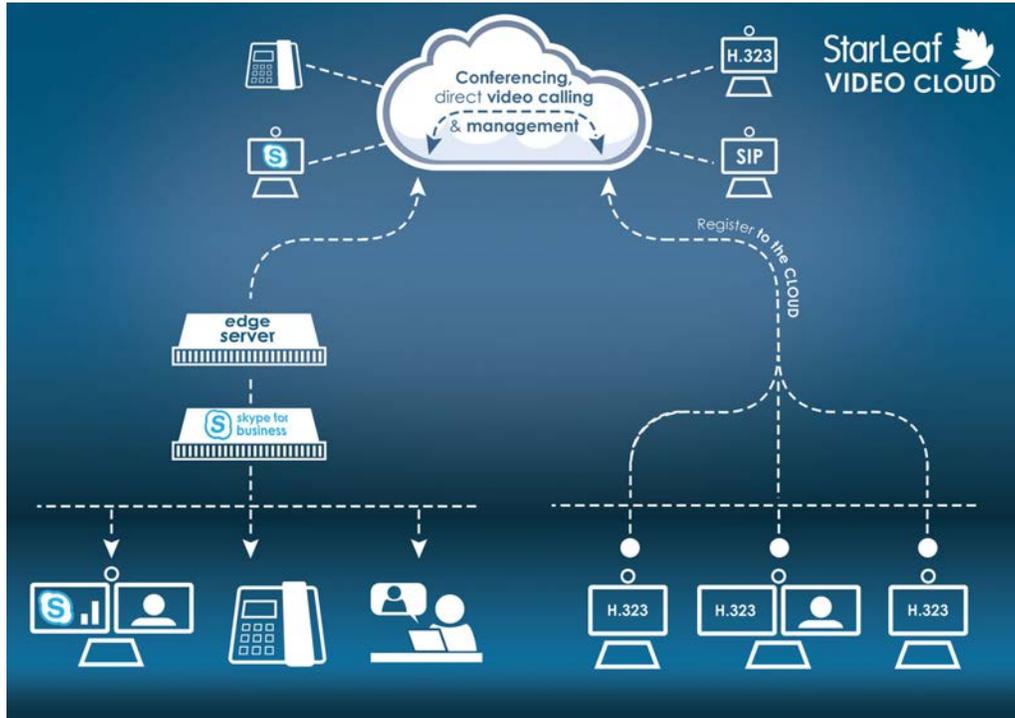**Figure: 3.** Direct video calling and conferencing services

Figure 3 illustrates how to achieve direct calling and conferencing for all, while maintaining current legacy room systems, registered directly to the video cloud.

Making the switch

Achieving a unified video calling and conferencing environment that improves and streamlines all facets of video within an organization requires a switch. By swapping infrastructure for cloud services, and legacy endpoints for tightly-integrated cloud video endpoints, a meaningful transformation will occur that vastly improves the user experience, system deployment and ongoing management.

Replacing meeting room systems for endpoints that have been developed for the cloud will ensure a seamless and interoperable environment between Skype for Business, meeting rooms, and external parties.

In addition to the benefits described above, and available when registering legacy endpoints to the video cloud, the StarLeaf Cloud and meeting room systems deliver an enhanced feature set:

- Ease of use from smartphone-like touchscreen controller

- Point-to-point direct video calling

- Call escalation from point-to-point to an ad hoc conference

- StarLeaf QuickMeet for ad hoc conferences

- Bi-directional screen sharing

- Guest invite, anyone can be invited to call directly into the meeting room via their own endpoint, or via a gifted software client

- Speed dials / Favorites

- One button to join scheduled meetings

- Automatic endpoint upgrades

- Endpoint and meeting room provisioning with StarLeaf QuickConnect

- Management dashboard

Figure: 4.   Interoperable and streamlined
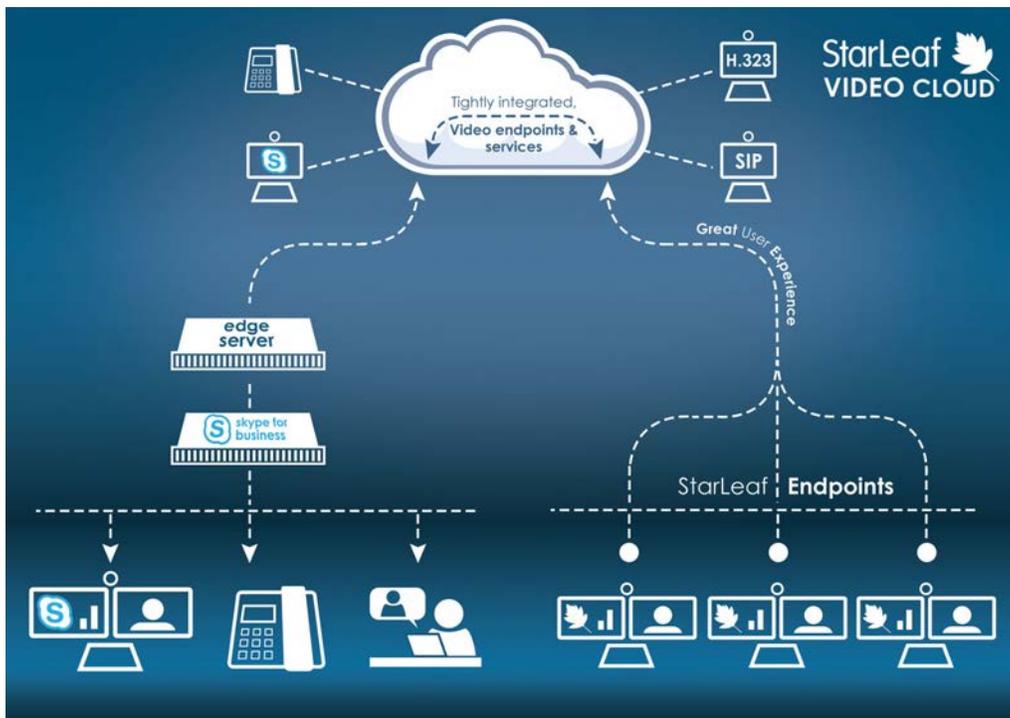
Interoperable and streamlined to deliver increased functionality and ease of use, deployment, and management.
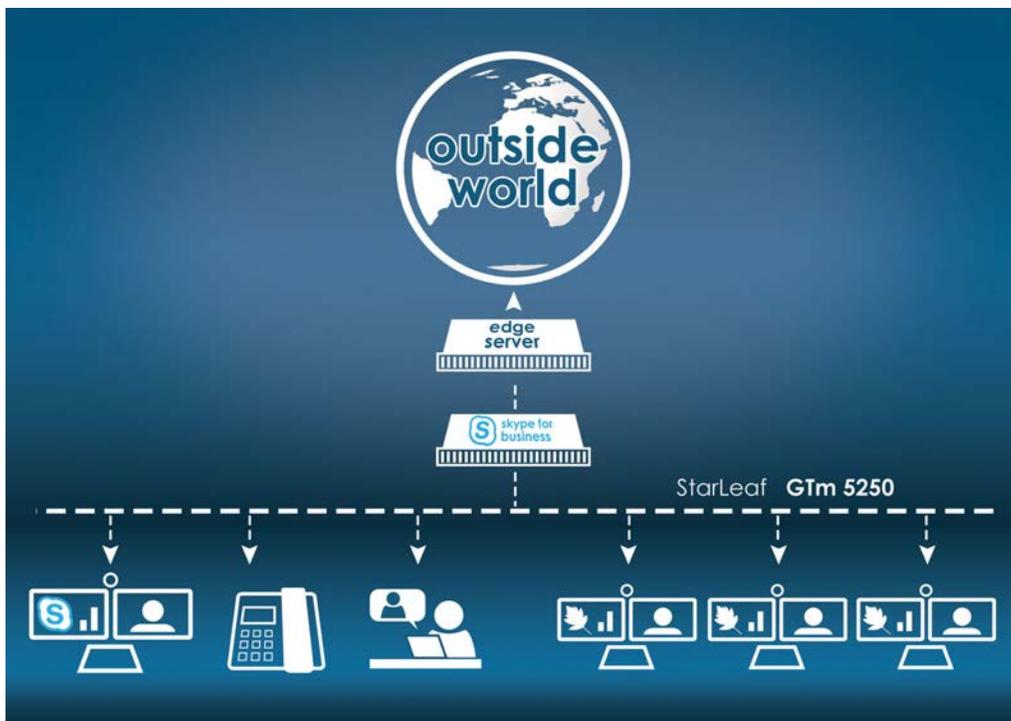
One world, one experience

Organizations that demand a single vendor UC environment will, by definition, want to remove all legacy systems, along with the supporting infrastructure. A decision to maintain and support a single infrastructure and end user environment is highly attractive as it reduces management and support complexity. However, addressing the meeting room for video still leaves a gaping hole in this strategy.

At first glance, a PC-based solution in meeting rooms will be attractive. This relatively low cost, low-tech option, offers a poor all round experience as there is no professional camera and users are expected to manage cables and connections each time they enter a meeting space.

There are several professional meeting room options available as native solutions. Offering the best price performance in this category is the StarLeaf GTm. This is a bespoke meeting room system developed to register natively to the Skype for Business server. Unlike some other systems, the GTm does not require any additional infrastructure.

The stand out benefit of the GTm is that it comes complete with a touchscreen controller and options for a PTZ or USB camera, and of course it seamlessly slips in and registers directly to the Skype for Business server, to mimic the one world unified communications experience.

Figure: 5. One world, one experience

While 'One world, one experience' meets the criteria, this setup can also benefit from the video cloud, which will allow the organization the manifold benefits of interoperability with its business partners and the outside world.

In summary

With the exception of 'Do Nothing', StarLeaf is well placed to solve interoperability for Skype for Business users. In each of these migration strategies, the StarLeaf video cloud can be used to great effect by providing the additional calling and conferencing capabilities. In addition, StarLeaf reduces the cost and complexity throughout, by replacing legacy systems for state-of-the-art cloud technology.

Legal information