



BRITISH SUGAR



“Any multi-site organisation – and particularly one serious about safety - should adopt video conferencing sooner rather than later.”

ASH SOLANKI
HEAD OF HEALTH AND SAFETY
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Improving employee safety and making meetings more productive

Part of the multi-national food giant Associated British Foods, British Sugar is one of the world’s largest sugar producers, with five sites in the UK and factories in Europe, Asia and Africa.

Historically, the company’s many sites required extensive road travel. As a result, three years ago British Sugar was startled by statistics showing that 1,000 people die annually in the UK while driving on company business, compared with fewer than 300 who die in workplace accidents.

“Our staff travel to attend lots of meetings all the time,” says Ash Solanki, Head of Health and Safety. “So from a safety point of view these statistics were worrying. The first thing we wanted to do was reduce the amount of time our employees spent driving.”

Multi-site solution replaces business travel

Mr. Solanki used the statistics to push for video conferencing solutions to be adopted at all levels and locations throughout the company. Shortly afterwards, British Sugar installed a TANDBERG 990 with multi-site capability at their head office and a TANDBERG 880 at four factory sites. They later installed a Codian bridge, allowing multiple sites to talk directly to each other and third parties without needing to go through head office.

TANDBERG personnel in Oslo provided all necessary training via video conference. “TANDBERG’s training worked wonderfully well. The session actually gave people the confidence to use video conferencing themselves, because they could clearly see that you could train a whole room of people in one location with a trainer in another part of the world,” says Steve Pateman, IT Business Analyst at British Sugar, who implemented the new technology.

Greater productivity and faster decisions

Since installation, road travel has fallen sharply. For example, key personnel from different sites previously had to attend a day-long meeting every month, which required some to make a six hour round trip.

These meetings have since been replaced by video conferences, with British Sugar estimating that it has saved tens of thousands of miles in business travel and related costs. Furthermore, video conference meetings have proved more productive.

BUSINESS ISSUES

Strategy to reduce risks to employees caused by extensive business-related travel across different sites in the UK and abroad.

SOLUTIONS

TANDBERG multi-site video conferencing solutions placed in different facilities to enable regular meetings to be conducted remotely.

RESULTS

Considerable success in reducing business-related travel, improving productivity and collaboration, accelerating decision-making and reducing travel costs.

FUTURE

Video conferencing is now standard business practice and likely to become further embedded within corporate practice.



TANDBERG IN MANUFACTURING

Video conferencing enables multinationals to diagnose problems remotely, hire and train employees worldwide and accelerate accurate decision-making by global business managers. This cuts production time and reduces time-to-market. Video conferencing also helps to build important personal relationships, cuts travel-related time and expense, and thereby improves your employees' quality of life.

"Our monthly meetings soon became shorter, weekly meetings, so the information the teams were discussing was more current. This has undoubtedly enabled decisions to be made faster and on more accurate data," says Mr. Pateman.

Improved collaboration and project management

Mr. Pateman has noticed other changes. "Collaboration between our sites has improved with the installation of TANDBERG video conferencing – we're operating more as a single business. When a pump failed it was taken into the video conference room, so that our engineers from different sites could work together on solving the problem. By enabling us to call upon other resources when required, this could therefore save considerable amounts of time."

The technology has also proved invaluable as British Sugar expands abroad. "We've extended our factory in Poland and in China we're building new factories," says Mr. Solanki. "A lot of the project management is being done from here in England. A weekly video conference with China is a lot more efficient than going there for three months, which otherwise would have been necessary."

As such, video conferencing has now become standard practice at British Sugar, as Mr. Solanki says: "People ask me 'why do we need to meet, why can't we do this by video conference?'"

Embedding video conferencing into corporate culture

However, for Mr Solanki, there is the overarching benefit that employees now spend less time on the road – and that means a lower probability of injury or fatality. The importance of this has been recognised internally, with Mr. Pateman recently being nominated for one of the company's safety awards.

"One of the fundamental principles at British Sugar is continuous improvement. Through the video conferencing project Steve has been instrumental in delivering a continuous improvement in our safety by getting our people off the roads," says Mr Solanki.

Looking ahead, British Sugar's experience may prompt its sister companies to adopt the technology. For his part, Mr. Solanki hopes to embed video conferencing still further by asking line managers to confirm on expenses forms that the travel could not have been replaced by video conference.

Summing up, his recommendation is clear: "Any multi-site organisation – and particularly one serious about safety - should adopt video conferencing sooner rather than later."

"Video conferencing is an enormous advantage when talking to our factories across the UK and abroad, saving me lots of travelling and accelerating our decision-making significantly."

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