

:: Conference Call Services

Description: Organizations using teleconferencing can rely upon conferencing services for their conference call needs. This is true not only for audio teleconferences; as we describe in other sections, there are services for **Web-based collaboration** and for **videoconferencing**. Conferencing services provide conference calls to customers so they have no need to purchase their own **bridging equipment**. Customers are billed by the minute for the calls they make, much as they are billed for their long distance toll.

Conference call services provide a wide spectrum of service options. At one end of the spectrum there are what might be considered full "hand holding" services, where the conference call service takes care of everything, from taking the reservation and booking the time on a conference call **bridge**, calling and/or e-mailing participants to remind them of upcoming conference calls, and providing an operator to greet and announce participants as they come into a call. At this "high end" of the spectrum, the service bureau will even call out to participants who forget to call in at the appointed time of the conference call. At the other end of the spectrum are what are termed **fully automated** or reservationless calls. These are calls where customers control the entire process, organizing and scheduling the conference call themselves, giving participants a phone number and a **PIN** to use to enter the call. There are a multitude of services in the middle of the spectrum, including call recording for people who miss the call, participant **polling**, and question and answer (Q&A) management. Most audio conference call services also offer **Web conferencing** or **data conferencing**, as well as **streaming** of audio or video presentations to participants (see the Web and Data Conferencing Section of this guide for more on these services).

As business has become more global in nature, so have conference calls and conference call services. There are now conference call services in most countries, and certainly for every time zone around the globe. Sometimes conference call services based in one country will set up offices in other countries to assist their multinational customers. In other cases, conference call services based in one country will form partnerships with conference call services in other countries, allowing their customers to book all of their calls through one vendor.

Issues: (Edited from *Teleconferencing: 2002...and Beyond*, a white paper by [ECI](#).)

If you are relatively new to conferencing, are dealing with complex issues, or have participants calling from around the globe, your needs would be best served by an operator, who can lend expertise and make the call easier to manage. For groups already familiar with conferencing, or those that meet on an ad hoc basis, an **automated** (also known as reservationless) conference allows a greater degree of freedom to scheduling and conference entry. In addition, the availability of an operator should one be needed is also important.

In the [Investor Relations](#) arena, the quality of the message delivery is critical to the success of a call. For quarterly results, public disclosures, and other event conferences there is little room for error. [IR](#) officers need the professional support of their provider to ensure that their calls are flawless.

Because IR and event calls normally involve many participants, your service provider must have the capacity to handle the call volume and the ability to do so efficiently. A professional provider should have operators that can place participants into the call quickly, make certain that the presenter can be heard clearly, and help the moderator prioritize questions. Since most participants will not, and do not need to, know the service provider behind the call, all mistakes made will be attributed to the company conducting the call. The impact on the company's image and investor perception could be devastating. Innovative conference call services have recognized the importance of this market segment, and established dedicated IR departments to provision their needs. This focus allows departments better collaboration with product development efforts, and helps create solutions that enhance the call experience.

TeleSpan has found that prices vary dramatically, depending on a company's willingness, or lack of willingness, to commit to volume usage on a long-term contract. As in the case of long distance toll, customers signing contracts for high volume commitments can get the lowest prices. Buyers need to ask about the various discount programs.

For global companies, another way of controlling the cost of their conference calls is to rely on a conference call provider that has bridging equipment in the countries where the global company has employees. With this global distribution of equipment, the cost of international conference calls can be dramatically reduced.

At the same time, price is not necessarily the primary issue in selecting a conference call provider. Reliability and quality of service are often more important. In addition, it can prove to be a costly mistake to select a service provider based on price alone, and later learn that they cannot provide the features you need for your calls.

Finally, for those who want to check their skills in running a conference call, we suggest Global Crossing's [tutorial](#), so that a person running the meeting understands all of the features *before* running a meeting.