

# **IT - THE RIGHT DIRECTION**

**Interview with  
KEVIN WILSON  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
AUDEO SYSTEMS**



In a series of interviews with KFA Connect, company directors talk about the issues which need to be addressed to align IT with their business strategy and operations.

The interviews will be brought together as a report to be published by DECISION magazine and then as a digital book.

KEVIN WILSON CONFESSES that the own technology sold by his company has made him lazy. "I often use video conferencing to talk to my technical director, who sits at the other end of the building!" he says, toying with the iPad on which the two of them communicate.

Wilson is MD of AuDeo Systems, a major designer, reseller and installer of audiovisual equipment for video conferencing and meeting rooms. And he believes, admittedly not for the first time, that video conferencing is a technology whose time has come. "This is one of those great ideas that has taken twenty years to get really good," he says. "The technology was difficult to set up and use before but now even my mum uses it. If an eighty-three-year-old can use it, anyone can."

Wilson says this new operational ease, along with increased awareness and falling prices, has helped to revolutionise his twenty-year-old business over the last three years.

"Now the technology is cloud-based, it's easier to demonstrate and easier to sell," he maintains. He likes to link video conferencing to the popularity of WhatsApp. "No one ever marketed social media but people try it out and

all of a sudden they find they are part of fifteen WhatsApp groups."

Falling prices due to the cloud-based model are a big help - video conferencing was once perceived as a corporate luxury, but that presents new challenges for suppliers like AuDeo.

"As the technology improves and embraces the cloud, so the price drops. That means sellers don't get a big capital expenditure opportunity; they now have ongoing customers so they have to build long-term relationships with them and look after them to make sure they stay."

Fears about the security of the cloud have been largely overcome, observes Wilson. "It's like how people got used to direct debits and giving retailers their credit card number. The fact is that the cloud is more secure as your provider is doing it not just for you but also for other customers, so they have made an investment that you could never afford."

Very few videoconferencing calls are now done over ISDN lines, he says. "You can intercept an ISDN call but you can't do that with encrypted cloud calls. And in most cases you can choose where your data is held."

Videoconferencing is a technology that can make people's lives better and more productive, he adds. "Look at the evolution of the fax machine. At the time it was wow, what a wonderful bit of kit. If you invested early enough you had a massive advantage: it looked better, felt more professional and you could get quotes out quicker without having to translate what you had written into telex code. Then, when the price dropped from thousands of pounds to £200 everyone got one and if you didn't have one you were at a competitive disadvantage.

"The technology cycle goes: you have an advantage if you have one and then you are at a disadvantage if you don't, and then eventually it's no use to anyone. No-one sends a fax any more; it went through the entire life-cycle and then died. I think email is on its way there too, and possibly the same with the phone. The secret is to find a product that will give you an advantage before it becomes a must-have, and way before it becomes a disadvantage not to have it and then becomes something that no one uses."

Part of the appeal of videoconferencing for businesses is that it reduces the need for costly meeting rooms and can increase productivity, says Wilson. Another benefit is that users can

communicate 'in person' more often. "You don't have to physically be with them to see them," Wilson points out.

Meanwhile, the ease-of-use and lower cost means that companies like AuDeo Systems are no longer primarily targeting the IT departments in client businesses. It means the sales message is different, says Wilson. "The mistake IT vendors make is to say 'this will change the way you work'. I don't want to change the way I work, I just want to enhance how I work and do it quicker."

One customer sector that AuDeo tend not to engage with is what Wilson calls video virgins. "We like to talk to people who get it, who see the value for money and productivity returns. The virgins will say 'FaceTime is free so why should we buy your system?' It's difficult to make them understand there's a big difference between personal and corporate video conferencing. FaceTime is personal; you are unlikely to call a business supplier on it. And you need specific devices to use it and what we are trying to achieve is ubiquity.

"Controllability is also important to corporates. Companies don't

want WhatsApp, for instance, as their employees could leave and still be part of the WhatsApp group. And as for Skype, it's a closed platform; you can talk only to other people who have Skype as it doesn't inter-operate with anything else. It's using old technology that is clunky and hard to use. And the video conferencing element of it is inefficient. I describe it as the equivalent of papier mache and string."

Demonstrating how an incoming video call 'rings' your device just like an incoming phone call does, Wilson says: "Imagine having to send an email saying 'I would like to call you tomorrow' then you both have to phone the cloud at a pre-arranged time and meet there; that would be ridiculous. With up-to-date cloud-based equipment you can communicate with anyone, anywhere, and access it from your iPad or mobile. When I hear it ring I can pick up any of my devices to answer the call."

He predicts that video will soon become seen as just another everyday communications tool - "the same as voice except that you can see people" - with customers choosing their own agnostic hardware devices and service providers, like they do with mobile phones. And he believes after-sales

support will also become the preserve of video conferencing. "It's quicker to resolve a support issue if you can see people when you explain it to them," Wilson maintains.

But he can't see a time where IT will replace humans. "I was at a round table meeting where they were talking about robotics, meaning automated decision-making. The guy peddling this idea said humans will soon have no meaningful work and I said I don't believe that, we have been producing and introducing new technology for decades and we still have too much to do."

Indeed, people can become slaves to IT. "It's forcing a change in how we work. My phone is never off," says Wilson. "It's also making remote working more the rule than the exception."

He identifies a clash in attitudes between generations in the workplace. "The millennials come up against the attitude of older people that you must get in to work at nine and you stay until five. There is a battle between the generations, and it's the kids who will win.

"They will be there long after we have gone so we have to learn to live with

that and deliver the lives they want so we can create a business that they will want to want to stay with."

Wilson believes that, done well, this will generate a competitive advantage as it will help businesses to attract the best people. "Yes, there have always been people who want to take advantage, whether it's being on Facebook all the time or having seventeen cigarette breaks a day," he points out. "If you give them the freedom that technology allows, they will either develop or turn it into a rope to hang themselves. But if you choose the right people in the first place, they'll get it right."

• • • •

For 30 years, KFA Connect have been "developing innovative software solutions that make sales order processing, logistics, management reporting, and eCommerce functions run perfectly." This is achieved by uniting the best parts of current systems with modern bespoke software so that it perfectly fits an organisation's own individual processes and ways of doing business.

KFA Connect  
First Floor, 28-30 Southampton Road,  
Ringwood, Hampshire, BH24 1HY  
Email: [info@kfa.co.uk](mailto:info@kfa.co.uk)  
Tel: 0800 167 0844

[www.kfa.co.uk](http://www.kfa.co.uk)

Researched and published by  
DECISION magazine  
[www.decisionmagazine.co.uk](http://www.decisionmagazine.co.uk)