

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS VIA SKYPE

By Sandi Cain, News Editor

Show managers and vendors often look for ways to do more with less. Internet phone service Skype is one VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) that does just that. The five-year-old company, a unit of eBay, provides free phone calls over the Internet between its 246 million account holders worldwide. It also offers highly discounted service for calls made by Skype account holders to traditional phone numbers. That has helped countless individuals and businesses connect to discuss sales deals, trade show logistics or just chat.

Gives New Meaning to 'Face to Face'

Skype also offers video service via web cam. That opens up a host of new possibilities. Cherif Moujabber, president of Creative Expos & Conferences, was an early proponent of Skype – he has been using Skype to run his international business for at least three years. He uses the chat function, which is a form of instant messaging, roughly 50% of the time when he is on Skype, and the voice function about 40% of the time. However, Skype's video capabilities take discussions to a new level, Cherif said. "Communication is stronger when you can see the expression on someone's face and their body language."

Trade show vendors such as SMART-reg International have jumped on the Skype bandwagon to more easily demonstrate products to a global audience

without flying halfway around the world. "There's no learning curve ... it's very intuitive," said Arnie Roberts, President and CEO of SMART-reg. "And you rarely lose a signal."

Trade Show Executive uses Skype to "meet" with international companies and partners. We tested its capabilities recently in a conference call with partner *msexpos* magazine in Mexico City and registration contractor SMART-reg International in Palo Alto, CA to discuss two upcoming events. "Business discussions are richer and more efficient because facial expressions and gestures communicate so much more than words alone," said Darlene Gudea, *TSE's* publisher and editor. "It was very productive and 'face to face,'" said Roberts, who participated in the call.

"For trade shows that have partners across the world, it's a good opportunity to communicate across borders," said Yves Daoust, executive vice president of the online events, virtual trade show and lead generation division of Montreal-based iCongo Live. Daoust said it saves money, is easy to use and simplifies communication.

Roberts was inspired by Skype's video capability. In the past month, he negotiated with vendors in Hong Kong and was able to demonstrate the company's registration services to a potential client overseas via web cam. None of that would have been likely to happen using traditional means, he said.

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