IEEE Region 3
Candidate Audio Conferencing Tools for Replacement of HiDef Conferencing™ Service

Prepared By

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I.   SUMMARY

This report outlines candidate tools identified to replace the use of the HiDef Conferencing™ Service currently utilized for audio conferencing by IEEE Region 3 and its Executive Officers, Region Executive Committee, Region Committee, and other standing and ad hoc committees.

It should be noted that this is an incomplete analysis for the following reasons:

- A lack of complete and definitive specifications for the desired service or tool
- No data on IEEE Region 3 audio conference historical use or projections for future use

The following subsections summarize the history of Region 3 audio conferencing (as known), the specifications used to identify new, candidate tools, research parameters and methods used, a list of all the candidate tools identified, and the primary (WebEx Event Center) and secondary (Calliflower™ Ultimate Plan) recommended candidate tools.

In addition to the primary and secondary recommendations, the remaining identified candidate tools are broken down into those (provisionally) recommended (for testing or further research) and those not recommended (because of apparent lack of customer support or high projected costs).

It should be kept in mind that the researcher and initial author of this report has tested only one of the candidate tools (WebEx Event Center) and a service (FreeConferenceCall.com) related to two other candidate tools (FreeConferenceCallHD.com and FreeConferencing.com) offered by the same company (Free Conferencing Corporation).

I.A.   History (as Known)

IEEE Region 3 has been using the HiDef Conferencing™ Service either as a stand-alone audio conferencing platform or in conjunction with other electronic conferencing or Web meeting platforms.

On 19 January 2012, the IEEE Region 3 Director, David Green, PhD was notified via email by Tom Nickerson of Citrix Online, the owners of the HiDef Conferencing™ Service, that Citrix Online was discontinuing the HiDef Conferencing service effective February 17, 2012.

The Region 3 Director tasked the IEEE Region Communications Committee, chaired by Bill Marshall, PhD, to find suitable replacement candidates.

I.B.   Platform Specifications (as Known)

The following specifications for a HiDef Conferencing™ Service replacement were derived from communications between IEEE Region 3 Director, David Green and IEEE Region Communications Committee Chair, Bill Marshall.

Initial specifications used were[1]:

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[1] David Green email of Fri, Jan 20, 2012 at 11:09 AM, "HiDef Conferencing Service Announcement"

1. Limited cost (less than or equal to $125 per month)

2. 75 to 100 simultaneous participants

3. Unlimited usage (understood to mean unlimited number of sessions per month, not unlimited length of calls)

4. Capability for participants to access audio conference via

    a. Skype VoIP (voice over internet protocol) service, at no cost to the participant

    b. A toll, direct dial-in number using PSTN (public switched telephone network), with possible toll costs to the participant

    c. A toll-free dial-in number, at no cost to the participant (if the participant does not have cost-effective access to option 4.a. or 4.b.)

A later communication appeared to add the following specification[2]:

5. "A tool for smaller groups"

I.C.   Research Parameters and Methods

I.C.1   SOURCES

Research was primarily Internet based and included a review of BLOGS and other sites addressing conferencing platforms (for both for profit and non-profit organizations) as well as various key-word searches using Web search engines.

In certain cases, telephone calls were made to the provider of a candidate tool to ascertain features or pricing.

I.C.2   PARAMETERS

I.C.2.a.   Primary Factor Used – Skype Access

Because hundreds of electronic conferencing and collaboration tools are currently available, the factor that appeared to be the most limiting, direct Skype access, was used a requirement in identifying any candidate tool.

Because much of the research had been conducted before the fifth specification (A tool for smaller groups) was communicated, and because it appeared a single tool might be able to fulfill the need

I.C.2.b.   Specification Not Specifically Address – Smaller Group Tool

Extensive research to identify a platform to meet the fifth specification (a tool for smaller groups) was not conducted, because much of the research had been concluded before the fifth specification was communicated and because it appeared a single tool might meet the needs of both large and smaller groups.

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[2] David Green email of Feb 6, 2012, at 2:11 AM, "Re: HiDef Conferencing Service Announcement"

In fact, if the fourth set of specification requirements (access methods) is strictly applied, there appear to be no other candidates available for large or small groups.

Additional research into other tools for "small group "use could be conducted once specifications are delineated. Other platforms could be considered, if the specifications are not the same for the "large group" use. For instance, Skype can be used for audio conferencing for up to 25 participants at no charge, if all users are on Skype. Skype can also be used for audio conferencing with a mix of Skype and toll PSTN users (no toll-free option), at a relatively lower cost with the contracting of a Skype subscription plan or a Skype online number.

I.D. Tools Identified Meeting (Most) Specifications

1. WebEx Event Center
2. iotum® Inc.'s Calliflower™
3. Free Conferencing Corporation's FreeConferenceCallHD.com
4. Free Conferencing Corporation's FreeConferencing.com
5. Open4ip Company's myGlobalConference.com
6. Advanced Communications Solutions' TurboBridge
7. Instant Teleseminar
8. Simply Speaking, Inc.'s My Conference Line
9. N Partners, LLC's NConnects™

I.D.1 RECOMMENDED CANDIDATE TOOLS (FOR TESTING OR FURTHER RESEARCH)

I.D.1.a. WebEx Event Center – Primary Recommendation

WebEx Event Center is included as a candidate tool, as it is currently a platform available via IEEE at no cost to the IEEE Geographic Unit.

There does seem to be a question about the long-term availability or cost of the IEEE WebEx Event Center[3,4]; however, currently the platform is readily available to all geographic units, at no cost (including toll and toll-free PSTN access).

While WebEx Event Center does not meet the specification for direct Skype access, if does meet all other requirements. In addition, since toll-free PSTN is included in the platform, and U.S. and Canadian toll-free calls are free-of-charge to all Skype calls originating in the U.S. and Canada, Skype access would be available at no cost to all participants in the U.S. or Canada.

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[3] Email from David Green of Fri, Jan 20, 2012 at 11:09 AM: Subject: HiDef Conferencing Service Announcement: "We should probably look at this versus paying the WebEx pricing (IEEE) meeting"

[4] Email from David Green of Wed, Nov 30, 2011 at 8:12 PM: Subject Re: Does IEEE Have a Replacement for Dimdim in Place?: "hey are working to roll out WebEx and are still working on the sharing model but they have a way to do it in this transition time. Be aware they may be some charges if the telephone component of the tools is used (as opposed to the VOIP)."

More importantly, there is a Jamaican toll-free dial-in for the IEEE WebEx Event Center platform. This is the only candidate tool that has any dial-in number, toll or toll-free, for Jamaica. For all other candidate tools, our partners in Jamaica would be restricted to using Skype or making a costly, long-distance call to the U.S.

The IEEE Richmond Section has now used the IEEE WebEx Event Center, without charge, with the toll-free PSTN dial-in feature, four times since it was made available. With the exception of the "call-back" feature occasionally not working for some users, each use by the Richmond Section met with complete success. The flexibility of the Web controls, including Web-based controls for PSTN audio conference, were particularly noted and appreciated.

The only limit on the use of the IEEE WebEx Event Center that has been noted is that in cannot be used for reservation-less conferencing. Advance registration (of at least five business days) is required of the host.

I.D.1.b. Calliflower™ (Ultimate Plan) - Secondary Recommendation

iotum® Inc.'s Calliflower™ Ultimate Plan appears to offer the best compromise in features versus expected cost.

Under the iotum's offer to nonprofit organizations, estimated costs would be as follows:

- $20/month with unlimited use via toll PSTN or Skype access with up to 70 participants per conference, but no toll-free access

- $75/month, estimated, computed on a base charge of $30/month (additional $10 per month to include toll-free access) plus an estimated 1000 user-minutes of toll-free use per month at 4.5 cents per user-minute with unlimited use via toll PSTN or Skype access with up to 70 participants per conference

I.D.1.c. Candidate Tools Recommended for Possible Further Research/Testing or Possible Small Group Use

I.D.1.c.1 FreeConferenceCallHD.com and FreeConferencing.com

These two platforms do not have a toll-free option; however, they are free of charge and do include Skype access.

I.D.1.c.2 Advanced Communications Solutions' TurboBridge

This platform appears to be a capable option; however, as there is are additional usage charges of 1cent per minute per participant accessing the call via Skype, use of this platform would be more costly than the C Calliflower™ Ultimate Plan.

I.D.1.d. Candidate Tools Not Recommended at This Time

I.D.1.d.1 Open4ip Company's myGlobalConference.com

The service myGlobalConference.com is not recommended because of the significantly higher projected total cost and because of the requirement to have sufficient "credits" to cover all usage charges pre-paid before each conference.

Instant Teleseminar, Simply Speaking, Inc.'s My Conference Line, and N Partners, LLC's NConnects™

Both the Instant Teleseminar offering and Simply Speaking offering appear to be simply a repackaging or resell of the NConnects™. While the $67 per month flat rate pricing appears reasonable, a toll-free option is not available. In addition, these services appear to be oriented to be used by sales and marketing professionals for sales seminars.

II. CANDIDATE TOOL COMPANY INFORMATION

Service Name	Company	Address / Location	Web Site
Calliflower™	iotum® Inc	1205 St. Clair Ave W, Suite 106 Toronto, ON M6E 1B5 CANADA Toronto Canada: +1-416-479-9648 New York USA:+1-646-652-	http://www.calliflower.com/
FreeConferenceCallHD.com	Free Conferencing Corporation	4300 E. Pacific Coast Hwy Long Beach, CA 90804 877.482.5838	http://www.freeconferencecallhd.com/
FreeConferencing.com	Free Conferencing Corporation	4300 E. Pacific Coast Hwy Long Beach, CA 90804 877.482.5838	http://www.freeconferencing.com/
myGlobalConference.com	Open4ip Company	Av du Centenaire 27 4053 Liege. Belgium. Phone: +32 2 8081750	http://www.myglobalconference.com/
TurboBridge	Advanced Communications Solutions	4905 Del Ray Avenue Suite 300 Bethesda, MD 20814 Phone: +1 (240) 292-6632 Fax: +1 (202) 652-4456	http://www.turbobridge.com/
Instant Teleseminar	(same ?)	N Partners, LLC 1140 Hwy 287 #400-311 Broomfield, CO 80020 503-290-5600	http://instantteleseminar.com/
My Conference Line	Simply Speaking, Inc	could not be determined	http://www.myconferenceline.com/
NConnects™	N Partners, LLC	could not be determined	http://nconnects.com/

III. CANDIDATE TOOL COMPARISON

See Microsoft Excel workbook file productComparison.xls