Company Overview

The company, a FORTUNE 100, underwrites more commercial property-casualty insurance policies than any other insurance carrier in the world. It also leverages its core competencies in financial services with a growing line of personal and corporate financial businesses, an extensive international life and general insurance portfolio, and a significant global asset management practice.

It has offices in 130 countries, over 50,000 employees and thousands of independent agents.

History and Status of Videoconferencing

This company has used proprietary and H.320-compliant videoconferencing in one form or another to communicate among key regional offices and with headquarters (located in New York City) since 1992. It owns 85 PictureTel Concord and Venue systems. Usage of these legacy systems averages 24 hours per system per year. Some are not running the most current software, some components may be obsolete or missing, and no one is allowed to use them without administrative approval. In headquarters there is also a 35-seat proprietary local area video network deployed with an ATM backbone connecting the 5 largest offices for data network as well as live executive communications between senior management and direct reports globally. A 24-port Lucent Technologies MCU with ISDN PRI interfaces in the NYC-based network operations center permits multipoint conference calls among company offices and with some institutional clients. Connecting between large and regional offices, satellite offices and partner offices for occasional meetings is accomplished by gateways from the ATM network to ISDN at 384kbps or direct ISDN connectivity. At least 90% of the remote sites this company's sites conference with are using Polycom ViewStations.

There is virtually no desktop videoconferencing in the company today.

The Mandate

New technology management seeks to reduce the monthly overhead per system and increase usage of video as a communications tool across the company and with partners worldwide (see section on "the Opportunities" below).

The Information Technology group has been assigned responsibility to migrate video services to a centrally-managed IP network environment and assume control of all video communications within 24 months. Since consensus is that the current IP network will not support regular video traffic, the CIO has decided that, at least for an interim period, the company will use one or more third party services providers to sort out the current systems, replace antiquated units, consolidate all video communications on a secure, Quality of Service-guaranteed IP network, and provide a variety of supplementary services (multipoint, gateway, recording and webcasting) as need by different users of the video service.

The Opportunities

In addition to conducting "business as usual", division managers are concerned about increased turn over in high margin lines of business. The personal lines of financial services are struggling to grow in a competitive environment. Several programs have been promised resources to address these problems. The programs will use technology to support:

- More frequent casual (small group) and visual communications between executives in headquarters and offices worldwide to improve retention and increase understanding of corporate issues/announcements.
- Monthly or weekly live (yet virtual and interactive) seminars offered by experts in remote offices can raise awareness (and subsequent use) of internal resources available to agents in branch offices or niche practices.
- More consistent and timely product releases in different regions of the world by conducting live (webcast) launch events. The senior management would like to leverage the same video technology for live interactive as well as webcast video events.

In addition, the company is in a position to acquire one or more competitors or complementary businesses in the next 12 months. This would potentially complicate the network management issues (therefore having a service provider manage all video over IP would potentially reduce work load on in house IT staff), and at the same time, merging businesses would necessitate frequent meetings, probably using video among managers in different offices. The potential expansion of the number of offices causes the proposal evaluation team to be particularly concerned about scalability of the solution a service provider offers.

Three Phases

In the first phase of its relationship with an IP videoconferencing service provider, the company will have dual objectives: to test the service provider's capabilities and network infrastructure suitability with limited end points in group environments, and to gradually replace antiquated technologies. In the second phase of the relationship, the company expects to increase usage of IP-based and ISDN-based conference room systems for the above objectives (internal meetings, seminars, product launch webcasts) so the company seeks assurances that the service provider has a scalable strategy. Also, during this phase of its relationship with a service provider, the company will occasionally want to record live meetings.

In the third phase, the company wishes to introduce desktop videoconferencing managed under the same system as the group system traffic to select offices. At this point, the company wishes to support telephony like features such as call transfer, call hold and no-answer call forwarding, for individual users. It also wishes the service provider to explain how it plans to make meeting archives searchable, retrievable and generally "navigable" by corporate knowledge managers.

The Proposal—Overview

Although the company may elect to keep or develop support for some of these processes internally, it would like to receive your proposal for all phases of the videoconferencing upgrade program and ongoing IP videoconferencing services. If you are working with strategic partners, for infrastructure evaluation, system deployment/replacement or wide area network services, these partners should be integrated into your proposal. If you do not offer services you believe will be necessary to meet the above objectives, specify so in your proposal.

Section I: This section should introduce your company and any partners. Explain the scope of your business and qualifications that are not technical but would influence the decision to work with your company over another.

Section II: Describe the technical capabilities your company offers, including network specifications and performance metrics.

A. Network specifications

Please explain the network architecture you offer (overlay? centralized or distributed?), giving details about the following:

- advantage(s) the network architecture and technology provide versus a centralized or distributed network, using the public Internet or a VPN; discuss scalability of your service here.
- Location of servers for multipoint conferencing, gateways; location of operations centers, support personnel (is support available in multiple languages?)
- Any proprietary software – e.g. support for centralized directory, customer account management –integral to the network architecture
- How your architecture
    - Ensures connectivity
    - Avoids single point of failure
    - Permits inbound and outbound calling through firewalls
- Capacity of network (note where responses to these questions include the partnerships/strategic alliances)
    - how do you measure the capacity of your network?
    - How many ports of IP-based multipoint are available?
        - What is maximum capacity for one live interactive meeting
        - Maximum capacity for live webcast/streaming
    - How many simultaneous gateways-facilitated sessions does your network have capacity to maintain?
    - Is the network global in reach?
- Data rate options for a videoconference (300kbps, 500kbps, 1MB?)

Performance and Availability

Please describe network performance (in terms of delay and packet loss, for example) and availability. How is this measured in your network? Does any software/hardware need to be installed at customer sites to ensure proper monitoring?

Can Quality of Service levels be specified? If so what are the suggested min-max levels, given different application requirements?

Section III: Describe the security measures in place to protect the company's data, users or other resources from third parties while also permitting live video sessions to be conducted between the company's sites and affiliated companies or customers.

Describe authentication and access control services offered. Are there multiple levels or types of security? If so, describe each in detail.

Section IV: The company does not yet have a target date for any of the phases. The proposal must have an estimated time line for implementation of the above phases. The proposal such also discuss how, in the future, the company will add new services (options such as discussed in phase 3 above). Are new services going to be added as a function of the end point manufacturers' development schedule or the service provider's network capabilities?

Section V: The quote must reflect all fees and terms (payment plans, penalties, start up or account initiation fees, etc.) in US currency. Quote fees on a per-facility, per end point, or per unit of time usage, as it will appear on the bill. Please include rate breaks for different number of users, length of contract and penalties associated with early contract termination.

We would also like to obtain rates for custom programming, if available, for new features or services.

Section VI: Please submit a sample Service Level Agreement with all relevant details. Include clauses for timely reporting (see below) and data recovery in the SLA.

Describe how and how often network performance and SLA compliance are measured. Ensure that there is a problem resolution guarantee time in the SLA, and state the customer's requirements (expected customer involvement) to resolve any issue.

Describe penalties/customer recourse for SLA breaches.
Please detail fail over/disaster recovery procedures as well as problem escalation processes. We would also like to understand the agreements that the service provider has in place with OTHER service providers critical to the delivery of the full solution.

Section VII: Please list information reported on the customer's account activity in the proposed solution (network delivery, application and user/attendance data).
Describe real-time and historical reporting tools.

- the availability of on-line reporting (Real-time? 1 hr? daily?)
- level of detail: is reporting per access basis, per account basis, per user basis, per application, per geographic region?
- How is the reporting integrated with customer business objectives and invoicing?
- Can company's network administrator download summary of data and raw data logs (Comma delimited files, standard HTML formats) and put them into the enterprise's own databases?

Describe how the company can customize reports/detail tracking (for example, the QoS level on different network segments) for cost analysis purposes.

Section VIII: Please provide contact information for 3 customers who can be contacted to describe relationship and service performance/track-record of service provider.

Due Date

Proposals will be accepted up to the end of day 14 business days from the day the RFP is issued to the service provider. If you receive this on August 16, you will need to complete the proposal and submit it electronically no later than end of day September 6. If you receive this on August 17, please submit your proposal on September 7.

Criteria for Selection

The company will choose the service provider based on technical merits (architecture of network, security, redundancy, capacity) and business considerations (application development, costs, ability to do business).