



PLANTRONICS CASE STUDY

NOVEMBER 2012

HOW PLANTRONICS AND PGI SHARE A CULTURE OF INNOVATION

“PGi and Plantronics’ vision were one in the same – to bring a whole new level of collaboration to market that didn’t exist before. It’s not about features and functions, though those boxes need to be checked. It’s about elevating the fundamental user experience in a materially different way.”

—Jeffrey Seigel, Plantronics VP of Strategy & New Business Development

From the day two pilots set out to invent a new kind of aviation headset in their garage until today, Plantronics has considered breakthroughs in audio technology its daily business. They pioneered the lightweight and mobile headsets. They lead innovation for noise-canceling technology and the personal speakerphone. In short, Plantronics has always been driven by a single obsession: remove the barriers to simply smarter communications.

But in 2012, Plantronics realized they’d reached a tipping point that necessitated a critical shift in focus. For 51 years, the company had focused almost exclusively on optimizing the audio portion of their technology. They realized they’d finally mastered it. So, executive management set a new vision: Innovate to create a richer, more immersive experience where people feel they are in the same room, virtually, and can collaborate with the same level of quality.

Jeffrey Seigel, VP of Strategy & New Business Development, was tasked with the charge to drive revenue by charting new, innovative terrain. A key component of his strategy was to develop an ecosystem of key partners to assist in leveraging innovation. So, Jeffrey approached PGI to explore synergies with the provider of innovative meeting technology—specifically how Plantronics’ contextually intelligent headphones might enhance the PGI user experience.

WHAT ARE CONTEXTUALLY INTELLIGENT HEADPHONES ANYWAY?

Plantronics products are unlike any other technology because they sense what humans are doing, and respond in different ways to compliment that human action. Consider, for example:

- What if you took off your headphones, and your online cube automatically showed that you’d stepped away from your desk?
- What if the simple act of picking up a headset activated an incoming call, and automatically routed it to your headset—just because the headset can sense your heartbeat?
- What if you could see that someone in your meeting had stepped away from his desk to grab a cup of coffee—allowing you to know they can still hear you but not see their screen for the moment?

From the start, Plantronics and PGI saw that they shared the same bold vision to change the world by improving the way applications work. Says Jeffrey:

“I got very excited because I saw that PGI not only had a similar vision, but also a very serious effort underway to turn that vision into reality. And the more I learned about [PGI] and experienced [their products] myself, the more I went, ‘Wow, these people are really doing something significant here that is going to make a big difference in the world.’ We merged the best of PGI’s vision and Plantronics vision, which we call simply smarter communications. Bringing those two worlds together was a natural fit.”

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THE FIRST (I) MEETING

Because Jeffrey, a Silicon Valley native, lives across the country from PGI's corporate offices in Atlanta, the first meeting took place on PGI's collaboration tool, iMeet. It was the first time Jeffrey had encountered the technology. As he says,

“You could have pulled me off the floor. I was so impressed. I was so incredibly impressed. I said, ‘Oh my God so much innovation coming out of Atlanta, who knew?’”

Though he wasn't looking for new virtual meeting technology, Jeffrey quickly realized the web conferencing tools in his queue were insufficient. He recalls that his change from audio to web conferencing technology was a big step up because he could share his PowerPoint slides and screen. Still, these tools limited his ability to do his job.

Though he had considered other video technology in the past, Jeffrey felt disappointed with his options—clumsy audio software that incorporated video as an afterthought, or high quality video conferencing that lacked screensharing capabilities. Needless to say, Jeffrey was thrilled that iMeet offers “an integrated user experience across the board.” Such an intuitive experience was especially important, given the nature of Jeffrey's position at the core of Plantronics' vision for innovation. As he says:

“The competitive nature of today's world requires us to be time efficient without losing the efficacy of being in same place together. If you spend the time to travel and be in the same room, the pace of your business innovation will drop dramatically. And that's why I think iMeet is so important. It nails this new business imperative more than anything I've ever seen before.”

Today, Jeffrey uses iMeet to host one-on-one and group meetings with internal Plantronics teams and external partners across the globe. He also hosts meetings with the Unified Communications customer advisory board and Plantronics' board members. Here is how Jeffrey uses iMeet to tap into lucrative ideas outside Plantronics, and harness management's vision for dramatic, innovative change:

1. Forge trust and encourage collaboration faster with high priority potential partners

Given the relative newness of the Plantronics' directive for innovation, Jeffrey and his team schedule and spend much of their time in meetings with potential partners. In these scenarios, they often meet with people whom they've never met before. To quickly establish common ground and create an emotional connection, then, is imperative. It lays the groundwork for new, lasting partnerships and fuels richer collaboration that will be profitable for both parties.

Traditionally, the business rule of thumb says that such important first meetings must occur face-to-face if the parties involved want to get started off on the right foot. But iMeet has changed this business truism for Plantronics. According to Jeffrey, iMeet has given his team what they need to build critical new relationships and establish a measure of trust—without having to be in the same physical space. “That's huge,” comments Jeffrey. “That's a breakthrough in the business world.” He continues:

“When I'm first collaborating with someone, I'm trying to convey a bold new idea—something that they haven't conceived of—and get across the implications for their business. That can't happen on a phone conversation. My

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ideas need to really come forth in a way that is fully understood, where I can see how people are responding.”

To initiate meetings, Jeffrey says he simply embeds the URL to his iMeet room in meeting invitations. When participants login for the first time, he sends them a few chat instructions to help them turn on their webcams. “We’re fully operational in 60 seconds,” Jeffrey says.

2. Spark more innovation by engaging current partners more deeply

Of course, Jeffrey’s team also frequently hosts many virtual meetings with companies who are already key Plantronics partners. Before iMeet, Jeffrey says conference calls were the status quo, where participants were only half engaged. “They wrote and read emails, and sent texts from their phones. Sometimes, they were even talking on their phones.” In short, meetings suffered from un-optimized productivity and effectiveness.

Today, Jeffrey says his team and partners are more fully engaged in collaborating because of iMeet—from banter at the beginning of a meeting, to asking questions, expanding on others’ points, and nodding in agreement.

“We no longer have the ‘luxury’ of emotionally and mentally opting out. I’m no longer clueless about whether people are even listening. That’s now a given.”

Jeffrey continues to explain that it’s already hard for him to imagine “dummying down” his interaction experiences by not using iMeet, without severely compromising how effective he needs to be for his job.

3. Facilitate serendipitous “casual collisions” with internal team

As the Plantronics team enjoys richer conversations with outside parties more often, it’s increasingly important for them to connect with each other. The success of the company’s innovation roadmap depends on their ability to unite as a community, and collectively weave together the best of the ideas that they’ve collected.

Jeffrey notes iMeet has infused incredible ease and simplicity into team meetings, from the quality and meaning of live interactions to follow-through on action items. Furthermore, Jeffrey no longer has to be in the office every day, which boosts his own effectiveness and enhances his quality of life. With pleasure, he says:

“iMeet frees me to be effective from anywhere, without having to contribute to the carbon footprint of the world or waste time in the car.”

Of course, there’s no denying that impromptu in-office meetings can be extremely serendipitous, and Jeffrey greatly values such encounters. But in the same way that economic research shows that productivity leaps by six to 28 percent every time physical population density doubles, he believes iMeet will soon bring the power of serendipity online. “Let your imagination run wild,” he says of Plantronics’ future plans.

4. Better ability to drive a significant revenue impact, and deliver on an innovative vision and bold product promise

Plantronics’ partners range from small software vendors with 100 employees or less, to very large companies that approximate and even exceed PGI in size. In general,

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Jeffrey says that the smaller companies tend to move quicker and be more innovative, whereas larger enterprises tend not to be as nimble. Jeffrey postulates that companies of scale often skew toward linear, more incremental improvements instead of dramatic change, perhaps because they're stuck in their legacy's past. Still, he seeks partners with bold imaginations and a keen sense of what's possible in the world. And sometimes, he's pleasantly surprised by what he finds, as he was with PGI:

"I found that PGI is Apple-like in the sense of being a more mature company that's scaled its business, yet still has a culture of innovation. Their future destiny isn't bounded by their past. They are willing to make big bad bold moves and invent the future. This is exactly how they dared to innovate with iMeet."

Though Plantronics partnership with PGI is still quite new, Jeffrey fully expects to see a significant revenue impact on Plantronics' sales, and its ability to deliver on its innovative vision and bold product promise. Specifically, he anticipates the next release of iMeet, which has Plantronics' contextual intelligence baked into it. "I am confident," he says, "that customers will easily grasp what I call our 'better together solutions.'"

"The next iMeet iteration is ground-breaking. No other company has embraced this level of innovation with so much passion than PGI. It is very exciting to know our companies are going to create so much value in this world together. It's been a great journey, and at the same time, we're really just getting started."