

Interview

Powerful Connectivity

An Interview with Robert C. Hagerty,
Chairman of the Board, Chief Executive Officer, and President, Polycom



Robert C. Hagerty

EDITORS' NOTE Robert Hagerty joined Polycom in January 1997 as President, Chief Operating Officer, and a member of the Board of Directors. In July 1998, he was named Chief Executive Officer and, in March 2000, he became Chairman of the Board of Directors. Prior to joining Polycom, Hagerty held key senior management positions with Stylus Assets, Ltd, Logitech, Inc., Conner Peripherals, Signal Corporation, and Digital Equipment Corporation. He holds a B.S. in Operations Research and Industrial Engineering from the University of Massachusetts, and a M.A. in Management from St. Mary's College of California. Hagerty was named the 2009 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year for Northern California, Technology Sector and CEO of the Year in 2005 by industry analyst group Frost & Sullivan. In addition, he currently serves on the Board of Directors for Palm, Inc.

COMPANY BRIEF Polycom, Inc. is the global leader in telepresence, video, and voice solutions and a visionary in communications that empower people to connect and collaborate everywhere. Polycom (www.polycom.com) is the market leader delivering best-in-class category products and the industry's only unified collaborative communications solution that integrates voice, video, data, and the Web and extends from the desktop to the core infrastructure hardware and software required in a world class communications system. The company has made a number of key acquisitions – including Voyant Technologies,

ViaVideo, Accord Networks, PictureTel, MeetU, ASPI, and Circa Communications – to build the most complete product offering for collaborative communications.

What impact did the economic crisis have on Polycom?

We saw some slow down, particularly in our voice business. Our video systems powered through fairly well. We didn't see any real disruption in Asia, mostly driven by business in Japan and China. The U.S. clearly saw some effects as did Europe. Overall, it was a challenging year, but one in which we were able to organize a number of strategic initiatives and get some things done.

Is there an awareness of how your solutions and services have continued to broaden into different segments?

Definitely. There is a vast difference between video technology of eight or ten years ago compared to today. We now have giant high-definition screens and an immersive environment with relatively no latency – the pictures are crisp and clear and it feels so like being there that I've had people reach across the room to try to shake hands over the cameras. As you can imagine, this has enabled a variety of applications.

We offer applications that provide two distinct benefits: they make the users and the organizations that use this equipment much more productive on a number of fronts, and they lower their costs of delivery. One such application is for education, where video has been used to reach into rural areas where the students are spread out geographically.

Another is in telemedicine, where the doctor and the system can be more time- and cost-efficient by consulting with patients via video. Translators can also be available via video to help a doctor communicate with a patient speaking a foreign language. In addition, we can apply a telepresence solution in a training hospital, where, for instance, a group of doctors can view a surgery via multiple high-definition cameras while being able to communicate directly with the surgeon in a live interactive process.

When you look at the enterprise, companies across the globe are using Polycom video and telepresence to dramatically improve productivity. These customers include LexisNexis, FranklinCovey, Turner Broadcasting, Regus, Daimler Trucks, and Atari, just to name a few.

Have you also focused on the public sector and worked with governments and public enterprise?

Yes, we work with all the federal agencies. We comply with all the security and networking rules, so we are certified to operate on those secure networks. We're widely deployed in both voice and video. In fact, NATO uses Polycom telepresence daily for central command communications, emergency management, and workgroup collaboration.

How critical has corporate responsibility and community engagement been for Polycom, and is that a responsibility of business leaders?

We have focused on that from the beginning. We have our own team inside the company that works on our relationships with non-governmental organizations. Many of them are trying to break new ground and become more efficient, so we're not only a source of talent and funds, but also a vehicle to make them more efficient. For instance, we work with Global Nomads Group. They use our video to connect students in different locations around the globe. Their mission is to encourage global understanding, and they're using our equipment to do it.

Another is Medical Missions for Children, which highlights telemedicine solutions. They connect children in distress facing life-threatening illnesses with expert doctors, who can consult on tough cases.

In addition, everybody in our company is allowed to take a day off to work on a charitable effort. We also offer matching funds and provide online training on ethics. The spirit of citizenship is critical to our company.

How do you find the time to spend with customers?

I do about seven to nine video calls a day, so I can be anywhere in the world instantly – it's just a click away. I have a set of tools available that everybody should have but not everybody does. I meet folks and get together and if they're video users, we connect and talk routinely as we need to on video, and if they're not video users, we try to convince them to become video users, because it's made me a lot more productive than I could otherwise be. So I do travel, but only to augment my video communications. Customers are supreme – that's what we really focus on at Polycom. ●