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Cell Phones Get Chatty
Polycom Has Its Sights On Conference Calling You Can Put In Your Pocket

We've all seen one of Polycom's ubiquitous triangular speakerphones sitting in a conference room somewhere. Not as well-known is that Polycom provides the guts inside 60% of the world's teleconferencing services, according to James Brennan, product and business development manager for Polycom's wireless division.

Polycom plans to extend the high-quality, full-duplex conference calling available now through commercial services into the cellular phone market. It has just announced the availability to cellular providers of the IGC (Instant Group Calling) feature. While IGC has yet to be adopted by any U.S. cell phone carriers, it is intended to allow both the new generation of smartphones and traditional cell phones to quickly and easily set up group conferences with any phone number in the world.

For a smartphone, the intent is that the caller will simply select a group of callees from her address book, and IGC will initiate the conference call. The caller is placed on hold until the first callee answers and then is placed into conference, similar to how traditional teleconferences operate. Callees will receive an automated message letting them know they are being placed into a conference call and be given the chance to opt out.

For older phones, predefined groups will be set up using a Web interface. Then the caller will initiate a call using a code such as ##1, and the remainder of the procedure will be identical to that for a smartphone.

Brennan sees IGC as complementary, rather than competitive, with existing push-to-talk cell phone services. "We've done a development with them where we've combined push-to-talk and Instant Group Calling so that from a single user interface and a single buddy list, a user can see who's available and initiate a push-to-talk session or initiate an Instant Group Call, and it also adds the possibility of starting with a push-to-talk session and converting it to an Instant Group Call," he says. ▪

by James Turner