



## Top 5 Evaluation Criteria for Finding the Best Remote Collaboration Solution Provider for Your Business

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## Introduction

The manufacturing sector has enjoyed significant recovery in 2010 following an unfavorable 2009 performance. *Industry Week*<sup>i</sup> recently reported that manufacturing technology consumption in July was up 58.9% YTD as manufacturers have become more comfortable investing in high-tech business solutions.

In response to growing tech budgets, many manufacturers are investigating the benefits of remote collaboration solutions such as audio and web conferencing to help address a number of business challenges including:

- **Supply chain management** – Meeting remotely with suppliers and clients to help optimize supply chain performance.
- **New Product Development** – Collaborating with geographically dispersed design and engineering teams to shorten development cycle times.
- **Quality Assurance / Quality Control** – Conducting remote diagnostic and troubleshooting sessions.
- **Operational Efficiency** – Reinforcing lean manufacturing methodologies by coordinating waste reduction.

Although several remote collaboration service providers offer high quality solutions, some are more effective than others at meeting the unique requirements of today's manufacturing businesses. This guide is intended to help manufacturers properly identify best-fit collaboration solutions by recommending a top 5 evaluation criteria.

### 1. Global Conferencing Footprint

Increasingly, the global marketplace presents U.S. manufacturers with profitable opportunities to leverage new and existing supplier, client and third party relationships around the world. A recent study performed by the *Manufacturing Performance Institute (MPI)*<sup>ii</sup> revealed that “the world market for manufactured goods is increasing at 10-15% per year while the U.S. demand for manufactured goods is increasing at 3-5% per year.” MPI concluded that “the manufacturer of 2015 will operate in a fully global environment and will need a global sell/source strategy to succeed.” Remote collaboration that facilitates operating in a fully global environment requires a solution provider that offers an extensive global footprint.

Evaluating a solution provider's global footprint should entail more than simply determining if competitively priced international toll-free access is provided for selected countries. A more thorough evaluation should include an examination of the following criteria:

- **Quality of international service** – Test the voice clarity of international audio conferencing calls and connection speed for international web conferencing sessions.
- **Local country support** – Verify that the provider offers 24/7 local language support to help participants located in other countries ensure access to collaboration sessions.
- **Translation services** – Determine if the solution provider offers translations services to help participants that speak different languages communicate effectively.

## 2. Cross Platform Compatibility

Manufacturers often utilize a broad spectrum of computing platforms ranging from standard desktop computers to highly specialized mobile devices. Cloud computing, which delivers hosted software-as-a-service over the internet, enables manufacturers to access software programs using a computing platform's built-in web browser. *Manufacturing.net*<sup>iii</sup> recently reported that "three out of every five manufacturing business decision-makers stated that their company was adopting some form of cloud-based computing, and 30 percent reported their company was ready to move all of its applications to the cloud."

Collaboration services that are accessible using cloud computing can help avoid many of the operating system compatibility issues, field deployment challenges, and unauthorized file downloads associated with traditional software packages. When evaluating the cross-platform compatibility of a collaboration solution provider consider the following criteria:

- **Cloud computing browser based access** - Determine if web conferencing, online phone conferencing management tools and webcast access are available using most major web browsers.
- **Software or plug-in download requirements** – Determine if the collaboration solution requires participants to download any software programs or plug-ins that may prove incompatible with operating systems.

## 3. Professionally Managed Solution Implementation

The companywide impact of any collaboration solution is highly dependent upon a well executed roll-out, successful internal adoption by employees and proper utilization. Navigating these steps is best achieved with the assistance of a provider that is experienced at addressing manufacturing business processes. Evaluation of a collaboration solution provider's implementation and management capabilities should include an assessment of the following criteria:

- **Roll-out support** – The provider should assist with the internal solution launch by provisioning employee accounts. Live support and on-line tools should be available to assist with any future provisioning requirements.
- **Solution Training** – Ongoing trainings should be made available by the provider to help employees utilize remote collaboration solutions with optimal effectiveness.
- **Solution Customization** – The provider should remain a full-time resource to help recommend best practices and present customization options for addressing new business challenges.
- **Management Support** – Live account management and online account management tools should be readily available.

## 4. Employee Training Capabilities

Manufacturers face the challenge of delivering large-scale employee trainings to implement new production processes, meet regulatory compliance standards, and develop a more skilled workforce. The *Manufacturing Performance Institute* recently found that 70.7% of surveyed manufacturers fall below the minimum recommended number of hours devoted to training each employee.

Remote collaboration solutions are used by a growing number of manufacturers to conduct cost-effective trainings that eliminate logistical issues such as travel requirements or scheduling conflicts. As a result, manufacturers are able to offer their employees better trainings more often. However, not all remote collaboration solutions are well suited for conducting trainings. Evaluating the training capabilities of a collaboration solution should incorporate the following criteria:

- **Q&A functionality** – Is the solution designed to support a formal Q&A process.
- **Training Registration** – Are there registration page capabilities to ensure that participants can sign-up for trainings.
- **Examinations and Surveys** – Does the solution provide built-in survey and examination tools to ensure that trainings were successful and support certification requirements.

## 5. Secure Collaboration Environment

The sharing of confidential information such as product design specs amongst company employees presents manufacturers with security challenges. *The Ponemon Group*<sup>iv</sup>, an independent research and consulting agency specializing in information security, found that “69% of all serious data leaks occur as a result of employee activities, costing \$6.3 million on average. Out of these leaks, 39% percent involved confidential business information, 27% involved personal customer information and 14% involved the company’s intellectual property.”

Remote collaboration solution providers typically employ state-of-the-art security measures that guarantee private information remains fully protected. Nonetheless, a proper evaluation of any solution must include verification that strict security measures are enforced. Evaluation criteria should include:

- **Multiple pass code protection options** – Primary and secondary password protection options should be available to prevent unauthorized entry into a collaboration session.
- **SSL 128 bit encryption** – All shared information should be properly encrypted to protect against interception over the public domain.
- **Secure data center housing** – Solution providers should protect their global collaboration infrastructure with 24hr guarded security.
- **Detailed usage reporting** – All employee usage of collaboration solutions should be documented in detail and made available to administrations using easily accessible reporting.

## Summary

Additional criteria such as features offered, user-interface customization and billing options should be incorporated into a thorough evaluation process. However, adhering to criteria outlined in this document should help to ensure a best-fit collaboration solution provider is ultimately selected.

## About Arkadin

Arkadin ([www.arkadin.com](http://www.arkadin.com)), a global audio & web conferencing provider, helps organizations of all sizes, including Fortune Global 500 companies, to better communicate and collaborate using customizable, cost-efficient, user friendly solutions.

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.industryweek.com/printarticle.aspx?ArticleID=22751>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.cmcusa.org/pdfs/NGM%20Overview%20and%20Findings.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.manufacturing.net/Blogs/ManuFACTS/Collaboration-Is-Job-No--1-In-Manufacturing/>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://manufacturing.net/Articles-Basics-Of-Document-Security-For-Manufacturing-Professionals-103009.aspx?menuid=242>