



Catch every word

The new standard of
professionalism starts
with good audio.

Understanding
Sound Experiences,
2021 report

EPOS



Audio technology is the foundation for a new world of business, where what we say takes centre stage.

In the last 12 months, the lives of working professionals have transformed. Hybrid working is now a reality and it's a way of working many have dreamt of for years. The flexible approach, in theory, promises individuals better control of their time and money, and freedom to fit work around life. While, for businesses, the potential efficiencies of reduced travel and a more flexible workforce look attractive.



17%

believe they appear
unprofessional because of poor
sound experiences

But in practice, navigating the technological changes needed to optimize hybrid working is a challenge and audio technology is a primary concern. The average audio solution end user loses 31 minutes per week due to poor sound quality on voice calls. This has a serious cost to business. Every missed communication has significant repercussions. 15% of employees report losing a key piece of work – resulting in financial loss to the company – due to poor sound quality.

Businesses may feel like they've already had to move quickly to help teams adopt new technology to enable hybrid working. Video conferencing tools like Zoom and Microsoft Teams have increased their user base significantly, with 51% and 43% of Enterprise professionals using them in 2021 compared to just 10% and 27% in 2020.



But the virtual meeting experience still isn't quite working. The struggles of video conferencing prevalent before the pandemic still exist, and as more employees are now working from home it's arguably a bigger problem than ever. The significant business impacts of bad audio persist, and so as we accept our transition to a permanent hybrid model, it is urgent that organizations take action.

One thing is clear: there's no going back to business as usual. So, as we adapt, we should recognize there is a new and better way forward.

One that benefits employers and employees alike, and where the substance of what we say is the deciding factor between success and failure.

Audio technology is at the heart of this revolution. By acknowledging the powerful role of audio, we can ensure a total focus on the substance of what we say – and make that the professional standard we all aspire to.



Every word counts for the new hybrid professional

The potential of virtual meetings is difficult to overestimate. They offer freedom, connection, and collaboration with teams and clients all around the world. However, with these benefits, come issues that can negatively impact standards of professionalism.

In traditional work environments, professionalism was gauged by appearance, the choice of meeting locations, and effective time management. In a remote work environment, professionalism is less about physical presence

and more about the content of interactions. This is a positive change – because it’s the content that matters – but without the right technology it’s a change that poses a risk to organizations.

Research by Ipsos and EPOS, showed that 63% of global end users experience issues during business conversations on a regular basis because of poor sound quality. The most common problems include background noise (32%), interferences on the line (26%), and asking for information to be repeated (23%).

60%

of decision makers believe
better sound will help them
retain clients

71%

believe that better audio
will help prevent lost pitches
in the future



Together these factors contribute to 31 minutes per week that the average end user spends on extra work. Not only is this a waste of time, but it also undermines professionalism.

Missing important information shared by clients or asking them to repeat themselves during virtual meetings damages client relationships and adds a barrier to securing new business. In a hybrid working world, bad audio poses a barrier to professionalism more damaging than a scuffed shoe or weak handshake: 60% of decision makers believe better sound will help them retain clients, while 71% believe that it will help prevent lost pitches in the future.

At the beginning of the pandemic, audio glitches in meetings were common – and most people were forgiving. But as the world transitions into a “new normal”, expectations have changed. People don’t have as much patience for suboptimal virtual meetings as they did in early 2020 and equipping employees with high quality audio and video technology is essential to smooth-running business. Those adopting the right audio technology now are at a competitive advantage – they can be more efficient, more professional and elevate the client experience.



Employees reach their potential working with confidence and in comfort

Employers have long recognized the importance of investing in employee wellbeing, but few were prepared for a situation as disruptive as Covid-19. Employees around the world are struggling with their mental health, with one demographic finding the balance of at-home work and life particularly difficult: Gen Z. In July, MetLife's 18th annual US Employee Benefits Trends Study showed that Gen Z employees were three times more likely to have sought help for mental health issues like stress and burnout than their more seasoned counterparts. For employees, positive internal communications about maintaining the same professional standards as before can exacerbate feelings of stress and isolation, and continued use of tools

and technology that carried over from the office and into the home don't help. Technology built for in-office scenarios where employees could expect quiet surroundings simply don't work for a hybrid set-up.

26%

of employees are left feeling frustrated, irritated, or annoyed by bad audio



19%

experience moments of stress at work due to bad audio

26%

of employees report misunderstandings due to bad audio

21%

of employees miss out on critical information due to poor audio

With the pre-existing tools they have at their disposal, many employees struggle to maintain efficiency and productivity while working remotely. Due to the emotional impact of poor audio technology, 26% of employees are left feeling frustrated, irritated, or annoyed; and 19% experience moments of stress. Inevitably, their work can suffer.

26% of employees report misunderstandings, 21% miss out on critical information, and 17% believe they appear unprofessional because of poor sound experiences. Over time, these regular negative experiences affect their ability to focus, engage and actively contribute.

But this lack of connectivity doesn't only increase the risk of employee burnout. It presents a real threat to innovation. In the traditional workplace, idea-sharing happened organically. Spontaneous encounters with colleagues enabled networking and cross-team collaboration. For many, day-to-day interactions have shrunk to immediate teams and this makes it harder to build meaningful connections across a company - connections which lead to the exchange of ideas and drive innovation.

But there are some ways to enable employees to regain the ability to collaborate and facilitate the generation of ideas. This starts by ensuring everybody's voices are heard. In other words, equipping employees with high quality audio or video so that they feel confident bringing new ideas to the table and collaborating with colleagues they may not have had much in-person interaction with.

We've seen the consequences of poor sound experiences on employees' stress levels and quality of work. The less time and energy they can expend on fixing audio issues, the more they can spend on networking and idea-sharing; a win for employees' career advancement and productivity across an organization.



68%

believe good audio will stop the need to repeat or clarify points while working



56%

believe good audio will prevent moments of stress at work



67%

believe good audio will prevent feelings of frustration, annoyance and irritation at work



66%

believe good audio will prevent extra time required setting technology up at work



Tailor your tech to the conversation

Our research found that 79% of end users recognise the benefits of video for virtual meetings, an increase of 7% from 2020. Along with savings in time and cost compared with face-to-face meetings, 21% of decision makers say that video meetings help them feel closer to their team. 17% believe it establishes trust in working relationships.

However, 31% of decision makers claim technology issues are the main obstacle to using video in meetings; 21% point to issues with the video conferencing applications themselves; and 20% report difficulties with seeing details shared on screen.

Research from Stanford University found that video calls force people to stare at their colleagues close-up. At such proximity, the brain is hard-wired to expect either a punch or a kiss; and endless eye contact can make for a stressful experience. This phenomenon, known as “Zoom fatigue”, is exacerbated by bad audio. 20% of decision makers said that they have difficulties hearing everything said in a meeting with the audio equipment they have.

68%

of modern workers believe
that good audio solutions can help
solve a lack of confidence
or embarrassment

61%

believe good audio
will prevent them appearing
unprofessional at work



While the right video technology can help to overcome many of these challenges, it's also worth considering when it is right time for a video call, and when will audio alone be enough – or even a better choice. The default approach for many employers separated physically from their teams is to try and replicate the experience of seeing each other through video meetings. But too much virtual face-time can be counter-productive.

To unlock the potential of hybrid working, we need technology to enhance our experience and blend seamlessly into the daily lives of employees, not work against us. Recognising

when seeing each other's faces is a benefit – when we want to see the other person's emotions and reactions to our conversation, for example – and when clear, crisp audio alone gives us what we need, can help support employee wellbeing and balance the working day.

Introducing audio only meetings could allow users to stretch their legs and get a change of scenery while remaining engaged in their work. And with the right audio technology, the background sounds to an alternative space won't be an issue.

Employees see hybrid working as the future

The opportunity of hybrid work is one that everyone agrees on. 79% of end users see benefits, reporting the top three as time saving, cost saving, and the freedom to work from anywhere.

However, our research found that there is a discrepancy between the expectations of decision makers and employees about what work will look like after the pandemic.

53% of decision makers think that the majority of employees will work more from the workplace, in the next year, whereas just 26% of employees think the same. 36% of employees believe they will work more from home compared to before the pandemic, compared to only 30% of decision makers.

This signals a marked shift in employee expectations over the last 12 months. They have proved they are able to perform in a hybrid model during the pandemic and they want more flexibility long-term.



79%

of end users see benefits of premium audio, reporting the top three as time saving, cost saving, and the freedom to work from anywhere.



This is something leaders need to recognize. And in fact, it presents organizations with a major opportunity. Those that offer a thoughtful approach to hybrid work will retain and recruit the best talent. To get there will require consideration of a range of solutions address the diverse needs and concerns of employees. A successful hybrid working strategy is not your “business as usual” working from home. An employee in a noisy, open-plan office will require a different type of audio solution than someone working remotely – and of course many employees will be doing both.

Organizations that invest in high quality, fit-for-purpose audio solutions will get the most out of a hybrid working strategy. These investments make keeping in touch and collaboration as easy as when two colleagues sit side by side. And they avoid the risks many are currently facing, when tech issues leads to dissatisfied clients and burnt out employees. By listening to the way employees want to work, and providing the technology needed to make this a seamless experience, organizations can not only meet its previous standards, but exceed them.

Recognize the risk, prepare for the opportunity

Bad audio is limiting the potential of employees and undermining the possibilities of hybrid working. Audio quality can mean the difference between success and failure in virtual communications and the far-reaching consequences of this can affect the long-term health of an organization.

83%

of all decision makers
believe that consequences of
bad audio caused their
company issues within the
past 12 months



15%

of modern workers lost a
key piece of work or a deal
because of bad audio



17%

said bad audio has resulted
in a financial loss at work due to
incorrectly undertaking a task



20%

said bad audio has resulted
in dissatisfied clients



13%

of modern workers say they've lost
a client as a result of poor audio



When audio technology fails, customer relations suffer, internal productivity drops, and employees cannot meet their full potential.

The good news is that more than three quarters of decision makers are aware of the solution: high quality audio solutions. In the next 12 months, 86% of decision makers are considering purchasing new audio equipment, providing headphones, headsets, or personal speaker phones to 32% more employees than before.

By acting now, decision makers can address immediate audio issues in their organization and mitigate the risks they pose to the business and employees in the long-term. Using high quality audio to create an optimal working set-up for all employees – regardless of their location – will empower everyone to contribute to a new and better way of working.

Stay professional as always

Find out more about the audio solution to ensure you catch every word.

Visit eposaudio.com and learn more about eliminating bad audio from your business.



About EPOS

EPOS delivers high-end audio and video solutions for business professionals and the gaming community.

The establishment of EPOS follows the demerge of Sennheiser Communications – the joint venture between Sennheiser electronic GmbH & CO.KG and Demant A/S. Alongside the introduction of an own-branded portfolio, EPOS continues to sell the Sennheiser Communications portfolio co-branded as EPOS | SENNHEISER.

Headquartered in Copenhagen, EPOS is part of Demant – a world-leading audio and hearing technology group.

About the research

This research was conducted by IPSOS Denmark on behalf of EPOS. The data was collected using Online Computer Assisted Web Interviews (CAWI) between medio March to beginning of April 2021.

The main target sample consisted of respondents:

- From the US, UK, France, Germany, Hong Kong and Singapore
- Males / females 18–65 y
- Working in companies with 50+ employees*
- Decision makers and end-users of audio solutions
- Working a minimum 20 hours per week

Target Definitions

Throughout the report, the respondents are categorized and referred to as follows:

Decision Maker (DM) Call Centric

Decision makers responsible or sharing responsibility for purchasing headsets for: employees who spend most of their time at their desk receiving and/or making calls with customers, suppliers and colleagues.

Decision Maker (DM) Office/Mobile

Decision makers responsible or sharing responsibility for purchasing audio solutions for: employees who do much of their work at their desk, but also have meetings and other activities OR are highly mobile within the office/workplace or outside.

End User (EU) Call Centric

Spend most of their work receiving and/or making calls with customers, suppliers or colleagues. 64% are using headset / headphones at work that were bought separately. 36% are using both corded headphones from a smartphone at work and a headset that was bought separately.

End User (EU) Office/Mobile

Do much of their work at their desk, but also have meetings and other activities OR are highly mobile within the office/workplace or outside. 73% are using headset / headphones at work that were bought separately. 27% are using both corded headphones from a smartphone at work and a headset that was bought separately.

Potential End User (EU) Office/Mobile/Call Centric

100% do not use separately bought headset / headphones at work. 11% are using headphones that came with a smartphone at work.

*Due to a very low incident rate for end-users call centric in all countries, the criteria for company size was relaxed and companies with 10–49 employees accepted. 63 respondents (2,5%) out of the total sample.

EPOS

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