StarLeaf

How to build a best-in-class collaboration technology stack with Microsoft Teams

Meet better. **Meet StarLeaf.**
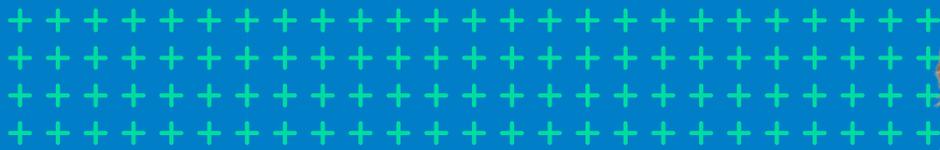
Executive summary

Many organizations that have adopted Microsoft Teams are seeing growing benefits from the use of video collaboration among their colleagues. While the meeting functions in Teams are sufficient to meet these needs in some cases, such as internal collaboration, it is not an optimum strategy when it comes to supporting all types of business-critical video communications, including those with external parties.

Instead, adopting a best-in-class approach by deploying a secure and reliable video meeting solution that is tightly integrated with the Microsoft technology stack, can greatly enhance an existing Microsoft Teams deployment by delivering a rich set of features and functionality, both at the desktop and in the meeting room.

This paper explains how integrating the right solution can help Microsoft Teams organizations to:

- improve business-to-business working by enabling teams to connect and collaborate with people on any platform

- benefit from an increased choice of video calling features

- support a greater mix of room solutions - protecting your investment without an increase in management overhead

Business-to-business video communication

Not all businesses use Microsoft Teams for their communication platform, and even fewer have Microsoft Teams compatible meeting rooms.

As of 2019, Cisco Webex has a market share of 50%, and with the shift to remote working in light of the Coronavirus pandemic, other platforms such as StarLeaf and Zoom have grown in use.

The new normal for organizations will see the critical requirement to communicate with other businesses using video. Given the above market shares, most of these external businesses do not use Microsoft Teams. This means that they may not be able to join your Teams meetings from their video meeting rooms. It also means that your colleagues are likely to receive invites to join meetings held on platforms other than Microsoft Teams. In order to maintain crucial business operations, you will need to be able to:

- Join meetings hosted on other platforms from your meeting rooms
- Schedule meetings that other businesses can join from their meeting rooms

StarLeaf is an open platform. Core to our mission is enabling people to connect and collaborate using video, regardless of the platform they use.

StarLeaf meeting rooms can join most meetings hosted on other platforms, including:

- Cisco Webex
- Zoom
- BlueJeans
- Pexip
- Microsoft Skype for Business
- Microsoft Teams (via CVI partners)

And, with the addition of our MultiJoin technology, users don't even need to know what type of meeting they're joining – they simply connect. StarLeaf finds the meeting in the user's calendar and automatically synchronizes the touchscreen so that users can join the meeting with a single touch. So when your colleagues receive that invite to a Zoom meeting from another business, they can easily join it from your meeting room.

Every StarLeaf meeting invite contains dialing details for a wide variety of video conferencing equipment. When your colleagues send a StarLeaf meeting invite to another business that uses a different video provider, their guests can join from the comfort of their chosen meeting room.

Multiple platform support and a secure alternative to Zoom

Just as an organization may have a mix of room solutions, it is rare for all users and teams within a large enterprise to use a single meetings platform. While Microsoft Teams may be the standard, some teams choose to use Zoom or another platform. This might be acceptable at the desktop but it creates a challenge in the meeting room, where rooms must serve both Teams and Zoom users by offering the ability to join both meeting types with a single touch.

In the same way that StarLeaf enables business-to-business video communications, we enable multiple platform support in the meeting room. With your Microsoft Teams users equipped with StarLeaf meetings and your Zoom users scheduling Zoom meetings, your meeting rooms can be used by both sets of users.

Ideally, from a security standpoint, you may even persuade your Zoom users to migrate to StarLeaf. It is likely they originally chose Zoom due to its simple experience, but recent developments might cause concern.

StarLeaf also delivers an intuitively simple user experience but our key difference is that, with StarLeaf, security is in our DNA, engineered into the core of everything we do from the outset. For StarLeaf, security is not an afterthought or considered to be something that can simply be fixed with a post-breach patch.

In addition, StarLeaf is the only vendor that is:

ISO/IEC 27001 certified

an adherent of the UK National Cyber Security Centre's 14 principles of cloud security platforms

HIPAA compliant

recommended by the French DINUM

These accreditations coupled with an immaculate track record (StarLeaf has never suffered a global vulnerability or data breach) mean that organizations are turning to StarLeaf as a vendor they can trust with their business-critical video communications.

Meeting room hardware and management

When choosing your meeting room hardware, consider the total cost of ownership of the solution. This could include large hidden costs associated with:

Firmware management

Are you responsible for managing version dependencies between operating systems, applications, and third party drivers, or is system firmware managed by the vendor? If the former is true, what is the additional personnel cost associated with this?

Room management

Does the solution have a single centralized management interface that allows for estate management, end user support, and reporting? If not, what are the additional costs associated with running your estate, and what is the cost of downtime and any resultant loss in productive business hours?

Hardware refresh cycle

What is the operational lifespan of your meeting room hardware? Is it in line with the relatively short lifespan of intensively-used, shared end-user compute devices? Or is it closer to the custom architectures found in your core network infrastructure? What is the total cost of hardware over a three or five year period?

StarLeaf offers a broad range of meeting room systems, including non-Windows based solutions for all sizes of meeting spaces. And because these systems are designed with longevity in mind, they come with the option of a 5-year warranty, though we expect them to last much longer. Using our unique intelligent cloud architecture, we can deliver continued innovation to these devices throughout their lifecycle through upgrades to our cloud infrastructure.

All StarLeaf meeting rooms are managed centrally from our Portal, and firmware updates are transparent; carried out automatically, and out of business hours, to allow for maximum availability.

This availability is underpinned by StarLeaf's industry-unique 99.999% SLA which guarantees less than 5.5 minutes of unscheduled downtime per year.

Providing users with meeting spaces and services they can trust and rely on drives usage and, in turn, reduces the total cost of ownership of your video meeting room deployment.

Protecting investment in meeting room hardware

For organizations with legacy video meeting room hardware in place that is no longer meeting requirements, for example hardware that is not directly compatible with the shift to using Microsoft Teams, or systems that are not fit for purpose faced with the increased need for video meetings in a post-Covid world, there is an alternative to ripping and replacing this equipment.

With a StarLeaf 3rd party hardware subscription, these otherwise obsolete room systems can be given a new lease of life. Registering video room systems to the StarLeaf platform delivers new functionality and extends the lifespan of an existing video estate. Doing so with no additional network infrastructure means that not only is your existing investment protected, but also ongoing maintenance costs are reduced, while centralized management for all 3rd party systems reduces the IT burden.

Your users are then able to communicate and collaborate more easily and more widely than ever before as StarLeaf brings the power of business-to-business communications to previously siloed systems, extending the reach of your existing video room deployment.

Supporting user workflows

StarLeaf integrates seamlessly into your users' existing workflows. The StarLeaf integrations for Microsoft Teams and Outlook allow users to schedule and join StarLeaf meetings from within the tools they are most familiar with. And when in a call, the StarLeaf user experience is intuitively simple, yet feature-rich.

StarLeaf offers advanced functionality, such as personal smart layouts which includes a 25 participant view, allowing teams to stay connected. Our unique centralized architecture allows us to achieve this at a fraction of the bandwidth used by Microsoft Teams for basic HD conferencing, allowing colleagues to keep collaborating even across poor network connections.

And for administrators, the StarLeaf integration with Azure Active Directory simplifies user deployment and management with automated synchronization for new users, user updates, and deactivation.

Intelligent cloud architecture

Microsoft Teams uses a multiple stream, switched media topology during video meetings. That means each participant and meeting room receives multiple audio and video streams, with one for each participant. A benefit of this architecture is that it requires relatively lightweight servers in the cloud to support a very large number of users. Downsides of this architecture include its bandwidth profile and the compute requirements for the devices required by participants and in meeting rooms. Bandwidth will vary based on several factors, such as the number of participants, the video layout, video resolution, and video frames per second. This is in part due to the additional video streams needed for each additional participant.

With the increased adoption of video collaboration and home working, these high and variable bandwidth requirements can create challenges for network planning and, with many users connecting over home WiFi, accommodating domestic internet connections. This results in loss of quality, with calls even failing in some cases.

As each participant's laptop and meeting room device receives multiple video and audio streams, the devices have to decode multiple sources before composing and mixing the media. For laptops, this means that specification requirements are constantly creeping upwards, often at a rate faster than the IT equipment refresh cycle. For meeting rooms, where quality of video and audio is critical, this means frequently updating the meeting room hardware, often at great cost, to benefit from the latest functionality.

StarLeaf uses an intelligent cloud architecture with a centralized media topology delivered from globally distributed data centers. That means each participant and meeting room receives a single audio and video stream from our platform, regardless of the number of participants.

The benefits for your users are better quality, reliable video meetings on the devices they choose to use. The benefits for your administrators are a much friendlier bandwidth profile and lightweight requirements for the devices used by participants.

As the heavy lifting is done in our intelligent cloud, your meeting room hardware lasts longer. We can upgrade your experience for years to come by keeping our cloud hardware up to date. You can even register your existing standards-based endpoints to our intelligent cloud, upgrading the experience on devices that are sometimes several years old.

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Wherever you are in your Microsoft Teams journey, StarLeaf has a solution to complement your existing technology stack and help you get more out of your deployment by creating a best-in-class solution that suits your organization.

Tightly-integrated StarLeaf meeting rooms deliver feature-rich and secure business-to-business video communications with anyone, anywhere, no matter which meetings platform they use. Endpoints are always up-to-date and always ready so users can walk into the meeting room and know StarLeaf will make their meetings happen every time.

Existing third-party endpoints are revitalized with added features and functionality, including improved workflows and interoperability, when subscribed to the StarLeaf platform.

And because this platform is built on intelligent cloud architecture, entirely built, owned, and managed by StarLeaf, security and reliability are at its very core.

From a spontaneous get together to weekly meetings and large scheduled conferences, StarLeaf meetings effortlessly bring your teams together securely wherever they are. Using the StarLeaf integrations for Microsoft, users can retain a familiar workflow while harnessing the power of StarLeaf.

StarLeaf works better so you can work better with simple, reliable, and secure high-quality video, audio, and web meetings.

To find out more or to arrange a demo to see
what StarLeaf can do for you, **visit starleaf.com**

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