

RingCentral

# Unrecognizable collaboration

How teams work together,  
from everywhere

[RINGCENTRAL.COM](https://ringcentral.com)

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# INTRODUCTION

On May 24, 1844, Samuel Morse, co-inventor of Morse code, sent the first telegram in the United States. The message read, “*What hath God wrought,*” and traveled the 40 miles between the Old Supreme Court Chamber in Washington, D.C., and the Mount Clare station in Baltimore, in a split second. While simple, Morse’s four-word message was a momentous act that ushered in a new era of instantaneous communication.

And almost immediately people began to experiment with the new technology.

Just a few months after Morse’s historic first transmission, the relay operators wondered if they could use telegraphy for fun, rather than dry political and economic communication. On one cold winter morning, two telegraph operators, Mr. Greene of Baltimore and Dr. Jones of Washington, D.C., set up two chess boards in their respective cities and began sending each other moves via telegram. After several hours, Greene toppled Jones’ king and declared himself the winner.



The story reminds us that while companies and inventors create new technologies, **it’s the end customers who decide how to use it.**

# INTRODUCTION

And recently, a new generation of Greenes and Joneses have emerged. The only difference is that they're not experimenting with telegraphy.

The communication landscape is always changing. One hundred years ago, we sent telegrams. Fifty years ago, we made phone calls. Ten years ago, we typed emails. And recently, a new communication medium has come to the fore: video.

Every year, video penetrates our personal lives a bit more. We broadcast personal events on Instagram Live, chat with our friends on FaceTime, and leave video messages on WhatsApp. As we've become more comfortable with video chat, it has steadily spread into the professional sphere.

Just as Greene and Jones did back in the 1840s, innovators are now starting to experiment with video. In the last few years, we've seen an explosion of new workplace applications. Innovators are building virtual rec rooms, simulating spontaneous office conversations, and facilitating spontaneous conversations between remote colleagues.

In this insight report, we've profiled **5 of the most exciting applications**, investigating precisely how organizations are implementing video and how it's affected their teams.



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# Manufactured social time

## MANUFACTURED SOCIAL TIME



### IN THE EARLY 2010s

Online collaboration technology was just starting to take off. Team messaging apps were spreading like wildfire and video calls were starting to creep into the workplace. Those advancements opened up new operational opportunities for businesses. Instead of recruiting locally, businesses could hire employees from all across the world and collaborate via new technology.

### IN 2016

When Ollie founded his company, he decided to tap into this trend and build a global workforce. For his first few years, everything seemed to go well. His employees were efficient and productive, and his company developed from a fledgeling startup into a burgeoning SMB. But after a while, Ollie noticed something was wrong.

His employees were becoming more disconnected and unengaged. “I noticed a dip in productivity, which did not correct itself,” Ollie told RingCentral. “This was coupled with a sudden lack of urgency from a number of team members when it came to internal communication.” This puzzled Ollie. His team had always run like clockwork and this trend had emerged out of the blue.

But productivity  
doesn't disappear  
on its own, and Ollie  
knew **there had to be  
a root cause.**

He called an all-hands meeting and encouraged his 10-person team to discuss their concerns openly and honestly. Many highlighted the same problem. They had worked with each other for eight hours a day for several years now but they still felt like a group of strangers.

## MANUFACTURED SOCIAL TIME

With no opportunity to strike up a casual conversation and get to know each other, Ollie's employees felt isolated and alone.

Ollie knew this would be a challenge. As a distributed company, Ollie didn't have a shared rec room for his employees to congregate in. And because they all worked from their own offices, they would never even bump into each other in the hall. Ollie knew that it was up to him to manufacture social time. After much brainstorming, he came up with an idea he named Team Thursdays.

Every Thursday morning, Ollie and his employees log onto a video call and just spend time together. Sometimes they'd play games. "Last week we played Draw the Picture, which involved a team member describing a set of pictures and everyone else drawing what they think it should look like," Ollie says. But most of the time they just hang out, talk about their lives, and get to know each other as people.



On first blush, it might seem like an inefficient way to invest a company's time but Ollie is convinced Team Thursday produces good returns. After implementing regular shared social time, Ollie says he noticed a sharp uptick in productivity throughout the entire business. "It is clear that a bond has also developed between my team members since we initiated Team Thursday," Ollie says. "That closeness was not evident a year ago." Science backs him up, too. [One study](#) showed that individuals who had 15 minutes to socialize with their colleagues at the start of the day experienced a 20 percent uptick in performance compared with those who spent all their time alone.

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# Always-on virtual meeting rooms

## ALWAYS-ON VIRTUAL MEETING ROOMS

Connor is a huge video advocate. In his most recent role, an industry solutions architect at a SaaS company, Connor implemented video throughout the company's sales process, using personalized messages and screen recordings to help engage prospects.

**“We wanted a tool that included video, audio, and screenshare functionalities to allow us to meet with prospective and existing clients in a more personal way,” Connor told RingCentral. But augmenting existing sales processes was just the start.**

Since Connor's role had him working with a number of teams, including sales, customer success, and product teams, he had unparalleled insight into the obstacles faced by specific orgs. Connor quickly realized growth team, which was entirely remote, faced a range of entirely unique challenges compared to other office-bound teams. “We had to get creative in order to continue collaborating as if we were all together in one office,” Connor says. One of the solutions Connor implemented was a virtual meeting room for the growth team's cold-calling power hours.

### VIRTUAL MEETING ROOM

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#### ? What:

A video call for the growth team's cold-calling power hours. “It works just like it sounds,” Connor says. “One teammate queues up a video call, invites all members, and everyone joins.”

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#### ☀ Key difference:

Compared to a normal call, there's no predefined purpose or conversation. The call runs in the background and everyone just gets on with their work, which, in this case, was making cold calls to prospects. In between calls, conversations naturally ebb and flow between colleagues, just as they would in a physical workspace.

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#### ✓ Result:

Connor says that their communal call helped build camaraderie between remote employees, who were used to working in isolation.

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## ALWAYS-ON VIRTUAL MEETING ROOMS

The idea was so effective that Connor evolved the concept into an always-on virtual space. Instead of having an employee set up a call for each power hour, Connor set up one call and has left it running permanently. Members of the growth team can drop into the call whenever they needed some camaraderie and leave whenever they needed some quiet time. “It helped a lot with productivity.” Connor says. “Our remote team was able to get quicker responses to their questions and, since we had an open forum framework, it inspired a lot of group discussions, allowing team members to join in on relevant discussions.” While always-on virtual spaces worked for Connor, he’s careful to temper expectations.

### **HE RECOMMENDS PEOPLE EXPERIMENT SLOWLY, RATHER THAN JUMPING STRAIGHT IN WITH A PERMANENT VIRTUAL SPACE:**

- > Start off with specific meeting initiatives and an agreed-upon format.
- > Test it out with your team.
- > Collect feedback.
- > Use that information to help design an always-on solution tailored to your team’s specific needs.



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# Ad hoc meetings

## AD-HOC MEETINGS

In December, 2017, Kara joined forces with an old friend to start a design studio. There was just one problem: Kara and her business partner lived 750-miles apart. With a 30-hour round trip required for every face-to-face meeting, Kara suggested they build their company around a remote working environment. While the idea was sound, it was a steep learning curve for two founders with extensive in-office backgrounds.

To replicate the day-to-day interactions employees experience in physical workspaces, Kara turned to video. “We use video conferencing for regular meetings, training events, and project updates on a daily basis,” Kara told RingCentral.

But where Kara found the most value with video was with short, sharp, ad hoc catch-ups.

In late-September, 2019, a media request dropped into Kara’s inbox. It was an interesting query on innovative communication systems and Kara knew her studio could offer a unique reply. However, she had recently appointed a new press relations supervisor and hadn’t yet briefed her on her vision for the studio’s corporate identity. “We wanted to make sure that we were on the same page,” Kara said. So she set up a discussion channel in her collaboration tool and invited people to discuss their approach.

Seeing her employees on a daily basis helped emulate the feel of a physical office and quickly turned a group of remote employees into a cohesive team.

## AD-HOC MEETINGS

Kara outlined her proposed response but found she struggled to convey her more complex and nuanced points via text. Eventually, she decided an ad hoc contextual meeting would be better and set up a call within her collaboration tool. With the call sitting alongside the context of her discussion, Kara quickly recapped the media request and presented her vision for how they'd present the studio. The call took no more than five minutes but effectively aligned everyone's approach. After the call, everyone logged off and got straight back to work.

Beyond the practical benefits of clearing operational logjams, Kara says ad hoc meetings help colleagues get to know each other better. "It gives us all a chance to connect on a more personal level," Kara said. She says in-the-moment catch-ups are analogous to drive-by conversations in the office. They are spontaneous, friendly, and cultivate strong bonds between colleagues.

But ad hoc calls can go awry if you aren't careful. "It's important to develop a structure so that everyone knows what is expected," Kara said. By setting clear objectives and time-boxing the call, it's easy to keep the conversation on track and avoid disruptive diversions down rabbit holes.



### *The* **SOCIAL PERKS of AD-HOC MEETINGS**

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Help remote colleagues get to know each other

Allow chances to connect on a more personal level

Catch an entire team up in just minutes

Cultivate bonds between colleagues

1 2 3 4 5

# Always-on video

## ALWAYS-ON VIDEO



In early 2012, Benjy, then a senior engineer at a tech firm, looked up from his desk. Across his swanky San Francisco office, he saw dozens of other people working. But his colleagues weren't in California, they were actually 3,000 miles away in Lower Manhattan. Benjy was peering through an always-on video link into the company's headquarters in New York.

The company set up shop in New York, but like most technology companies, its founders quickly discovered that they couldn't just rely on east coast talent. The Bay Area in California was a talent vacuum, sucking up all the hottest developers, marketers, designers, and project managers. And that posed a challenge: did they relocate to San Francisco and risk losing their New York identity or did they split their workforce between two coasts? After much deliberation, the company opened a San Francisco office and hired Benjy to head up the team.

Splintering a workforce across two coasts created a fresh challenge. As Benjy once quipped, code doesn't care where it's written—but the people writing it do. In a physical office, employees can look around and see other people working.



They glean information through occupational osmosis, offer help spontaneously, and spark up serendipitous conversations when they bump into colleagues in the cafeteria. But when you have a fractured team—or worse, an entirely remote team—it's much more difficult to cultivate those interactions.

**Benjy's solution was simple: an always-on video link between the New York headquarters and the office in California.**

They set up one camera in the middle of each workspace and transmitted the feed to a huge television in the opposite office. Suddenly, employees in New York could see what was going on in San Francisco and vice versa.

The video link helped the two teams experience each other's workplace. For example, New Yorkers could see if there was a birthday celebration in San Francisco and join in the singing—even if they were out of time due to the transmission delay. Small acts like that helped foster better interpersonal connections between the Californians and New Yorkers, which, ultimately, created a more collaborative working environment.

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# Buddy breaks

## BUDDY BREAKS

Consider the average day of a remote worker. Let's call her Jen. Jen wakes up, cycles to her coworking space, and logs on for a morning huddle with her team. She briefly discusses her goals for the day and any predicted roadblocks. Throughout the day, she answers a few project queries via team messaging but other than that, she works mostly on her own.

Jen's day is typical of the average remote worker. When interactions require effort, people tend to default to what's easiest—working alone. This is a real problem for organizations with remote workforces as isolated working hampers communication, collaboration, and productivity. This is something startup founder Sid has dealt with for years. His company, an infrastructure tech firm, has been fully remote for several years and now employs workers in more than 40 countries.

Through trial and error, Sid developed a number of systems and processes to promote more face-to-face communication within his team. Chief among them is randomized coffee breaks.

Sid began pairing up members of staff at random and scheduling a shared coffee break in their calendars. Because Sid's staff are all remote, this all takes place via video chat.

These unexpected chats over coffee mimic the chance encounters common in physical offices. When two employees are paired up, it's like they've met in the cafeteria line and stuck up a conversation. During their shared break, employees are free to talk about whatever they want—weekend plans, work challenges, accomplishments, dreams, or even the latest Netflix show. What employees talk about isn't that important. What's important is that...

They have the  
opportunity to  
communicate with  
their colleagues.



# UNEARTHED WITH EXPERIMENTATION

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Computer scientist Sebastian Thrun once said, “With any new medium, the full power is only unearthed with experimentation.” That message is just as true in computing as it is in video.

Powerful, stable, and affordable video communication platforms have only been around for a handful of years. The applications we’ve profiled come from early-adopters—and they’re just the start of a larger trend. As video technology proliferates throughout the workplace and becomes a mainstay of professional communication, we will encounter more diverse and exciting use cases.

But people can only innovate when they have the right technology. That’s where RingCentral comes in. RingCentral combines the three pillars of communication—voice, video, and team messaging—with contact center in one integrated platform. With RingCentral, users can move seamlessly between their work, video, audio, and messaging, which opens up a raft of new opportunities for innovation.

Click here to learn more about [RingCentral Video](#), our browser-based, effortless video solution.

