

# HIDEF CONFERENCING

## Musings From The Tech Guy

### **Participants? What are they?**

This column has always focused on the features for and responsibilities of conference owners, the moderators of the conference. One of these conference owners asked about the conference participant's role in conference management and for some hints and tips on how to get the most out of a conference when they call in as a participant and not as the big chief in charge of the whole thing.

### **Sound Quality**

Noise is the bane of all conferences. Anything and everything sent to the conference is mixed together and sent back to the callers. Sometimes a conference can echo or sound noisy or even distorted and all of these symptoms have similar causes, the environment of one or more callers. Noise does not discriminate and both the participants and moderators can be a source of noise.

What types of noise might we hear?

- Echoes are caused by one caller being near another caller (or one caller using two telephones but that's not so common). The microphone on one PC or telephone picks up the sound from another participant's telephone or PC and echoes it back to the conference. This is very slow acoustic feedback.
- Echoes can also be caused by a bad speaker-phone that has the volume turned up too far. The sound from the speaker-phone bounces off of a wall, back to the speaker-phone and is transmitted to the conference. High quality speaker-phones have special circuitry that eliminates this.
- Noise in the background is usually caused by one or more callers being in a noisy environment (calling from an airport is a typical situation) or having less than good equipment (cell phones are often a culprit, particularly when used in airports, a double whammy). Another common cause of noise is an unmuted speaker-phone. Speaker-phones are very good at picking up all of the sounds in a room but they can and will send all of this to the conference, even unwanted background sounds.
- Distortion is usually caused by low quality telephones or PC microphones or by poor internet connections (the latter usually makes the caller sound as if they are underwater).

We recommend that for the best sound you use:

- A high quality wired headset attached to a PC equipped with Skype
- A high quality wired headset attached to a telephone on a real wired telephone line
- A high quality telephone handset on a real wired telephone line

In general the following are not recommended because they can generate noise:

- Inbuilt PC microphone and speakers
- Low bandwidth PC connections (underwater sound).
- Noisy environments
- Mobile phones
- Speaker-phones

If you are in a noisy environment and/or need to use a speaker-phone or cell-phone please try to mute yourself as much as possible and only unmute your line when you need to speak to the conference. The easiest way to do this is to use the star-two command on your telephone or Skype key-pad (see below under participant commands).

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### Participant Commands

The participant has command keys to provide information and to control the conference behavior. All of these commands are issued by pressing the appropriate keys on the telephone or on the Skype keypad (on Skype there's a tab marked *Call Phones* that displays a telephone keypad).

**Star-One** Press the star or asterisk key (\*) and then the one key (1) and you will hear a list of the commands you can issue.

**Star-Two** Press the star or asterisk key (\*) and then the two key (2) to mute your own line so that people in the conference cannot hear you. When successful you will hear the recorded message *"This line is now muted"*. Press the Star-Two combination again to unmute your line so that your voice can be heard in the conference. This time you will hear *"This line is now unmuted"*. If the moderator of the conference has muted all of the users you may not be able to unmute yourself and you will hear *"The moderator has muted the conference, this line cannot be unmuted"*.

**Star-Five** Press the star or asterisk key (\*) and then the five key (5) to hear the number of people currently in this conference.

**Star-Nine** Press the star or asterisk key (\*) and then the nine key (9) to raise your hand to ask a question. If successful you hear *"The moderator sees your raised hand"*. Although you cannot see it, a shining, golden hand appears next to your name on the moderator's console to let her/him know that you wish to ask a question. If the moderator chooses to take your question you will hear *"You may now speak"* and the whole conference will hear the question you ask. The shining, golden hand disappears from the moderator's console when she/he invites you to ask your question.

Pressing star-nine again doesn't make any difference if your hand is already raised. There's no *"Please Miss, please Miss, ask me, ask me"* function to remind the moderator that you wish to ask a question (though the shining, golden hand does remain on the moderator's screen until the moderator accepts your question or the conference terminates).

Note that Star-Nine is not always available because the moderator must place the conference into *Hand-Raising mode* before this command is allowed. If the conference is not in *Hand-Raising mode* then you will hear the message *"Your entry is not valid"* when you issue the Star-Nine command.

The way the command keys work is that the system looks for two keys pressed within six seconds of each other. So the star is pressed first and the second key must be pressed within six seconds. If the star is pressed and nothing else then it's thrown away after six seconds and the system is ready for a new, two-character, command. If at any time you think that the system is not responding to your commands properly then wait a full six seconds (or seven or eight to be on the safe side) and then issue the two-character command again.

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That's about it. The three enemies of any conference are noise, noise and noise. Each participant has a responsibility to keep their noise to a minimum by using the best equipment that's available to them in as quiet a setting as possible. Don't forget that anything sent to the conference goes back to all participants. If you have the television on in the background then everyone will know what you watch.

Cheers,  
The Tech Guy

These musings from the Technical Corner are geared to users of the new HiDef Conferencing service (the orange one). Users of the older +Plus or Premium HighSpeed Conferencing service (the blue web pages) or of the ConFreeCall service or of another Vapps' service may find this helpful but the exact web page navigation, command sequences or capabilities may be different.

As always, if you have questions, comments or ideas for a new musing do let me know. I will not have time to answer all of your questions but I will answer as many as I can. I can be reached by email at: [TechGuy@hidefconferencing.com](mailto:TechGuy@hidefconferencing.com)

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