

# COMBATTING THE TYRANNY OF DISTANCE

Interview with **Marc-Alexis Remond** Global Director, Government Solutions and Market Development, Polycom

**Future Gov Asia Pacific:**  
*What challenges do government's face in overcoming remoteness?*

**Marc-Alexis Remond:**  
The public sector faces a variety of issues related to access, equity, quality, efficiency and skilled resources in the delivery of public services, education, healthcare and safety in rural areas.

Limited access to education and training compels young people to leave rural areas to study and work in cities contributing to urban congestion and a lack of skilled professionals in rural areas.

Poor access to healthcare means those same rural and remote citizens have to travel great distances and spend a lot of money to see a doctor. Recent natural

disasters have shown that emergency services struggle to detect, respond and coordinate the adequate recovery and reconstruction efforts due to a lack of preparedness, skilled resources and adequate communication tools in rural areas.

**FGAP:** *What is the uptake of online services like?*

**MAR:** Despite the boom of personal computers, the Internet, and mobile device use at home, at the office, and around the world, it seems that governments have yet to solve the question of low uptake of online services, department efficiency, and inter-agency collaboration.

Whilst certain factors such as age, gender, culture, or the digital divide may explain some of the gaps, it all comes

down to one key human factor: the absence of real-time, face-to-face communication.

Being connected to a Web portal, an integrated voice response server, or a call centre agent, while effective in bridging the gap between citizens and government, does not replace the level of interactivity, consultation, engagement, and personalisation offered by face-to-face conversations.

**FGAP:** *Why is face-to-face communication so important?*

**MAR:** Governments have had to find a way to enable face-to-face communication in real time, over long distances, and in a more efficient and productive manner to make it easier

for citizens, businesses, and government departments to communicate and collaborate

As a leader in video conferencing and telepresence technology in Asia Pacific and worldwide, and as part of our Collaborative Government initiative, Polycom works closely with public and non-profit organisations to address these challenges in Asia and beyond.

With HD video and telepresence solutions at its core, the collaborative government approach enables national and local departments to enhance operational efficiency, improve productivity, accelerate decision-making and engage more effectively with stakeholders at



all levels by enabling on-demand life-like communication between agencies, businesses and citizens.

Internet access and speeds are less and less of an issue due to rapid adoption of broadband across Asia Pacific in the form of wired broadband (Singapore, Korea, NZ, Australia) and wireless broadband based on 3G or VSAT (China, India, Philippines and Vietnam).

**FGAP:** *What role do e-kiosks have to play?*

**MAR:** Applications such as tele-services, tele-education, tele-health, tele-presence or tele-justice will help boost the adoption and utilisation of a country's national broadband network and government services. This is because they provide the same high level of interactivity and personal touch as face-to-face communication without the need to travel over great distances.

Most e-kiosks today only offer basic internet access, access to information and the ability to complete basic transactions. They do not provide the personal touch citizens and businesses are asking for, they are used by people who are computer-literate and are not able to handle exceptions and cannot handle applications such as telemedicine.

This is why governments should consider deploying

video-enabled kiosks in the form of video-clients on desktop computers, video application phones for those who are not computer-literate and Telepresence Kiosks for applications such as tele-education, tele-medicine and tele-trade in community centers, post offices and various government branches across the country or state.

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