

Fulfilling (and exceeding) AT&T's Dream for Picturephone
Visionary technologies take time to come together, but are well worth the wait.

Stop to think of the ways personal videos are improving our lives. It started with one company and one product that was ahead of its time. Now, there is much more to it than was demonstrated by the original Picturephone. Avoid travel; experience more effective and more efficient messaging; provide greater security; and have the ability to see what others are doing first hand, to name a few. How about accompanying your resume with a video email to set you apart from the masses or a virtual visit with a son or daughter in college, seeing grandchildren as they grow up, or see a relative in a nursing home across the country? Time, cost savings and better experiences seem limitless as video applications grow for individuals as well as the organizations they work for.

Affordability is essential to practicality. Picturephone was a great idea that few people could afford in the beginning. It had its issues. I first saw AT&T's Picturephone at their 1964 New York World's Fair pavilion in Flushing, New York. As an engineering student, I was fascinated by the improvement it represented over current state of the art telephone communications. Little did I realize how much time and money would be required to make the concept ready for primetime or that I would work for the company. Forty-five years later, there are still hurdles that must be overcome before universal adoption. However, low cost cameras and broadband service are making a wide range of video services practical alternatives to costly travel and bringing multi-media to marketing and sales. Imagination and creativity will add more and more applications and benefits as obstacles continue to fall.

Putting things in perspective. Back in the 1950's and 60's, voice calls were a luxury for many, if not most, of us. Costs were usually avoided except for emergencies and special occasions. (I can attest to paying a low of about 15 cents per minute to a high of \$12 per minute. Multiply these numbers by 10 for an estimate of what this would likely cost in today's dollars.) The telecom infrastructure was mostly built around copper. Some calls still needed to be set up by operators and the rest used electro-mechanical switches and analog phones with rotary dials. Then, along came the transistor and a shift to electronic switching. Telephone switching equipment used discrete electronic components, e.g., diodes, transistors, resistors and capacitors, connected with wire. Integrated circuits and the explosion of micro-miniaturization had yet to arrive. It took multiple voice circuits to provide the bandwidth to support a Picturephone call. Compared to what people relied upon, Picturephone was nirvana. It was easy to imagine how wonderful it would be to see a loved one. What wasn't easy to see was what it would take to make it affordable. Even today, few people have all the bandwidth that they need or would like to have as applications grow.

The dots are getting connected. You are likely to find a camera in that new cell phone or laptop. Broadband is a common feature of telecommunications products. Once people have them, no one wants to have something that they don't use. Why should they pay for something and forego the greater value that it would offer? Why not enjoy virtual visits, participate in videoconferences, watch children as they are cared for by babysitters and see who is breaking and entering your home? For those with products that lack needed bells and whistles, there are upgrade paths. Functionality can be added at a modest cost to realize comparable increases in value.

Video is part of the Outcome Improvement experience. Learn about creative ideas and innovations, including an increasing number of video-based services. They improve outcomes. We facilitate them through:

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- Sharing ideas and information, team building, motivating and creating awareness
- Risk assessment, priority setting, migration strategies, asset protection and emergency preparedness
- Business case development, planning, implementation, remediation and change management

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