

ConforMeeting/e, Solution for Board Meetings

OMATA Hitomi, SAITO Hiroyuki, KUBOTA Kiyohito

Abstract

ConforMeeting/e is a business meetings solution that also comprehensively fulfils the requirements of board meetings. These are “advanced security,” “productivity improvements,” “support for quick administrative action” and “reduction in the cost of meetings.” ConforMeeting/e is the board meeting solution that has been used consistently for NEC Informatec Systems, Ltd. board meetings. This paper introduces the features of the business conference solution as an advanced communications technology from the aspect of management functions and meetings.

Keywords

board meeting, business meetings solution, paperless

1. Introduction

At corporate management board meetings, top management holds discussions to enable decision-making. In order to execute and manage such meetings it is necessary to deal effectively with the following issues:

(1) Advanced Security

Board meetings often involve highly confidential information concerning corporate activities, therefore, it is necessary to take all necessary precautions against the leakage or alteration of information. Moreover, it is essential that the system is capable of participant authentication in order to identify those present at a meeting.

(2) Improvements in the Productivity of Meetings

It is necessary to provide effective support for meetings by offering functions that enable timely access to the minutes of past discussions, reference materials and other related information as well as to functions that enable the participants to share their insight and experience.

(3) Support for Quick Administrative Actions

It is desired to accelerate administrative action by a quick transmission of the contents and decisions of meetings to subordinates and other concerned parties.

(4) Reduction in Costs of Meetings

It is desirable to reduce the cost of the labor required to prepare “paper” documents. Such costs include the preparation of documents for distribution, production of meeting reports, distribution of minutes of meeting/reference materials and information management.

In order to solve the above-mentioned issues our team at NEC

Informatec Systems has developed the ConforMeeting/e, a board meeting solution and marketed it following successful proving tests at our own board meetings.

2. ConforMeeting/e, a Solution for Board Meetings

2.1 Outline of the Solution

ConforMeeting/e employs a simple user interface that takes the behavioral characteristics of board members, continuity of arguments and the way of thinking during meetings into consideration. In the past, presentations using an electronic conference system still required paper documents to be handed out to participants. On the other hand, ConforMeeting/e thoroughly pursues the creation of a paperless environment for board meetings in order to ensure information security and to save on the labor involved in meetings administration. In addition to the meetings themselves, it is also aimed to streamline the meeting process by offering a fully comprehensive solution supporting the whole process of meetings from the pre-meeting stage of document preparation to the post-meeting stages of reviewing and reusing documents (See Fig. 1).

2.2 Characteristics

ConforMeeting/e, which realizes a paperless environment for board meetings has solved the issues mentioned earlier by utilizing the following means (See Fig. 2).

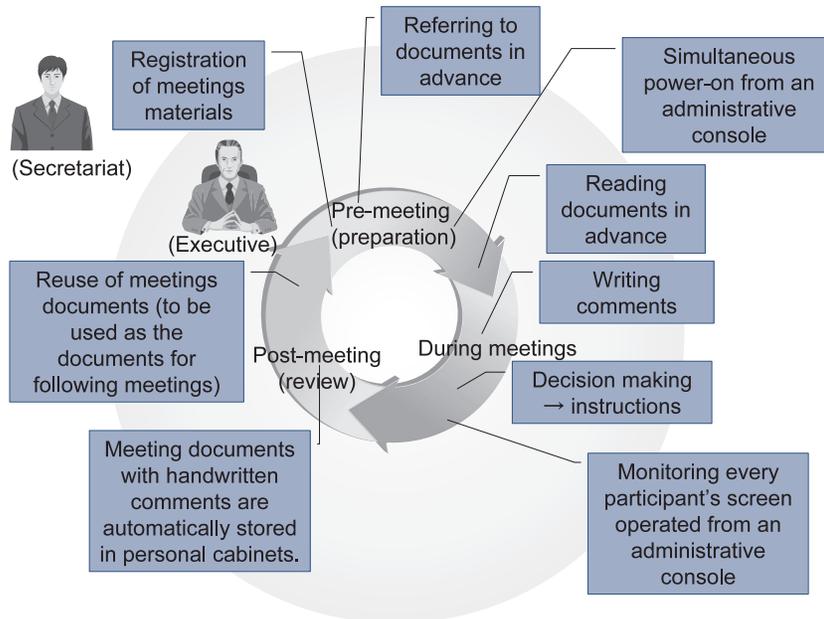


Fig. 1 A comprehensive meetings solution offered by ConforMeeting/e.

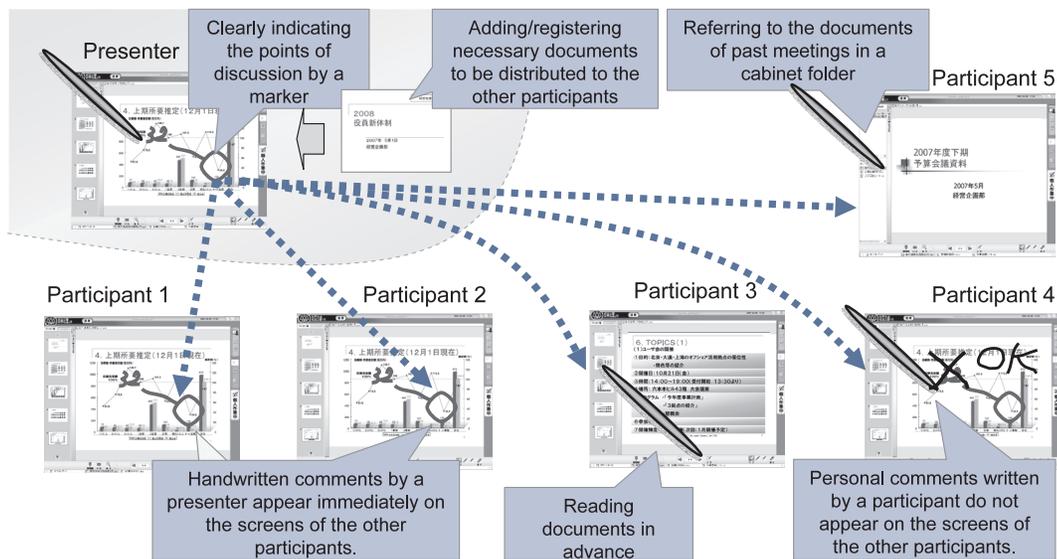


Fig. 2 Screen images of ConforMeeting/e.

(1) Advanced Security

It is possible to apply a personal authentication function using a contactless IC card and LDAP in order to verify approval of the user to participate in meetings. In addition, in order to prevent information leakages all of the documents used in meetings are managed by the servers, and no docu-

ments remain on the terminals of the board members. After completion of the meetings, all documents are converted to PDF files and stored in personal cabinets, a process that is useful for avoiding any alterations to the documents. Furthermore, ConforMeeting/e supports Thin Client configuration as well as more advanced information security systems.

(2) Improvements in Meetings Productivity

ConforMeeting/e improves productivity of meetings by conducting and managing meetings using the following functions:

- It is possible to update documents until just before a meeting. It is also possible to access web sites and distribute up-to-the-minute information even after the start of the meeting. In other words, participants can utilize the latest information for discussions and decision-making.
- Participants can read documents in advance as a meeting is underway. They can know the contents of discussions in advance and clarify the points of discussion by taking notes.
- Like a laser pointer, the Marker Function provides presenters with the capability to clearly indicate the points of discussion on screen, which helps to enable dynamic meetings.
- It is possible to easily retrieve and refer to past documents. Therefore, participants can immediately resume a discussion continued from a previous meeting or have discussions based on past background material, which all helps to contribute to efficient discussions.
- The Whiteboard Function provides all participants with the capability to write on shared screens, which easily and efficiently realizes a suitable situation for frank discussions.

(3) Supports for Quick Administrative Actions

It is possible to add handwritten comments on the pages of documents and to send them to administrative secretaries and subordinates via e-mail in or after the meeting. It is helpful to take quick administrative actions. Moreover, it is possible to transmit more accurate information for business communication by sending documents with handwritten comments, compared to traditional communications, which used only letters (mail) and voice (telephone).

(4) Reduction in Meeting Costs

Since ConforMeeting/e achieves a paperless environment throughout the whole process of a meeting, it is possible to greatly reduce the staff burden related to meetings such as the printing of paper documents, last-minute replacement of documents, filing of documents and the safe disposal of classified papers after meetings. Moreover, the staff is no longer required to perform filing work, because documents are automatically stored in the personal cabinets folders of participants.

3. Technology Platforms Supporting ConforMeeting/e

In order to solve the issues mentioned above a variety of

technology platforms help to make up ConforMeeting/e. Among such platforms, we would like to describe the “Real Time Communication Service Platform (hereinafter referred to as RTC Platform)” which enables the easy development of applications that support communications involving multiple people while at the same time maintaining future scalability and the “Information Sharing Platform” which enables participants to instantly share information in a meeting (See **Fig. 3**).

3.1 RTC Platform

The RTC Platform developed by NEC is a middleware for building up communications environments for meetings, etc. ConforMeeting/e utilizes some of the many features provided by the RTC Platform as follows:

(1) Easy Development of Applications

It is easy to build up applications, since the RTC Platform employs a component architecture and the API (application programming interface) is suitable for developing applications for communications involving multiple people.

(2) High Scalability

The Multipoint communications controllers of the RTC Platform are capable of simultaneously controlling multiple sessions and supporting up to 1,000 clients. Therefore, ConforMeeting/e makes it possible to have meetings without in effect limiting the number of participants.

(3) A Wide Range of Applicable Environments

The RTC Platform realizes the interconnections of Intranet/Internet by providing multiple protocols including original high-speed communication protocol and HTTP tunneling which enables Internet connection. The RTC Platform offers the best communication environment where applications are not required to be protocol savvy.

3.2 Information Sharing Platform

(1) High-Speed Client Cache

When users participate in a meeting, the meeting documents are distributed to client computers and stored in their cache memories. During the meeting, only control codes are simultaneously broadcast to all clients. Therefore, it becomes possible to provide added value services that are unique to a paperless environment such as high-speed page flipping and zooming in/out of documents.

(2) Intelligent Distribution of Documents

When distributing documents, the order of the distribution is dynamically controlled on a page-by-page basis and it is possible to prioritize the pages of documents to be distributed.

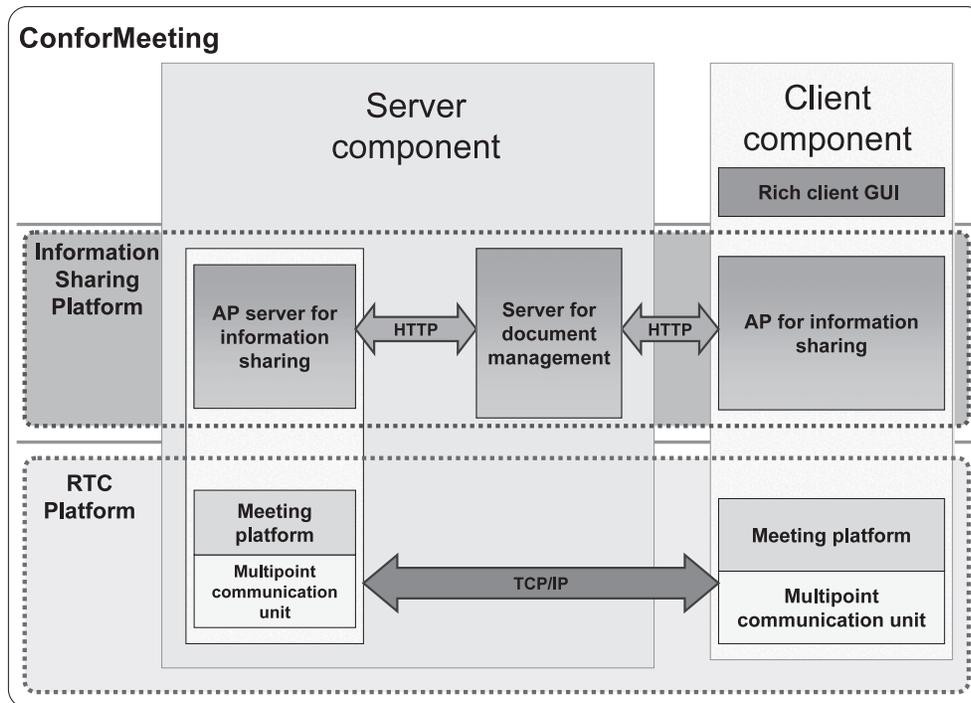


Fig. 3 The configuration of the technology platforms.

Therefore, the users can view the necessary pages and start discussions at once.

4. Conclusion - How to Proceed from Hereon -

This paper has introduced ConforMeeting/e, our solution for board meetings. At NEC Informatec Systems, Ltd., our board members have been using the ConforMeeting/e for their meetings since June, 2006 in order to verify the practical effectiveness of the solution and give feedback. Consequently, it was proven that the solution contributes significantly to the “further enhancement of the quality of meetings.”

We plan to utilize the ConforMeeting/e in various ways in addition to board meetings.

(1) General Meetings for Regular Employees

It is planned to enhance the functions of ConforMeeting/e to support general meetings. In other words, our aim is to have not only closed-door meeting but also multipoint meetings participated by employees using company-provided terminals. This will be possible by further improving input interfaces to support a wider variety of input devices such as keyboard and voice recognition as well as providing functions for the notebook PCs of each employee to enable them to

instantaneously participate in meetings.

(2) Education

It is possible to contribute to the creation of education systems by computerizing the lecture documents. With this system, the lecturers and students can send and share information by using the Handwriting Function of ConforMeeting/e. It is also possible to distribute the documents marked with notes written during lectures to students (See Fig. 4). In addition, we are examining the possibilities of holding brainstorming sessions utilizing an electronic whiteboard instead of a traditional whiteboard as well as remote lessons for individual students by utilizing a function that enables a lecturer to attach notes to documents of each student.

Furthermore, we plan to provide support for ConforMeeting/e by fully utilizing our IT expertise such as in voice, image and language processing (e.g. automatic generation of meeting notes).

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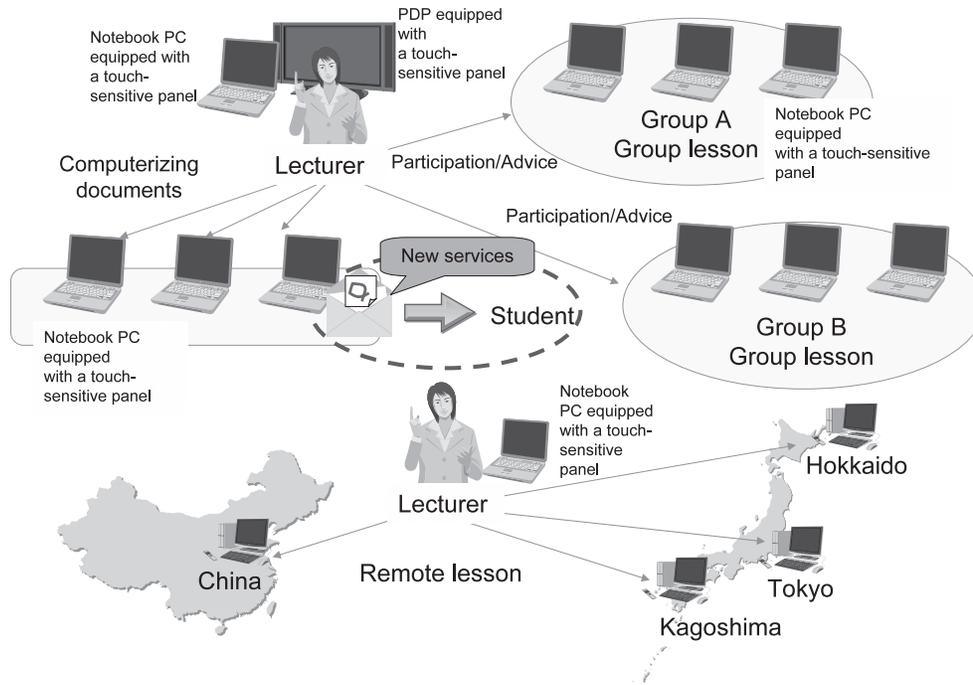


Fig. 4 Utilizing ConforMeeting/e in education fields.

Authors' Profiles

OMATA Hitomi
 Staff,
 Advanced Technology Solutions Division,
 NEC Informatec Systems, Ltd.

SAITO Hiroyuki
 Manager,
 Advanced Technology Solutions Division,
 NEC Informatec Systems, Ltd.

KUBOTA Kiyohito
 Group Manager,
 Advanced Technology Solutions Division,
 NEC Informatec Systems, Ltd.

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Related URL: <http://www.nis.co.jp/conformeeeting/>