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HP SkyRoom Software

High-performance remote collaboration for everyone.

By Robert Green, *Cadalyst* Contributing Expert



If you work in a design, architecture, or manufacturing environment, then chances are excellent that you've used some form of remote collaboration. It seems that anything from a simple conference call to a desktop-sharing session qualifies as remote collaboration these days, but I think we can all agree that allowing work team members to communicate across long distances without traveling fits the description.

The newest entry into the remote collaboration business isn't a business at all but a software package. HP SkyRoom software provides videoconferencing and remote desktop sharing on your own computer without any external services or expensive monthly bills. And although the new HP SkyRoom collaboration software will lower the cost of remote collaboration, it also aims to raise the bar on what remote collaboration can do if the right technology is used. Interested?



HP SkyRoom

What Is HP SkyRoom?

Good question. HP SkyRoom is, in essence, a program that unifies the use of web cameras and microphones for audio and high-resolution, high-quality videoconferencing while also permitting high-speed, high-resolution desktop sharing, but its unique ability is the combination of both rich media desktop sharing and high-end videoconferencing in a desktop software application that's easy to use, install, and afford. HP SkyRoom extends current desktop videoconferencing and application-sharing limitations by using the HP Image Engine and the HP Video Engine to achieve high compression rates that allow smooth, jerk-free video, better-than-telephone quality audio and desktop sharing at resolutions as high as 2,560 x 1,600 with as much as 24-frame per second video performance for as many as four concurrent users. HP SkyRoom simply is far beyond the jumpy, jerky screen-sharing application with poor audio quality that so many of us

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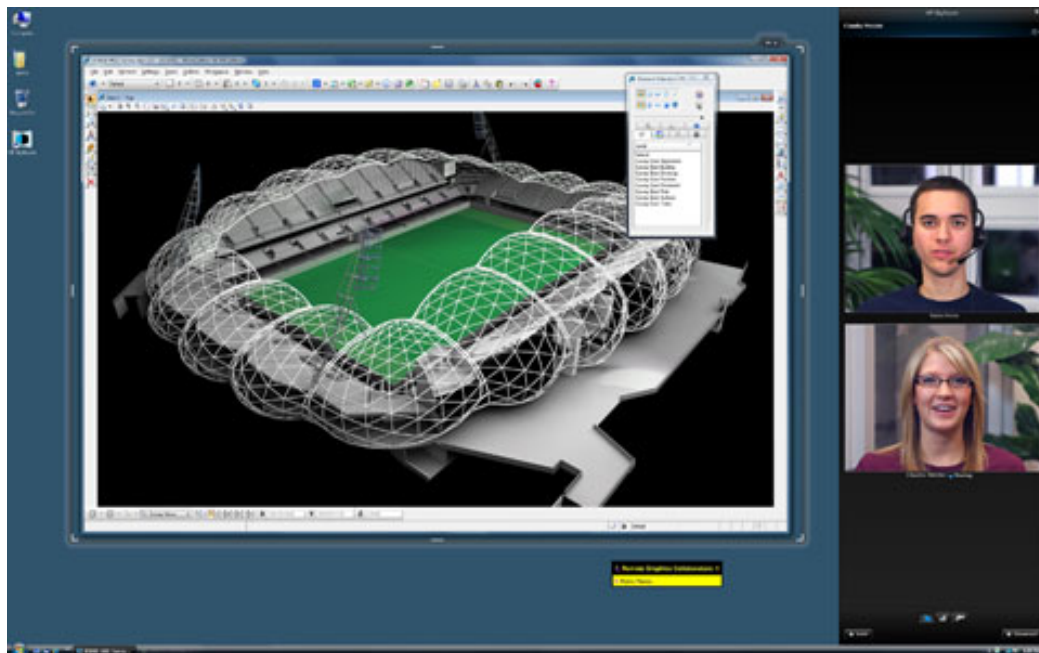
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have used before.

So, to summarize, HP SkyRoom is a videoconferencing and desktop-sharing solution in a single software package that delivers the kind of high-performance graphics you simply don't expect to see in a web-based remote collaboration session.



HP SkyRoom's high-resolution interface supports as many as four webcam users with audio and an optional shared desktop, which makes HP SkyRoom an ideal videoconferencing or desktop-sharing environment for small work teams.

How HP SkyRoom Might Be Used

Because HP SkyRoom integrates videoconferencing with desktop-application sharing, the following uses come to mind:

Videoconferencing. Don't share your desktop and HP SkyRoom becomes a no-cost, four-way video phone.

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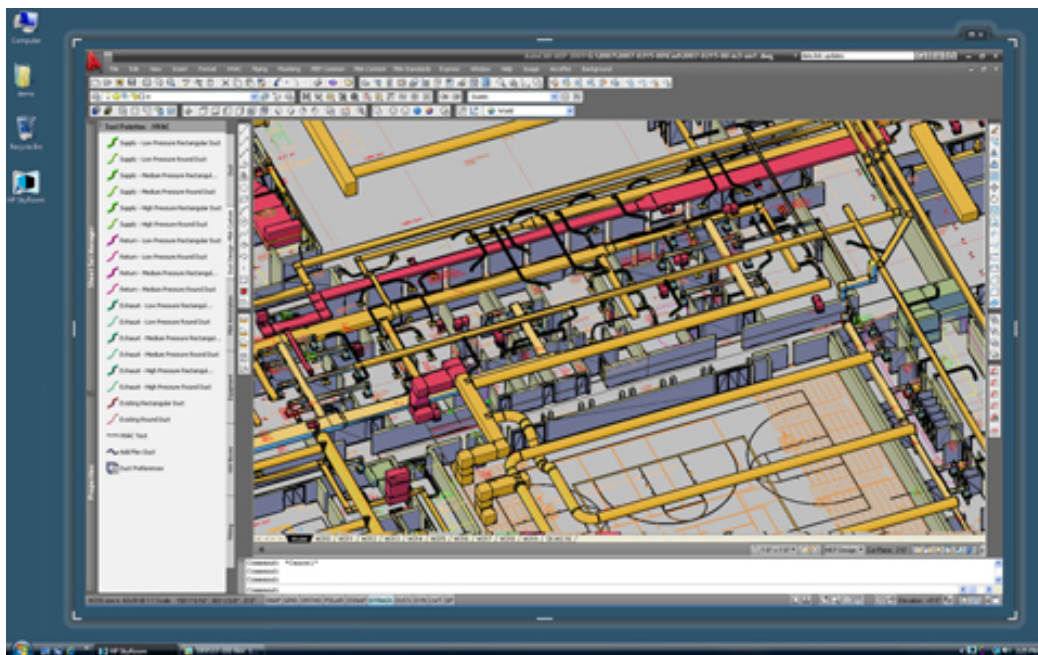
honor the best of the best — the most outstanding among all hardware and software products that earned Highly Recommended ratings from *Cadalyst Labs* over the past year. **The editors' pick for 2008 for hardware is the HP xw4600 and LP3065 30" LCD workstation/display combo (\$3,775).**

The HP xw4600 workstation is based on a proprietary Foxconn motherboard that uses the Intel X38 Express chipset; the system *Cadalyst* tested had an Intel Core 2 Duo E6850 processor rated at 3.0 GHz with a front-side bus speed of 1,333 MHz. In June 2008, reviewer Ron LaFon found the LP3065 30" LCD monitor to be "both pleasing and very useful" and judged the pricing, performance, and overall quality of the combo system to be ideal for a broad range of work.



HP SkyRoom's four-user videoconferencing mode means you won't have to use expensive phone conferencing services for audio and you'll gain the interactive collaboration of video support.

CAD design reviews. Share your 3D CAD application from your desktop and you have a fast-motion, four-way design review meeting in which design changes can be collaborated on almost in real time. No more waiting around to make changes and e-mail them.



HP SkyRoom allows only the desired portion of the desktop to be shared for viewing by the attending parties in the session. Even complex 3D viewing with rotation and rendering can be viewed with HP SkyRoom's fast graphics support.

Using HP SkyRoom simply for videoconferences doesn't take advantage of all the capabilities HP SkyRoom has to offer, but these example scenarios illustrate how powerful and versatile HP SkyRoom is as a communication tool. And when you consider that you don't have to use any external web hosting or teleconferencing services, cost no longer is a barrier with HP SkyRoom.

Hardware Parameters

Because HP SkyRoom provides high-speed video performance, it requires some hardware horsepower. The minimum hardware and operating system requirements are:

- Intel Core 2 Duo 2.33-GHz processor or equivalent
- 2 GB of RAM
- Microsoft Windows XP or Windows Vista (32-bit or 64-bit)
- 500 MB of hard disk space
- No server requirements

So although HP SkyRoom isn't going to run on old single-processor machines on the shop floor, it will run on most newer machines using today's most-common operating system platforms. Note that HP SkyRoom is not a server-based application; therefore, it places no demands on your network application servers.

Given HP SkyRoom's videoconferencing capabilities, you'll also need a webcam, microphone, and some sort of audio playback speakers. HP SkyRoom supports video resolutions as high as 960 x 720 using stationary Logitech QuickCam Pro 9000 webcams and as high as 640 x 480 using HP autofocus Premium or Elite autofocus webcams. HP SkyRoom uses system audio drivers for microphone and playback management, so any microphone and headset combinations using 3.5-mm input microphone and audio playback devices will work.



HP SkyRoom software requires only an inexpensive microphone, webcam, and speakers.

For the official HP SkyRoom specifications document, see the [HP SkyRoom site](#).

Network Parameters

Of course, any application that streams audio and video between remote sites will require an Internet connection. And because HP SkyRoom is streaming high-resolution video at high frame rates, that Internet connection becomes more crucial for proper operation. Bandwidth recommendations for HP SkyRoom are 400 kilobits per second (Kbps) minimum with 1 megabit per second (Mbps) recommended for high-resolution videoconferencing and incremental bandwidth for desktop sharing. This bandwidth range is within normal corporate network and residential DSL/cable modem performance parameters, but it would likely rule out cellular Internet usage for those outside high-speed 3G and 4G network coverage now uses in larger metropolitan areas. HP SkyRoom only works within a corporate network and the connectivity does not span firewalls, with the exception of VPN.

Setup and Licensing

Beginning in October 2009, HP workstations will include HP SkyRoom so there will be no setup issues or licensing expenses for those users.

License fees for a single seat of HP SkyRoom are \$149 per stand-alone user. Larger companies that want to share licenses of HP SkyRoom can use industry-standard FLEXIm licensing for concurrent usage tracking rather than purchasing HP SkyRoom for all named users. (Note to IT and CAD managers: HP also provides a remote-management tool for standardizing client settings and remote logoff of inactive users)

No matter which licensing methodology is used, the installation and configuration of HP SkyRoom is conducted through the HP SkyRoom setup, which also includes a First-Use Wizard application to set up audio devices, obtain microphone levels, and position webcams for proper viewing.

HP SkyRoom's Economic Value

If you've ever received a bill from a conference hosting service such as GoToMeeting, WebEx, or LogMeIn or another teleconferencing service, then you know that remote collaboration isn't free. In fact, fees for hosting remote collaboration events for even a few employees quickly can add up to hundreds of dollars per month. HP SkyRoom negates these fees by allowing you to use the power of your hardware and Internet connection without an intermediary hosting or telephone service.

If your company uses CAD, you probably already have computers that meet or exceed HP SkyRoom's hardware requirements. If your company has a well-configured local-area network or if you work from home using a broadband Internet connection, you already have the connectivity you need to run HP SkyRoom. Chances are the only expense you'll have is the small charge for HP SkyRoom itself (\$149) and a webcam and microphone for each user. Even with expensive webcams, you'd be hard pressed to spend more than \$300 per user to get HP SkyRoom up and running, so you could start saving hundreds per month in fees for meeting and teleconferencing services. Do the math and you'll see that HP SkyRoom can pay for itself very quickly while delivering higher quality audio, video, and desktop-sharing features.

Wrapping Up

There's no doubt that remote collaboration has changed how engineers and architects work. There's also little doubt that with travel budgets becoming ever tighter and the pressure to keep costs low becoming ever greater, remote collaboration will become more the norm.

With HP SkyRoom, remote collaboration simply becomes better, faster, simpler, and cheaper to implement for companies of all size, not just big firms. No matter what your company designs or how small your company it is, you can increase the quality of your remote collaboration experience with HP SkyRoom.

About the Author

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Robert provides CAD implementation, consulting, and programming services for a variety of companies throughout the United States and Canada. He holds a degree in mechanical engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology and is the author of *Expert CAD Management: The Complete Guide*. Reach him via his web site at www.cad-manager.com.

* 64-bit computing on Intel architecture requires a computer system with a processor, chipset, BIOS, operating system, device drivers and applications enabled for Intel® 64 architecture. Processors will not operate (including 32-bit operation) without an Intel 64 architecture-enabled BIOS. Performance will vary depending on your hardware and software configurations. See www.intel.com/info/em64t for more information. Dual Core is designed to improve performance of multithreaded software products and hardware-aware multitasking operating systems and may require appropriate operating system software for full benefit. Not all customers or software applications will necessarily benefit from use of this technology. Intel's numbering is not a measurement of higher performance.

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Windows® XP Professional is preinstalled on this system and includes end user rights and media for Windows Vista Professional. You may only use one version at a time. You must back up all data (files, photos, etc.) before uninstalling and installing operating systems to avoid loss of your data.

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