

**Jabra** GN

“Can you hear me?”

Sound Matters: The Role of Audio in Modern Work Environments

For many years, good quality audio has been an underrated tech feature. Whether discussing smartphones, PCs, or headsets, the focus has often been on design, battery life, and screen quality, with audio quality taking a backseat. However, the rise of voice-first interfaces linked to digital assistants and ambient computing has recently highlighted the crucial role audio plays in our content consumption experiences. Ambient computing, in particular, relies heavily on high-quality audio to deliver fully immersive experiences. Additionally, the pandemic and the shift to remote work have made us more aware of how audio quality can facilitate or hinder our workflows.

When considering quality audio, we often think about sound clarity. In the context of video calls, this typically means the clarity of the speaker’s voice. However, voice clarity also depends on the level of background noise that is picked up. Our brains must work harder to distinguish between background noise and the speaker we want to focus on, which can lead to brain fatigue. A study conducted by Creative Strategies at the start of the pandemic found that for 41% of the 890 remote workers surveyed, the biggest frustration during video calls was noise, while another 29% cited sound quality as their primary concern.

The Cost of Poor Quality Audio

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in the U.S. reports that intrusive and interruptive background noise can increase stress levels and exacerbate stress-related conditions like high blood pressure and migraine headaches. In addition, the American Institute of Stress estimates that job stress costs U.S. industries more than \$300 billion a year in absenteeism, turnover, diminished productivity, and medical, legal, and insurance costs.

It is well known and accepted that noisy environments in an office negatively impact productivity. However, evidence supports the claim that audio interference can have a stark impact on performance, jeopardizing comprehension and time optimization and increasing stress levels.

The impact of audio quality is not limited to the listener’s understanding. It also impacts how the speaker comes across. When audio quality is high (vs. low), people judge the content of what they are listening to as better and more critical. They also judge the speaker as more intelligent, competent, and likable. In an experiment, people rated a physicist’s talk at a scientific conference as 19.3% better when listening to it in high-quality audio versus slightly distorted, echo-prone audio. An experiment with NPR’s Science Friday interviews, where the researchers tested the same interview in high-quality audio vs. a simulated lousy phone line, bore similar results. When we start to consider how audio quality reflects on us

rather than just how much harder the listener has to work, the need for improvement becomes more apparent. Consider a salesperson trying to land a pitch with an important customer or a manager having an important meeting on the company's future. In both cases, you want the speaker to come across as knowledgeable, confident, trustworthy and knowing that what they say and how they say it is only part of the equation should have any company reconsider the tools they are equipped with that empower not hinder their delivery.

What Does Enterprise-Grade Audio Mean?

With hybrid work here to stay, investments must be made to provide both rich video and audio solutions. Choosing the right tools might seem more straightforward than it is, especially for audio. While video, outside of mobile phones, has been driven of late by business adoption, consumers are very familiar and comfortable with the options available to them when it comes to headsets and earbuds. During the pandemic, many companies found themselves scrambling to provide employees, forced overnight to work from home, all they needed. As a result, many made do with consumer products.

In many cases, especially for popular consumer headphones and earbuds brands, the audio quality is more than adequate to get you through a few calls. Yet, these models are designed to support users in different activities throughout their day, from listening to music to being on a call. In addition, battery life is not optimized for voice, which means that using them for work for an entire day is undoubtedly a challenge. Consumer devices are also not fine-tuned to support the different video services, nor are they designed to be worn eight to ten hours a day.

The negative impact of poor quality audio from the perspective of both the listener's engagement and the speaker's perception, coupled with the need to have the right tool for the job, must drive I.T. decision-makers to consider headsets as a tool in their own right, not just an accessory. Advancements in A.I. and data analytics make headsets the beneficiaries of intelligent personalization as well as the source of valuable insights on our collaboration habits. Both will be critical in driving employee engagement and satisfaction and fueling continued business transformation in collaboration and customer care.

A new paradigm creates new opportunities

With the reinvention of how we work, new tools are needed to enable us to do our best work, no matter where we are. Virtual workspaces have centralized teams and organizations and leveraging the right technology to connect to these workspaces and enable new ways of collaborating is essential for hybrid work to succeed. Though hybrid work will require experimentation and many iterations to optimize, with the right fundamental approach and considerations, the opportunity to reinvent the way in which we work is here.

For more information,

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WHO WE ARE

Jabra is a leader in communications and sound solutions. We create intelligent headsets and communications tools that help professionals work more productively; wireless headphones and earbuds that let consumers enjoy better calls, music, and media; and pioneering video conferencing solutions for more inclusive meetings.

Thoughtfully designed. Purposefully engineered. Expertly built.