

# *Conference and Resource Scheduling Reborn*

*Top Features and Functions That  
Help Break the Cycle of Indecision*



# Conference and Resource Scheduling Reborn

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*Today's Features and Functions That Help Break the Cycle of  
Indecision*

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## **The Scheduling Needs of the Enterprise**

Different types of organizations generate different product and service deliverables. For example, pharmaceutical companies focus on the research, development, marketing, and distribution of new drugs, while educational institutions focus on the creation and delivery of educational material to their student body. Because of the lack of similarity between the final deliverables of pharmaceutical and educational entities, it's reasonable to assume that these types of organizations are fundamentally different from each other. While true that their means of generating revenue differ and their day-to-day focus may seem radically different, from a top-level perspective, the primary goals of these organizations (and virtually all other organizations) are basically the same.

### ***All Organizations are Fundamentally Alike***

All organizations, regardless of their area of focus, geographical location, number of employees, corporate structure, fiscal characteristics, or final deliverables, share a fundamental set of goals including:

- 1) The need to serve their customer base in the most cost-effective, efficient manner.
- 2) The need to effectively leverage organizational resources.
- 3) The need to appropriately support and maintain all conferencing, collaboration, and audio visual resources.

In other words, virtually every organization shares one common challenge: the need to effectively utilize resources in order to best serve its client base and ensure the long-term existence and success of the organization. Unfortunately, the majority of organizations are unable to fully leverage their corporate resources due, in part, to the inability to effectively coordinate, manage, and schedule those resources.

### ***Scheduling Requirements – The Same Yet Different***

Generally speaking, although scheduling (people, places, and other resources) is a key daily activity in every enterprise, it is also one of the least understood and most frequently ignored activity. Typically this does not stem from a lack of interest in improving the effectiveness of the scheduling process. Instead, it usually relates to the average person's incorrect assumption that their organization's scheduling requirements are totally unique, and that no existing "off the shelf" scheduling solution can meet their requirements.

The fact is that while all organizations share certain fundamental needs and challenges, each organization has its own specific character, culture, and means of conducting business. Applying this to the scheduling world means that every organization has slightly different scheduling requirements. The following examples illustrate the similarities and differences of several types of organizations:

### Example 1: Large Global Investment Bank

Investment banks are driven by only one thing; maximizing profit for their clients and their company. A key part of effective investment management is the timely delivery of information throughout the organization (and eventually to the client base). Such an entity needs the ability to quickly schedule meeting rooms, presentation technology, and even meeting attendees to ensure the fastest possible distribution of information (the value of which declines quickly over time).

### Example 2: Large Educational Institution

Unlike the financial institution described in example 1, a large educational institution (such as a state college or university) is focused on providing a high quality, high impact educational experience to its students. Although the classes are typically scheduled far in advance, each session (and each instructor) may have different specific support and technology requirements. In addition, needs of remote (distance learning) and physically challenged students must be considered. Such an entity would need the ability to efficiently manage a large number of classrooms / meeting areas, a sizeable pool of audio visual resources, and a team of on-site support staff.

### ***Analysis Paralysis for Resource Scheduling***

For obvious reasons, each of the above entities would naturally seek some kind of computer-based scheduling solution. In most cases, organizations seeking a scheduling solution traverse the following path:

#### Step 1 – Investigation of Existing Internal Capabilities

In today's budget-conscious society, most organizations start their search by investigating the scheduling systems and information management platforms, such as Microsoft Outlook or Lotus Notes, which may be already deployed within their enterprise. Unfortunately, these systems -- which are designed to schedule people -- typically are not configured to manage the other data elements associated with non-human resources. For example, Outlook does not track the number of hours of usage of an LCD display, the IP address of a videoconferencing system, or the internal cost (or chargeback) for using a shared resource.

#### Step 2 – Search for Vertical-Specific Solutions

The frustration of Step 1 usually leads those responsible to seek a vertical-specific application that may suit their needs. In most cases, a quick web search (or review of an industry-specific magazine) reveals a number of possible solutions. However, these systems are often extremely expensive or require significant customization. In many cases, the solutions are actually custom-programmed on a client-by-client basis, which leads to long lead times and delayed deployments, and forces the organization to weather a slow and painful development process.

### Step 3 – Consideration of a Home-Grown Solution

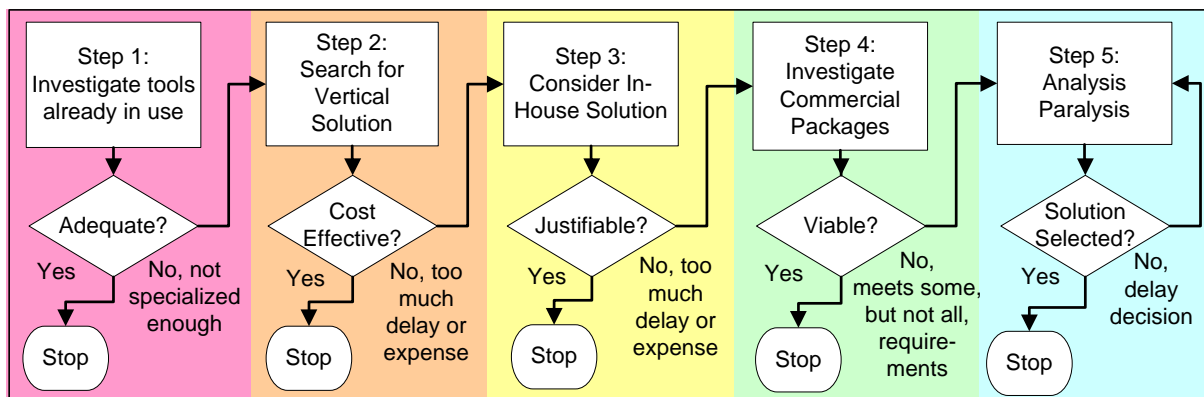
The information gained from Step 2 above (the need for certain features and functionality, etc.) often motivates those responsible to consider developing their own solution. In some cases the organization even considers creating a commercially sellable solution in hopes of gaining the solution it needs while creating a potential revenue source and means of recouping associated development costs. While this idea may seem interesting on the surface, a few meetings with the prospective development team (either internal staff or external contractors) quickly reveals that such a project would result in a long development cycle, a relatively high investment, and often a wealth of functionality compromises or limitations. Based on WR’s experience, the majority of internally managed scheduling system development projects fail, which then forces the organization to re-initiate its search for a scheduling solution.

### Step 4 – Review of General Scheduling and Resource Management Systems

At this point the organization turns its attention to general scheduling and management systems in hopes of finding a cost-effective, ready-to-deploy solution that meets their needs. By now the list of requirements is quite long and concise, and those responsible have a good idea of the costs associated with custom and home-grown solutions. In most cases it turns out that these scheduling solutions can meet a subset of the requirements, but not all.

### Step 5 – Analysis Paralysis

Step 4 above places the organization in a difficult situation: should it invest in “field-proven” solution that covers most (but not all) of its needs, or should it keep searching for an alternative solution? This is the analysis paralysis so often associated with enterprise scheduling, and in most cases it keeps organizations from enjoying the significant benefits afforded by scheduling and resource management solutions.



**Figure 1: The Cycle of Scheduling Indecision**

The worst part of all is that this cycle of indecision often continues for many years.

## *The Cost of Indecision*

In order to break the cycle of indecision, organizations must consider the cost of indecision regarding the deployment of a centralized scheduling system.

**Cost** – In environments without a centralized scheduling system, scheduling and reservations are either handled in a de-centralized manner (which means that many people must be involved for each multi-location meeting) or using a team of dedicated reservationists handling global reservations. In either case, organizations must shoulder the cost of scheduling on a daily basis.

**Efficiency** – Without a centralized system, the up to the minute availability of resources is not available to all global staff. For example, a person in London cannot see whether a conference room on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor is available to host his meeting at a specified date and time. This means he cannot immediately schedule this room, nor can he confirm this meeting with involved internal and external staff (or clients). Not only must this busy manager re-visit this issue at a later time (to book the meeting), but this often causes key meetings to be delayed. Clearly both of these items impact organizational efficiency.

**Opportunity Cost** – Although the time wasted coordinating meetings is considerable, and the inability to effectively leverage resources is unfortunate, for many organizations the opportunity cost of these issues represents the most significant cost. Quite simply, the time spent coordinating meetings “by hand” could be put to better use. Similarly, minimizing the money invested into meeting support resources allows more money to be channeled to the organization’s primary directives.

The following examples illustrate the impact of the cycle of indecision:

Example 1: An investment banker working on an important merger and acquisition (M&A) deal could not immediately book three videoconference rooms for a meeting, which forced him to delay the meeting with his client. The result was that key issues could not be immediately discussed and resolved, which ultimately increased the cost (and decreased the profitability) of the deal. In addition, the client did not receive the best and fastest possible support from the firm.

Example 2: A few minutes into a two-hour lecture, a video projector in a large classroom at a state university fails. Lacking a central scheduling system, the support staff is unable to see that the room next door contains a similar projector that is not scheduled to be used for the rest of the day. Because the support staff lacks this information, the team is forced to disassemble the projector on the spot and replace the bulb. In the end, 30 minutes of class time is wasted replacing the bulb instead of 5 minutes swapping out a projector.

Example 3: A pharmaceutical company has 30 meeting rooms in one facility, and each room’s schedule is managed locally by the floor receptionist. Although the rooms are busiest in the morning, the typical room is utilized only 30% of the time. Lacking a centralized scheduling system, this organization cannot easily reconcile the room schedules to consider whether they should decommission certain rooms to decrease costs and release space to other departments seeking valuable real estate to seat their employees. For this reason they keep more meeting rooms than necessary, shouldering the cost every day.

## ***Breaking the Cycle of Indecision***

The first step in breaking the cycle of indecision is to recognize that no centralized scheduling system, whether home-grown or COTS (commercial off the shelf), will solve 100% of an organization's scheduling requirements. There are simply too many organization-specific needs and workflows to be consider. There are, however, solutions available that effectively address the most common requirements for most organizations. WR estimates that the best of these solutions can meet roughly 80% of the typical organization's scheduling requirements.

After accepting the above, the end user organization simply needs to find the scheduling solution that best addresses its specific requirements. Note that WR is not suggesting that organizations give up on resolving the remaining 20% of their requirements. Instead, WR maintains that the cost of having no centralized scheduling system is too high to justify waiting for the "perfect" solution. In other words, a solution that addresses 80% of a company's *specific* needs today is better than no centralized solution at all.

## ***Typical Scheduling Requirements***

Wainhouse Research believes that the following list includes some of the typical scheduling requirements in today's enterprise. Some of these requirements are addressed by existing scheduling products – particularly as they attempt to include conferencing and collaboration capabilities – while others either are not yet available or exist only as "future ware" in the roadmaps of software vendors.

- Unattended, automated reservations capability so simple that *any* individual, with appropriate permissions and access, can schedule and update meetings
- Globally consistent, but configurable, views into the availability of all support resources (people, rooms, audio-visual equipment, videoconferencing systems, etc.)
- Accessibility from a variety of platforms and from virtually any global location (main office, branch office, home office, VPN, public internet, etc.)
- Delegation of rights so that proxies can have permission to schedule for others
- Localized conveniences including automated translation of time zones, support for multiple languages, and the ability to set local business hours as appropriate (based on local culture, holidays, siestas, etc.)
- Support for managing an overall meeting environment, across time and space, including both internal resources (people, locations, etc) and external business partners
- Support for non-traditional meeting-related items, e.g. meeting attendees, catering, security staff, etc.
- A flexible hierarchy (ex. location, building, floor, room, etc.) that allows an organization to organize its resources effectively within the scheduling system

- A set of policy and permissioning rules that utilize the above hierarchy system to determine the level of access and control that people and departments have to various resources
- Support for billing codes and flexibility in managing those codes, as well as tracking the financial information that arises from billing codes
- Integrated history and reporting functions with a number of standard reports (and the ability to customize those reports to meet specific requirements)
- Ability to interoperate and interface with existing organizational data systems including directory systems (active directory, LDAP, etc.) and internal chargeback / accounting systems

The above list is not intended to be all-inclusive, but it does include many of the basic resource scheduling requirements common to most organizations. Fortunately for enterprise organizations, there are a number of scheduling solutions available today that can address most, if not all, of the above requirements.

## Today's Hot Features

The prior section listed some of the common basic requirements for an enterprise scheduling system. In recent years, however, a number of "hot" features (some totally new, others expanded versions of existing capabilities) have emerged from vendors seeking to advance the art of resource scheduling and provide greater value and productivity gains for their customers.

The Wainhouse Research "top five" for 2005-2006 includes:

- Advanced Outlook / Notes integration
- User- and resource-based permissions and policy
- Support for various types of collaboration and access points
- Consolidation of all assets into a single scheduling system
- Highly configurable and personalized reporting and tracking capabilities

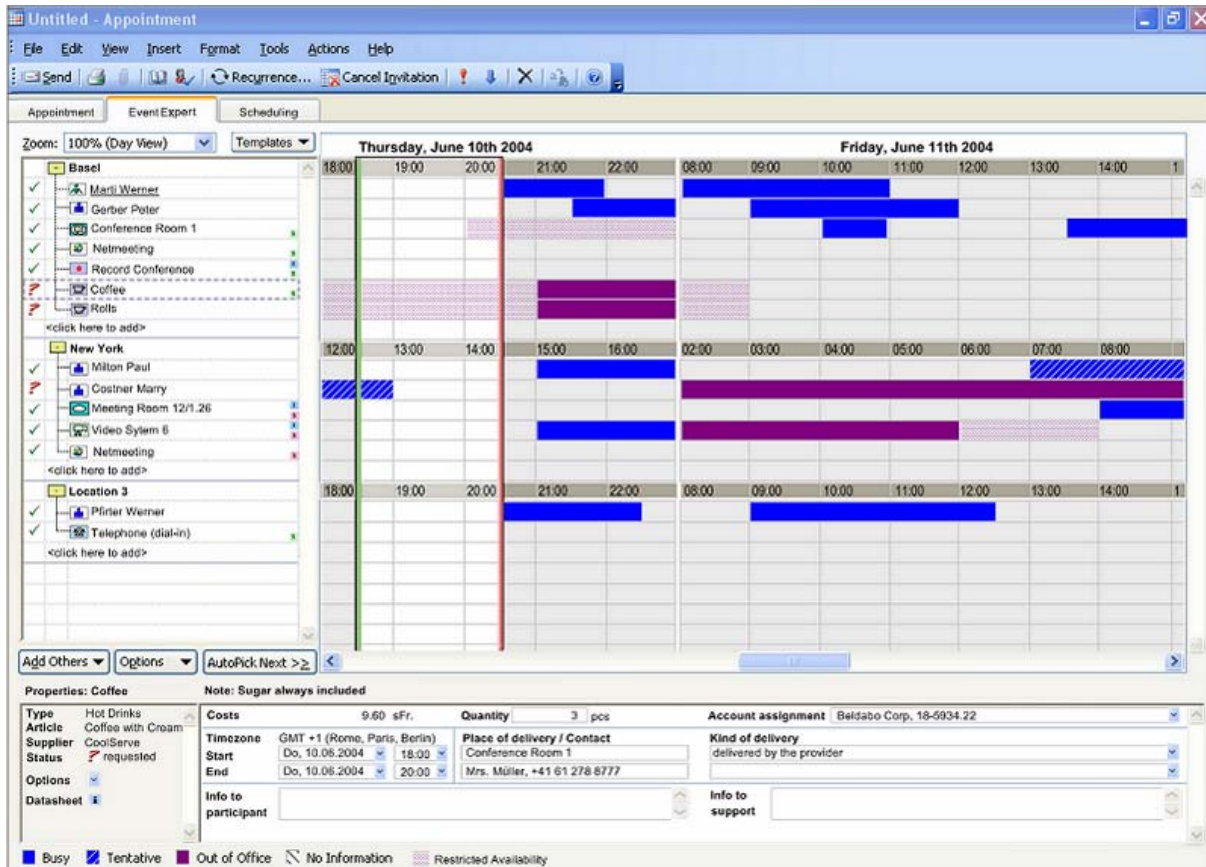
### ***Outlook / Notes Integration***

Most enterprise employees maintain their personal schedules and process their email using a combined email / personal information manager (PIM) such as Microsoft Outlook or Lotus Notes. The flow of email communications is so important that most workers keep these enterprise groupware clients open and running on their computers at all times. The high level of comfort among the user base and the "always on" nature of these applications make it logical for scheduling system vendors to interface with Outlook and/or Notes.

Overall, WR has noted that scheduling solutions offer varying forms of Outlook / Notes integration:

- 1) No Integration. These solutions do not integrate with Outlook / Notes, and therefore force the users to navigate between two applications (the scheduling system and the groupware client).
- 2) Email Invitations. Many scheduling solutions are able to generate properly formatted Outlook / Notes email invitations that allow users to easily insert meetings coordinated via the scheduling system into their calendars.
- 3) Database Polling. Certain systems have the ability to access (in real time during the meeting scheduling process) the contact directories and availability data from the enterprise groupware servers (Exchange / Lotus Notes) to assist users in coordinating meeting schedules.
- 4) Plug-Ins to Groupware Clients. As a means of leveraging the power of these groupware clients, some vendors have created Outlook and/or Notes plug-ins that provide flexible scheduling capabilities from within these platforms. In some cases these plug-ins provide additional tabs or drop-downs from within the groupware client. In other situations they actually add additional fields to the groupware database. Although capabilities may vary, these plug-ins make it possible for users to choose between the groupware client (with which they're already familiar and comfortable) and the scheduling system interface for their resource scheduling needs.

- 5) Total Database Synchronization. Select systems are able to fully synchronize resource information (basic information, free, busy, contact data, etc.) with groupware servers. In this case, although the two user interface options (groupware client or scheduling system interface) remain separate, all data remains common to the two platforms (in a manner similar to the plug-in method described above).



**Figure 2: Scheduling Resources Using an Outlook / Exchange Plug-In**

The above screenshot illustrates the ability to schedule (and check free / busy status) resources using the Outlook Plug-In / Interface provided with RoNexus' EventExpert solution.

Wainhouse Research has noted that the need to learn a new user interface has been a significant barrier for the deployment of various information systems. For this reason, WR recommends that enterprise organizations seek to integrate their centralized scheduling system as closely as possible with their deployed groupware solution. While IT managers may be concerned (and rightly so) with the idea of giving the scheduling system access to such vital groupware data, the benefit of increased resource management efficiency makes this worthy of serious consideration.

## *User- and Resource-Based Permissions and Policy*

In most organizations, the supply of conferencing resources (meeting rooms, A/V equipment, videoconferencing systems, bridging ports, support staff, etc.) is limited. In addition, many conferences are scheduled and conducted without any involvement from internal support resources. To ensure consistent availability, maximize resource utility, and minimize errors, organizations rely upon permissions and policy (P&P).

Permissions and policy provide enterprise organizations with two top-level capabilities:

- 1) The ability to provide end-users with appropriate and prioritized access to resources and information.
- 2) The ability to create rules and policies that automate various aspects of the conferencing and collaboration workflow.

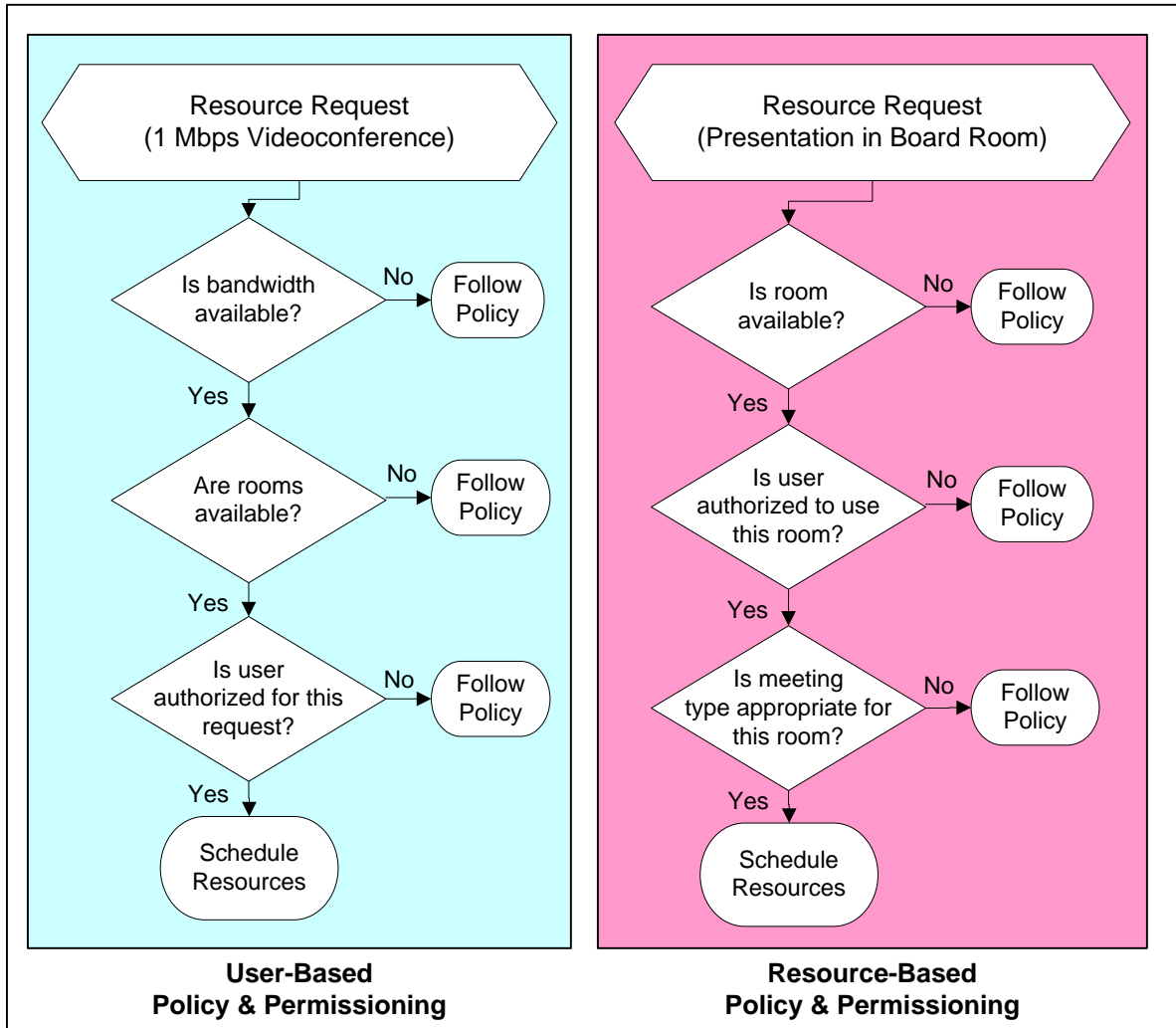
In general, there are three types of permissioning and policy: user-based, resource-based, and general. User-based P&P is based on the user requesting or using the resource. For example, user-based P&P would allow an organization to limit bandwidth usage for video calls based on a person-by-person level. In other words, all Managing Directors in the firm are authorized to conduct videoconferences at a 1 mbps connection speed while others are limited to only 512 kbps.

Resource-based P&P revolves around the resources under management. For example, using resource-based P&P an organization could ensure that all meetings in the Executive Board Room are approved by the CEO's administrative assistant.

Finally, general P&P allows an organization to enforce rules that do not apply to specific resources or people. For example, using general P&P an organization could ensure that:

- Meetings involving clients are hosted in the ground-floor conferencing center
- Meetings scheduled by a member of the HR department and with the word "termination" in the reservation title are scheduled late in the day, in one of the five conference rooms on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, and are automatically recorded / archived.
- Meetings involving five or more locations are automatically assigned a support person.
- Meeting reservations that involve an expense of \$1,500 or more in transport fees, support fees, equipment rental, or catering must be approved by a department manager.

In other words, permissions and policy allow organizations to enforce rules and regulations that grant and deny access to resources, limit the manner in which those resources can be used, and automate certain aspects of the conferencing environment to ensure adherence to compliance and workflow policies.



**Figure 3: User- and Resource-Based Policy and Permissioning**

In the diagram above, the term “Follow Policy” has varying meanings. For example, the policy to follow if bandwidth is not available might include denying the request, informing a responsible support person, or even decreasing the connection speed of other meetings scheduled at the requested date and time. Another example might be a specified policy or rule-set to follow when a room is not entirely appropriate for a specific meeting type. For example, perhaps an internal project meeting should not be held in the executive board room. In this case, policy might consist of rejecting the request, informing a support person, or suggesting an alternate (and hopefully more appropriate) room.

Superior scheduling and resource management solutions provide an easy-to-use and flexible policy and permission system. The screen shot below shows some of the permissioning and policy capabilities of the EventExpert system from RoNexus (the sponsor of this white paper).

Edit Service Class Rule			
<b>Active</b>	Select an Action and assign Roles that have the corresponding rights		
<b>Accessibility</b>	Action <input type="text" value="Add"/>	Role <input type="text" value="everyone"/>	Workflow <input type="text"/>
<b>Cancellation</b>	Action <input type="text" value="Add Waitinglist"/>	Role <input type="text" value="Managing Director"/>	Workflow <input type="text"/>
<b>Ordering</b>	Action <input type="text" value="Change"/>	Role <input type="text" value="CEO Assistant"/>	Workflow <input type="text" value="WF Standard"/>
	Action <input type="text" value="Cancel"/>	Role <input type="text" value="Admin, Support"/>	Workflow <input type="text" value="WF Privilege"/>
	<input type="button" value="More..."/>		
			<input type="button" value="Apply"/> <input type="button" value="Cancel"/>

**Figure 4: Entry and Modification of Policy and Permissioning Rules**

The screen shot above highlights the ability to limit certain resource management actions to specific types of users (roles). For example, only users with the role of CEO Assistant or higher can change the specifics of this meeting.

## *Support for Mobile Workers*

Legacy scheduling solutions focused primarily on providing a central repository for meeting information including locations, dates, times, and (on rare occasions) attendees. As these systems matured, additional functionality was added, such as the ability to manage and coordinate meeting assets including meeting rooms, A/V equipment, and support staff. Over time, these systems gained the ability to actively monitor and manage IP-based devices, adding an element of automation to the conferencing environment.

While capabilities have grown over time, for most solutions the focus remains the coordination of resources (rooms, devices, and people) located within the enterprise. Today's workers, however, are not always physically located within the enterprise environment. At any given moment, a person might be working from home, from another office, or while on the road visiting clients or attending a conference. "Mobility-aware" scheduling systems allow road warriors to inform the scheduling system of their current (and perhaps future) whereabouts and communication capabilities. The scheduling system then utilizes this information to include these workers in scheduled meetings.

The key benefit provided for mobile workers is that the scheduling system acts as the central point for collaboration sessions. In some cases, the system allows an individual to select his location from a personalized list of his common work locations or contact methods (main office, home, NY office, LA office, cell phone, notebook PC, etc.). In other cases, the system provides dial-in information to allow the remote worker to connect to the conference – regardless of his current physical location.

For example, a company's road warrior VP of Marketing schedules a call with her team while running between flights at the airport. The VP does not know (or need to know) the physical location or means of communication that will be available to each of her people at the time of the session. When the scheduled meeting time arrives, the system automatically connects all invited parties (including the VP of Marketing) by reaching out to them at their current location and via the appropriate communication method (audio call, video call, etc.)

Basically, this capability allows mobile workers to use the scheduling system as the hub for scheduled communications, in a manner similar to the way many people use instant messaging and presence as the hub for ad hoc communications.

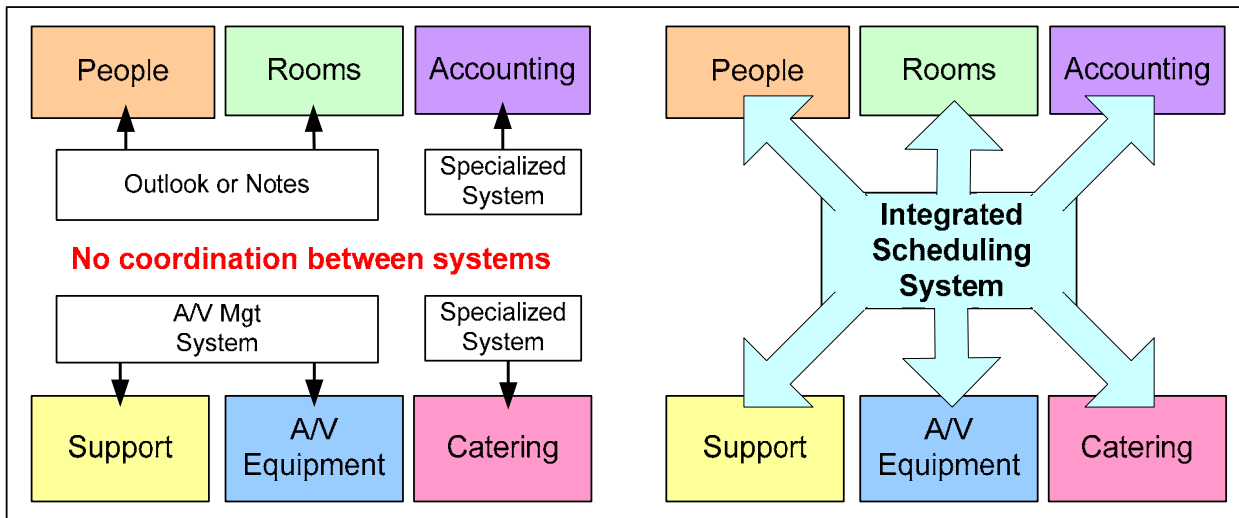
## *Management of All Assets and Services by a Centralized Scheduling System*

In the past, end users seeking meeting support and services often needed to interact with a variety of internal departments and management systems. For example, meeting rooms might be scheduled by floor receptionists, A/V equipment might be coordinated by the A/V group, videoconferencing rooms might be managed by the videoconferencing team, audio bridging might be provided by the telecoms team, catering might fall under the facilities group, and web conferencing might be considered an IT-coordinated function. These assignments might vary by location, department, or resource. As a result, end users needed to invest considerable time and effort just to schedule rich-media meetings and conferences.

Over time, many enterprises have streamlined the internal management of these services under a small number of internal support groups. Along those lines, superior scheduling systems have become multi-service capable, allowing end users to schedule and manage various items via a single interface as shown below. Items that may be managed by a centralized scheduling system include:

- Meeting rooms (including videoconferencing rooms)
- Audio-visual equipment (projectors, document cameras, screens, etc.)
- Web conferencing resources / systems
- Audio and video bridging equipment / ports / resources
- Centralized streaming and video archival systems
- Catering / food services
- Security services (participant escorts, printing of guest badges, etc.)

Consolidating these services under a single management umbrella saves time, leverages resources more effectively, decreases user learning curves, avoids delays in booking / conducting meetings, and more.



**Figure 5: Graphic Showing Islands vs. Centralization**

### ***Professional-Level Reporting and Tracking***

The scheduling system has become the information hub that allows organizations to manage conferencing and audio-visual services in the same way they manage other professional services within the enterprise. These systems provide managers with the information they need to make responsible decisions, consistently improve service levels, and regularly calculate the ROI of these investments. They also allow managers to allocate costs appropriately based on relevant and always up-to-date usage and spending data. Superior systems also allow users to customize the reports, and often save their own personalized versions of the reports reflecting their specific areas of interest or responsibility. Thus a scheduling system can generate a variety of reports including:

- Scheduling report providing detailed information about the meetings scheduled on a global, regional, or local basis
- Usage reports (by date, time, location, room, person, type of meeting, etc.)
- No-show report that highlights how often resources are reserved but not utilized
- Frequency of scheduling changes (by date, time, location, department, etc.)
- Monthly transport cost information (by location, room, person, department, cost code, etc.)
- Current (and historical) trouble tickets / problem items – including time to resolution information

Some reservation / scheduling systems also provide advanced reporting and analysis features including:

- Automatic report generation and distribution at specified dates / times
- Cost savings and ROI calculation reports
- Highlighting of frequent trouble issues (locations, equipment, users, etc.)
- SLA conformance reports for network and system availability and performance

With the data tracked and provided by a centralized scheduling system, an enterprise can track and justify -- or improve -- the efforts of a conferencing team, while also justifying current and future investments in conferencing.

## Real-World Examples

The benefits afforded by the use of a centralized scheduling system range from improved resource utilization to dramatic cost reductions. The examples below illustrate just a few of these benefits.

### Example 1: Expedited Scheduling

A mid-level manager needs to schedule a videoconference meeting with colleagues located around the world. In the past, coordinating this meeting would have involved a number of steps including:

- 1) Check all attendee's free / busy status through Outlook / Notes for several different meeting times
- 2) Release tentative meeting invites with a suggested dates and times to all attendees. This invite would include a request for confirmation of each person's anticipated location at the specified meeting date and time.
- 3) Contact video room coordinators around the world (via email, phone, fax, etc.) to confirm availability of video rooms in the required locations
- 4) Select appropriate meeting date and time based on attendee and room availability
- 5) Reserve each video room once the meeting date / time has been finalized
- 6) Release updated meeting invites (via Outlook / Notes) including suggested locations for attendees.

Whether the above steps are performed by an administrator or the end user manager directly, such meeting coordination efforts divert valuable time from other more critical tasks. By using the Outlook / Notes interface to a central scheduling system, the above process would be reduced to the following steps:

- 1) Utilize Outlook / Notes to find an available date and time for all meeting attendees, required video rooms, and additional support services.
- 2) Schedule the meeting via Outlook / Notes, which automatically reserves the appropriate conference rooms and releases an invite to all attendees.

Should an attendee need to change the location from which he will attend the meeting, he can use the same Outlook / Notes interface to update the meeting reservation and inform the meeting host.

### Example 2: Prioritized Access

A key vice president resigns and the CEO needs to confer with her executive management team, which is dispersed in four different cities due to travel obligations. Considering the magnitude of the situation and importance of the attendees, a video meeting seems the best option. Unfortunately, two of the attendees are currently in small branch offices (in Chicago and Frankfurt) with only a single video system in each. Previously, the CEO would simply order the management team to commandeer the video rooms immediately – regardless of the impact on the other offices. Fortunately, the central scheduling system provides other options.

After logging into the scheduling system, the CEO's assistant notes that an important video meeting with a key new client is currently underway in Chicago. Based on this information, the assistant provides three options to the CEO: 1) Interrupt the Chicago meeting, potentially impacting the new client, 2) start the meeting immediately, but have the manager currently in Chicago start the meeting on audio and then shift to video once the Chicago meeting ends (in 30 minutes), or 3) wait 30 minutes until the Chicago meeting ends. With this information in hand, the CEO chose option 2 and started her meeting immediately without impacting the client.

As luck would have it, the video meeting in Chicago ended 20 minutes early, which allowed the manager in Chicago to connect on video only 10 minutes into the meeting.

### **Example 3: Repair and Remediation**

Due to a water leak, a frequently used conference room must be taken out of production immediately for an estimated three days of repairs. Because the room is usually fully booked during business hours, an estimated 24 – 30 meetings must be relocated to other meeting rooms or postponed. The worst news of all is that the first meeting of the day in that conference room starts in only 25 minutes.

Prior to the deployment of the centralized scheduling system, updating this quantity of meetings would have taken several people several hours to complete. Fortunately, because the scheduling system maintains the schedules of all of the conference rooms in the building, a single scheduling manager can update these meetings quickly and easily. As each meeting is relocated, the system automatically releases a meeting update email to all participants (which people receive either on their PCs or handheld devices) informing them of the change. Thanks to the automation capabilities of the scheduling system, a task that would normally take many hours to complete has been reduced to perhaps a 20 minute exercise with minimal impact to the user community.

The take-away from this section is that thanks to the central database and interfaces to groupware systems like Outlook and Notes, the centralized scheduling system provides end-users and support staff with the information they need to make important decisions, deal with last-minute requirements and changes, and most importantly provide consistent service to the user community.

## Conclusion

For the most part, the meeting and resource scheduling requirements of different enterprise organizations are somewhat similar – regardless of company type, size, geographical footprint, and even vertical market. While true that company or industry-specific requirements are not uncommon, the core functionality that organizations need to schedule and manage their resources is fairly standard. Furthermore, there are solutions available on the market today that address these basic requirements.

Some scheduling systems provide functionality far beyond the basic requirements including advanced Outlook / Notes integration, permissions and policy, support for mobile workers, consolidation of assets into a single scheduling system, and highly configurable reporting and tracking capabilities. These advanced features provide the host organization with significant measurable and “soft” (difficult to quantify) benefits, thus making the justification for deploying such a solution even stronger.

Nonetheless, many organizations delay the deployment of a centralized meeting and resource scheduling system in hopes of finding a COTS (commercial off-the-shelf) solution that addresses both their basic and company-specific requirements. This decision delay means that these organizations are unable to realize the benefits of a centralized scheduling system.

Wainhouse Research believes that the cost of having no centralized scheduling system (including lost time, decreased efficiency, and ineffective resource management) is too high to justify waiting for a “perfect” solution that addresses every one of a company’s requirements. For this reason, WR recommends that organizations seriously consider deploying a high quality, commercially available, centralized scheduling solution as a means of quickly and cost-effectively improving their internal meeting management.

## About Wainhouse Research

Wainhouse Research ([www.wainhouse.com](http://www.wainhouse.com)) is an independent market research firm that focuses on critical issues in rich media communications, videoconferencing, teleconferencing, and streaming media. The company conducts multi-client and custom research studies, consults with end users on key implementation issues, publishes white papers and market statistics, and delivers public and private seminars as well as speaker presentations at industry group meetings. Wainhouse Research publishes Conferencing Markets & Strategies, a three-volume study that details the current market trends and major vendor strategies in the multimedia networking infrastructure, endpoints, and services markets, as well as a variety of segment reports, the free newsletter, The Wainhouse Research Bulletin, and the PLATINUM ([www.wrplatinum.com](http://www.wrplatinum.com)) content website.

### *About the Authors*

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## About Ronexus

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