Case Study

Beam Supports Microsoft Research's Efforts to Save Costs and Time

About Microsoft Research

For several decades, Microsoft Corporation has been a global leader in technological innovation, transforming the software and hardware industries with a wide range of products. In 1991, Microsoft founded Microsoft Research on its Redmond, WA campus to support the pursuit of both basic and applied research without the constraints of the product development cycle. Since then, the research subsidiary has grown to comprise multiple laboratories on three continents, with research expertise that spans areas including human-computer interaction, artificial intelligence, search technologies, natural user interfaces, networking, health and well-being, social science, and economics and computation. In addition to expanding the boundaries of technological possibility, Microsoft Research seeks to translate fundamental concepts into solutions for the broader consumer market.

"Use of the Beam has allowed me to stay connected with my team without traveling physically as frequently."

John Tang
Senior Researcher
Microsoft Research

Beam Supports Innovation across Distances

During Microsoft Research's early years in Redmond, it relied heavily on its geographic proximity to the product teams at Microsoft. As its footprint became global, however, it began exploring technologies that would assist with building and sustaining close working relationships across its distributed team, and ultimately purchased a BeamPro for the Redmond campus in 2013.

Microsoft Research faced an uphill battle in optimizing day-to-day operations across its geographically dispersed engineering teams. Jay Beavers, a software engineer manager on the team that selected Beam, comments, "Communications is always the biggest challenge, making sure everyone is on the same page." Beavers considers Beam to be particularly useful for brainstorming sessions and less formal meetings. He notes, "Writing software is easy; getting everybody to work on the same thing is hard. I wanted something that would get us past the conference room scenario. This is now eminently achievable because we have the technology on hand with the Beam to have a great quality experience."

Reduction of Travel Costs and Time

Beam also supports Microsoft Research's efforts to save costs and time through reductions in air travel. For example, adoption of the technology has allowed John Tang, a Silicon Valley-based researcher, to fly to Redmond on a quarterly basis, a significant reduction from the monthly trips that were previously necessary. Tang comments, "Having a physical representation in the space makes it easier to have natural conversations, turn-taking, and telling when people are asking a question directly towards me." Tang especially values the spontaneity of "beaming in," noting that the device gives him the freedom to seek out a team member or continue a discussion after a meeting. Beam's mobility expands remote presence beyond traditional meeting spaces, allowing him to benefit from "serendipitous, unplanned conversations" in hallways or the building's central atrium.

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