

Reviewed: The all in one Yamaha CS-700 video conferencing solution

Julie Berry, IT and AV support officer at University of Huddersfield gives her views on the newly launched huddle room product



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At the University of Huddersfield we have been transitioning to Skype for Business for the last couple of years. As a result of this we have been fitting out rooms so that they are Skype for Business (SfB) ready when they are refurbished.

Our refits commonly involve a Logitech C920 camera along with Audio-Technica boundary mics in the ceiling, which has worked perfectly well for us, but we always felt that there must be something better out there. We looked at a couple of other products that were close but not quite what we were looking for. The Acendo Vibe was very close but with the controls on the side we didn’t feel that it was quite as intuitive as it could be and was a bit on the pricey side. The Crestron Mercury was good too but lacked a camera and you would still have cables dragging across the table when you linked up additional mics.

One of the problems that we encounter is that people agree a specific time for a video conference and then find that there are no suitably equipped rooms available at that time because they are being used for normal ‘physical’ meetings. What we wanted was a portable option so we could transform any room into a video conferencing room.

So, when I went to the LTSMG conference (The Learning and Teaching Spaces Managers Group) at the University of Hertfordshire in November (2017), I saw the Yamaha CS-700 on display. We have been using a Revolabs FLX UC500 mic/speaker combination with great results and the CS-700 appeared to use the same technology but with an added camera and the controls now clearly visible on the front. An added bonus was that Yamaha were demonstrating it attached to a screen on a trolley, which is exactly what we had been thinking of doing ourselves for the portable option. It looked perfect for us.

When I got back to the office, I spoke to our integrator Roche AV to get a price (£900 + VAT) and decided to buy one. Unfortunately as this was such a new product they were not actually available yet so I would have to wait for a month or two. So I waited. And I waited until eventually I saw a tweet from AV Technology Europe - it was finally available in the UK. I called Roche and it arrived the next day – Valentine’s Day. Not quite a bunch of roses, but who am I to complain?

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The device was securely packed and came with everything I would need to connect it to an office. There was a mounting to screw into the wall and the instructions showed how the bracket to hold it easily snapped in. You can have it installed and working within half an hour of opening the box. As I was just testing it, I laid it on the table, connected the USB cable to my laptop, connected the power and I was ready to start.

Within SfB I selected the CS-700 for the audio and video source and made a call to a colleague in our office. Everything worked perfectly straight out of the box. I set up a table so that it would seat approximately six people. The camera took in the whole table and could easily accommodate a larger table if required. The camera was of a good quality and produced a decent picture. There is even a camera shutter for privacy if that is a requirement.

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The audio quality was excellent. Without any tweaking whatsoever my colleague could clearly hear what I was saying whether I was right next to the device or at the far side of the room about six metres away. The CS-700 picked up everything and it sounded great at my end too.

On the front of the device there are audio and video mute buttons, which glow blue when muted. It is possible to connect your mobile phone via Bluetooth, which can be done easily by the usual method of pairing, or you can use NFC to connect quickly. I connected my phone and made a call. The CS-700 mic and speakers automatically kicked in but I was a little surprised that the phone's camera is still used instead of the CS-700's. Nor could I find a way to get the CS-700 camera to be used via Bluetooth, but I don't think that will be an issue for us at all.

I then connected the CS-700 to our network and was able to easily control things via the web interface. It is a nice touch to be able to control remotely but the device will work just as well without a network connection. On the bottom of the CS-700 there are three screw holes so that tripods can be attached if required instead of the wall fixings. This will be ideal for us for the portable solution.

Drawbacks? It would be nice to be able to use the CS-700 camera with a mobile phone. Whilst it is easy to press the buttons on the front of the device, some room layouts may make it awkward to do so and I think that a remote control might be a useful addition.

Final Verdict: A great product at the right price. I don't think you could want more from a video conferencing system without making it too complicated. The clarity of the audio is excellent and the wide angle of the camera incorporates the whole meeting. Highly recommended.

Star Rating: 5/5

