



**Cut business trip expenses by 10% and improved efficiency of meetings with overseas sites through online conference system**

**“ThinkSmart Hub 500”**

## SoftBank Robotics Corp.

Location: 14th floor, Shiodome Sumitomo Building, 1-9-2 Higashi-shimbashi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-0021

Established: July 24, 2014

Business details: Development, sale, and maintenance services for humanoid robots and service robots

URL: <https://www.softbankrobotics.com/>

## Overview

SoftBank Robotics develops, sells, and provides maintenance services for Pepper, the well-known humanoid robot, and AI cleaning robots. In order to reduce its high business trip expenses, SoftBank Robotics deployed Lenovo's online conference system “ThinkSmart Hub 500.”

This system facilitated the company to conduct meetings with remote sites fully online. In addition to a 10% reduction in business trip expenses, this system generated various positive effects.

## Issues

SoftBank Robotics faced rising business trip expenses due to frequent overseas business trips as its employees visited Group sites spread across the globe. In order to solve this problem, it needed to establish a system that would improve productivity through a remote environment with its overseas sites.

## Solution

SoftBank Robotics deployed seven units of Lenovo's online conference system “ThinkSmart Hub 500,” which is user-friendly, boasts a high cost performance, and is specialized for using Microsoft Teams and Skype for Business.

They are placed in nearly all conference rooms at the Japanese offices, spurring a change in the work environment.

## Effects of deployment

- Created a virtual meeting space in which members at both sites could see both materials and one another's faces, leading to the promotion of collaboration.
- Reduced the number of employee overseas business trips. As a result, reduced business trip expenses by 10%.
- Allowed for the simple creation of a large video conference involving many participants in multiple conference rooms.
- In system development, because ThinkSmart Hub 500 created an environment in which members could connect with various people regardless of place, an off-site development team was formed that encapsulated both overseas and domestic development teams.

As a result, compared with fully on-site development teams, this style significantly impacted both outsourcing costs and the securing of work areas.

## Expand robotics business around “Pepper”

SoftBank Robotics is a company which operates the robotics businesses of the SoftBank Group.

SoftBank Robotics provides many services, such as the development, sale, and maintenance of humanoid robots and service robots. Its product lineup includes the well-known humanoid robot “Pepper” and the AI cleaning robots for corporations “Whiz” and “RS26 Powered by BrainOS.”

Of these, Pepper is a humanoid robot capable of a high level of communication with people because it can read a person’s emotional state and location through information obtained by microphones and cameras.

SoftBank Robotics began providing “Pepper for Biz,” a service for corporations, in 2015. Since then, this robot has operated in various industries and types of business, handling tasks such as reception, customer service, and cashiering.

Pepper has already been deployed at over 2,000 companies.

In order to grow Pepper into an international brand, SoftBank Robotics expanded to various countries, opening group locations in France, the US, China, etc. There is much collaboration between these sites.

“Since there are many meetings between Japanese and

overseas employees, Japanese staff has to go to these overseas sites to participate in these meetings.

Even in the SoftBank Group, the frequency of employees traveling overseas is significantly high,” explained Mr. Hiroyuki Tanaka of the Products &



According to Mr. Hiroyuki Tanaka, “Since our company has many business trips to overseas sites, the key performance indicator for our online conferences is the reduction of such trips.”

Services Division (Manager of Global IT Strategy Unit in the IT/IS Solutions Department).

If the number of employee business trips increases, so will the expenses.

Furthermore, the large amount of time required for travel to overseas sites is also a constant problem.

Most travel time is unproductive. The longer the unproductive time, the greater the possibility of impeding the progress of work.

In order to reduce the costs and unproductive time which come from such meetings, SoftBank Robotics deployed seven units of Lenovo’s online meeting system “ThinkSmart Hub 500,” which is user-friendly, boasts a high cost performance, and is specialized for using Microsoft’s web conference/voice communication service “Microsoft Teams” and “Skype for Business.”

It also plans to add three units.

ThinkSmart Hub 500 is not the first online meeting system which SoftBank Robotics has deployed.

In order to improve the efficiency of collaboration with overseas sites, the company took various measures to transfer meetings online.

\*1 Surface Hub: Microsoft’s online conference system using an integrated large screen. One can directly view or edit Microsoft Office files, write on a white board, and conduct online conferences using Microsoft Teams or Skype for Business.

“One was Surface Hub (\*1), an online conference system which uses an integrated large screen. This unit was placed in our network that links the city’s roughly 160 operational

### Seeking optimized solutions for video conferencing

large conference room.

We were able to create an environment to efficiently conduct interactive communication with our overseas sites.

We hoped to further improve the efficiency of this system as remote sites used the conference system to communicate to one another,” said Mr. Tanaka.

The company also conducted video conferences using other communication tools similar to Skype for Business.

However, in this system, the company encountered a problem of voices cutting out when a large number of people were connected simultaneously.

“In order to solve this problem, we did not use video, but only shared a computer screen over the Internet and used international phone calls for voice communication.

However, international calls increased communications

expenses.

In this unstable environment, we wasted ten to fifteen minutes before and after each meeting on set up and sending e-mails to share files,” said Mr. Tanaka.

In order to solve these issues, Mr. Tanaka explored new online conference solutions.

During this search, he encountered ThinkSmart Hub 500.

“The timing worked out perfectly because just as I was searching for a solution ThinkSmart Hub 500 was released.

At that point, I was considering using Skype for Business across the company as the software foundation for our online conference because the service is highly reliable and can be used in China, where we have business sites.

Therefore, I was interested once I learned about ThinkSmart Hub 500, which specialized in that software, and soon considered deployment.

In the end, I decided that ThinkSmart Hub 500 would solve the problems we faced and decided to deployment the system,” said Mr. Tanaka.

### The deciding fact for adoption was user-friendliness

According to Mr. Tanaka, two of the key factors for deciding to deployment ThinkSmart Hub 500 were its high cost performance and the small space it required.

“ThinkSmart Hub 500 is an extremely compact meeting system.

With just a proper size monitor, a space, a camera, and a LAN line for online meetings, you can conduct a conference among many participants



Lenovo's ThinkSmart Hub 500 in a conference room at SoftBank Robotics



using Skype for Business.

Furthermore, both deployment and running costs are low. In that way, it was very easy to decide to deploy this system,” said Mr. Tanaka.

In addition, Mr. Tanaka said that the simplicity of the feature configuration and the ease of operation also greatly helped the case for deploying ThinkSmart Hub 500.

“The most important thing for online conference systems is that they be easy for anyone to use.

Using a system which requires a lot of set up time before starting the meeting would actually waste the precious time of all of the meeting participants.

However, with ThinkSmart Hub 500, by simply turning the system on and easily configuring the connection setting, we are able to quickly share computer screens among participants as well as communicate by voice and video.

The configuration of the features is very simple. As such, most of the staff are able to operate the system without reading the manual.”

Mr. Tanaka also added that ThinkSmart Hub 500 has the merit of high maintainability.

“In order to enjoy better audio quality, small meeting systems often require installing and connecting separate speakers and microphones, all which increase costs. It can also be difficult to identify which component is not functioning when there is an error. However, ThinkSmart Hub 500’s high maintainability is another reason the system has been so well received.”

### Reduced business trip costs by 10%

In November 2018, SoftBank Robotics deployed and began operation of seven units of ThinkSmart

Hub 500.

One unit is placed in the President’s office and five are placed in conference rooms at the company headquarters in Shiodome, Tokyo. The remaining unit is placed in a conference room at the maintenance center in Toyosu.

By deploying ThinkSmart Hub 500 units, the conference rooms of each site of SoftBank Robotics are connected. This allows employees to easily conduct meetings using computer screens, voice, and video.

“As a result of this system, we are able to easily hold online conferences between headquarters and the Toyosu site. Furthermore, we are able to connect the conference room of Toyosu with multiple conference rooms at headquarters, allowing us to hold a large meeting at once.

There is no conference room in either headquarters or Toyosu where we can hold a large meeting with over thirty people.

ThinkSmart Hub 500 virtually created the large conference room,” said Mr. Tanaka.

Furthermore, since Surface Hub has been deployed in conference rooms at sites in France and the US, the company is able to hold meetings as needed between conference rooms in Japan and overseas sites by linking Surface Hub with ThinkSmart Hub 500.

“As a result, we have begun significantly reducing the number of overseas business trips by employees. We have already cut business trip expenses by 10%.

Over the course of one year, these cost reductions will add up to a significant savings,” said Mr. Tanaka, adding the following.

“Since we handle robot products, we need for our



technicians to accurately express how the robots are moving. In order to express that to someone at a remote location, the most effective method is to share video.

By deploying ThinkSmart Hub 500, we are able to easily share such video and discuss over the video while conducting the meeting across country borders.

I feel that is very meaningful.”

In addition, the deployment of ThinkSmart Hub 500 appears to be changing how SoftBank Robotics works with subcontractors.

“Before deploying ThinkSmart Hub 500, we had technicians from subcontracted companies stay in our offices during the course of this work.

However, we now have these technicians work at their respective companies. We have switched to a

style of having subcontractors report work progress and details once a week using ThinkSmart Hub 500. As a result, subcontracted technicians do not need to come to the company and can rather spend that time more effectively on other work.

We can also use the space which had been taken up by the subcontractors for new employees.”

As described above, ThinkSmart Hub 500 has allowed SoftBank Robotics to more fully utilize online conferences, producing various effects.

Based on this, Mr. Tanaka said the following in closing.

“The deployment of ThinkSmart Hub 500 has contributed to improved productivity of meetings as well as cost reduction.

We gained a high ROI on a small investment.

We intend to use ThinkSmart Hub 500 to its fullest.

**“Lenovo’s ThinkSmart Hub 500 has simple feature configuration, is easy to use, and allows anyone to easily conduct online conferences. This may be the ideal online conference system for companies such as ours which frequently hold meetings with overseas sites”**

SoftBank Robotics Product & Services Division, Business Promotion Department  
IT/IS Solutions Department Manager of Global IT Strategy Unit

Mr. Hiroyuki Tanaka



5

**reasons  
why Lenovo is a difference maker**



Trusted around  
the world



Expertise across  
categories



Confidence in our  
products



Business-boosting  
technology



Flexible support  
network