The room could seat 25 people, and we had 32 people sign the attendance form, and probably some more who did not, so we had standing-room only.

Most of the people were just getting started with this technology, or were considering it, so a frequent comment was the timing of this roundtable was very good for them.

In the brief opening statement, it was explained that H.323 is now widely available and used for applications such as professional collaboration, committee meetings, joint classes, remote lectures and student job interviews. H.323 does NOT involve ISDN, web cameras, web casting or video streaming. Polycom leads the market, with their $400 ViaVideo suitable for office use, and their $3500 Viewstation suitable for classrooms and meeting rooms. All H.323-using organizations should join ViDeNet (www.vide.net). The new Internet2 Commons provides free multipoint video conferences for all I2 member schools, and I2 access is now being expanded to include all K-20 schools, plus libraries and museums.

These are the topics that the attendees wanted to discuss:

1. Can video work over a shared network, with voice, data and video all sharing the same bandwidth?

   Yes, it can and usually does. If the network is of good quality, and not close to saturation, video works fine.

2. Is network guaranteed quality of service (QoS) required?

   QoS is used in only a few places, and is not the norm for most video conferencing. It helps in the case of crowded networks. It is not necessary on high-quality networks like Internet2, where over provisioning is used to avoid the need for QoS.

3. Do telephony PRI and Frame Relay circuits work?

   Yes, but those are generally for H.320 video and not H.323.

4. In multipoint conferences, how many users can you have at the same
There is no limit. In Megaconference III, we have over 200 end points. In practice, the limit is set by the capabilities of the Multipoint Control Unit (MCU) you are using. MCUs may be cascaded together to make larger conferences. Hardware-based MCUs such as RADVision and Accord work better than software-based MCUs running in NT PCs.

5. Are all vendor's video products compatible?

Most H.323 products are compatible and interoperate fine. Some vendors provide extra extensions to the standard, which do not always interoperate. Some vendors (such as Microsoft) do not follow the standard exactly, and that can cause problems.

6. Is there an H.323 video solution for Macs?

This is one of the most commonly asked questions. Tragically, the answer is "not today". Efforts have been under way for some time to get Apple to provide a driver for the Polycom ViaVideo USB device, but so far nothing has happened.

7. What is SIP, and how does that relate to H.323?

SIP stands for Session Initiation Protocol, and is being developed as a possible future migration path for H.323. It is expected that existing products will continue to work, perhaps with a software upgrade, so there should be no concern about holding back now with H.323 video.

Many of the attendees expressed thanks afterwards, saying how useful this roundtable had been for them. Many of them signed up to be on the Megacon mailing list for future discussions.

The biggest unmet need expressed is for technical training on H.323. Perhaps we should consider a pre-conference training seminar for the next Educause conference.