CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A video conferencing system comprising:

a viewing screen or screens configured for positioning between at least two local participants and further configured to simultaneously show videoconference images to the at least two local participants;

a video camera or cameras having a combined viewable perspective approximating 360 degrees mounted adjacent to the viewing screen; and

a processing module configured for receiving, processing and transmitting audio and images from the 360 degree camera as well as audio and images received from remote locations via network or other transmission means.

2. The video conferencing system of claim 1 wherein the top of the viewing screen is positioned to allow participants to easily maintain eye contact with one another while viewing the screen.

3. The video conferencing system of claim 1 wherein said video camera is mounted directly below said viewing screen.

4. The video conferencing system of claim 1 wherein said video camera is mounted directly above said viewing screen.

5. The video conferencing system of claim 1 wherein a portable projection apparatus is utilized to project images onto said viewing screen.

6. The video conferencing system of claim 1, wherein said processing module is hardware.

7. The video conferencing system of claim 1, wherein said processing module is software.

8. The video conferencing system of claim 1, wherein the video camera is mounted relative to the screen such that the shown videoconference images are not captured by the video camera or cameras.

9. The video conferencing system of claim 1 wherein said viewing screen is made of translucent material.

10. The video conferencing system of claim 9 wherein the viewing screen is configured to present an image to a first of the at least two local participants and a reverse image to a second of the at least two local participants.

11. The video conferencing system of claim 1 wherein the viewing screen and processing module are configured to display a videoconference image having at least two windows representing images of remote videoconference participants, each of the at least two windows corresponding to opposing sides of the remote location.

12. A method for video conferencing comprising the steps of:

positioning a viewing screen between participants;

positioning a 360 degree camera directly above or below a viewing screen;

capturing data from the 360 degree camera;

receiving data transmitted via network from one or more remote locations;

processing data received from the 360 degree camera and data transmitted from one or more remote locations;

displaying data images received from one or more remote locations on the viewing screen;

transmitting data images received from the 360 degree camera to one or more remote locations via network or other transmission means.

13. The method for video conferencing of claim 11 wherein the step of positioning the viewing screen further comprises positioning the top of the viewing screen below eye level to allow participants to easily maintain eye contact with one another while viewing the screen.

14. A video conferencing system comprising:

a housing conforming to the general shape of a portable computer;

a display coupled to the housing and configured to simultaneously present videoconference images to at least two local participants when the display is placed between the local participants; and

a video camera mounted adjacent to the display and configured to capture an approximate 360 degree view of a local conference location corresponding to the local participants;

15. The videoconferencing system of claim 14 wherein the video camera is mounted relative to the screen such that the shown videoconference images are not captured by the video camera or cameras.

16. The videoconferencing system of claim 15 wherein the video camera is mounted directly below the display.

17. The videoconferencing system of claim 15 wherein the display comprises a translucent material configured for projection of a regularly oriented image on one side of the display and a reverse image on the opposing side of the display.

18. The videoconferencing system of claim 17 further comprising a portable projection apparatus coupled to the housing and configured to present images from a remote videoconferencing location.

19. The videoconferencing system of claim 14 wherein the display comprises at least two video screens.

Claims

1. A video conferencing system comprising:

a translucent viewing screen configured for positioning between at least two local participants said participants located on opposing sides of said viewing screen and further configured to show one or more videoconference images to the at least two local participants;

a portable projection apparatus configured to project the images onto the viewing screen from one of said opposing sides and wherein said videoconference images are viewable from both of said opposing sides;

a video camera or cameras having a combined viewable perspective approximating 360 degrees mounted adjacent to the viewing screen; and

a processing module configured for receiving, processing and transmitting audio and images from the 360 degree camera as well as processing audio and videoconference images received from remote locations via network or other transmission means.

2. The video conferencing system of claim 1 wherein the top of the viewing screen is positioned to allow participants to easily maintain eye contact with one another while viewing the screen.

3. The video conferencing system of claim 1 wherein said video camera is mounted directly below said viewing screen.

4. The video conferencing system of claim 1 wherein said video camera is mounted directly above said viewing screen.

5. The video conferencing system of claim 1, wherein said processing module is hardware.

6. The video conferencing system of claim 1, wherein the processing module is software.

7. The video conferencing system of claim 1, wherein the video camera is mounted relative to the screen such that the shown videoconference images are not captured by the video camera or cameras.

8. The video conferencing system of claim 1, wherein the system and viewing screen are configured to present forward and reverse images on each of the two opposing sides of said translucent viewing screen.

9. The video conferencing system of claim 1 wherein the viewing screen and processing module are configured to display one or more videoconference images having at least two windows representing images of remote videoconference participants, each of the at least two windows corresponding to opposing sides of a viewing screen at the remote location.

10. A method for video conferencing comprising the steps of:

positioning a translucent viewing screen between participants;

positioning a 360 degree camera directly above or below the viewing screen;

capturing data from the 360 degree camera;

receiving data transmitted via network from one or more remote locations;

processing data received from the 360 degree camera and data transmitted from one or more remote locations;

displaying data images received from one or more remote locations on the viewing screen utilizing a portable projector positioned on one side of the translucent viewing screen, said projector and viewing screen configured to present the projected data image to participants located on two opposing sides of the translucent viewing screen; and

transmitting data images received from the 360 degree camera to one or more remote locations via network or other transmission means.

11. The method for video conferencing of claim 10 wherein the step of displaying further comprises displaying forward and reverse data images to participants located on the two opposing sides of the translucent viewing screen.

12. A video conferencing system comprising:

a housing confirming to the general shape of a portable computer,

a translucent display coupled to the housing and configured to simultaneously present videoconference images from a remote videoconference location to at least two local participants located on opposing sides of said display;

a video camera mounted adjacent to the display and configured to capture an approximate 360 degree view of a local conference location corresponding to the local participants;

a processing module configured for receiving, processing and transmitting audio and videoconference images from the 360 degree camera as well as processing audio and videoconference images received from remote videoconference locations via network or other transmission means; and

a portable projector apparatus configured to project onto the display videoconference images from the remote videoconference location.

13. The video conferencing system of claim 12 wherein the video camera is mounted relative to the screen such that the shown videoconference images are not captured by the video camera or cameras.

14. The videoconferencing system of claim 13 wherein the video camera is mounted directly below the display.

15. The videoconferencing system of claim 13 wherein the display comprises a translucent material configured for projection of forward and reverse oriented videoconference images onto one side of the display and the processing module is further configured to enable the forward and reverse oriented images to be projected onto one side of the display and which are viewable from both of said opposing sides.