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July 2018



TOTAL BUDGET

## Evaluation of Logitech SmartDock with Flex

*Hands-on testing of a secure meeting room console designed for the Skype Room System (SRS)*



This evaluation sponsored by:

logitech



# Background

Founded in 1981, Logitech International S.A. (Logitech) is a leading PC peripheral manufacturer offering webcams, keyboards, standard and “gaming” computer mice, PC speakers, mobile speakers, tablet accessories, home control devices / remotes, and more.

In 2011, Logitech formed the “Logitech for Business” division offering a variety of products and accessories targeting business / enterprise users. Members of our team have used and evaluated numerous offerings from the company’s business division including Logitech GROUP, Logitech SmartDock, and Logitech MeetUp offerings.

In September 2016, Logitech announced Logitech SmartDock - a table-top docking station and AV interface designed specifically for use with the Skype Room System solution from Microsoft.

In February 2018, Logitech announced Logitech SmartDock Flex, a SmartDock expansion kit that improved cable management and added additional capabilities.

In June 2018, Logitech commissioned the Recon Research (RR) team to perform a third-party assessment of Logitech SmartDock with Flex. This document contains the results of our hand-on testing.

## Skype for Business in the Meeting Room

For many years, enterprises around the world have used software-based video conferencing applications like Microsoft Lync and Skype for Business within their meeting rooms. However, these deployments suffered from a handful of challenges including:

- **System Workflow** – most conferencing applications (including Skype for Business) are optimized for use on a desktop or notebook PC, and not in a meeting room on a large shared display.
- **User Interface** – the need to use a keyboard and mouse to control the solution provided an unnatural, non-intuitive experience for those in the meeting room
- **Physical Footprint** – bring your own devices (BYOD), such as a notebook or NUC PC, requires extra cabling and AV hardware and yields a cluttered and untidy installation.

Microsoft’s Skype Room System (SRS), which was announced in September 2016, resolved the first two items in the list above. The SRS package includes the following:

- A Surface Pro tablet (SP4 or SP5) – provides the compute platform and a touch user interface
- Software - a version of Skype for Business optimized for use in a meeting room<sup>1</sup>

However, the Surface Pro tablet form factor makes it well suited for personal use, but not for permanent installation in a shared space. In addition, the Surface Pro does not offer the AV connections needed in a meeting room environment. That’s where Logitech SmartDock comes in.

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<sup>1</sup> In mid-July 2018, Microsoft released a version of SRS that supports Microsoft Teams. At the time of our testing, this software build wasn’t publicly available, so we conducted our testing using a Surface Pro 4 and Skype for Business.

# Understanding SmartDock

Logitech SmartDock is a mechanical docking station that transforms a Microsoft Surface Pro 4 or 5 tablet into a meeting room touch panel. From a top-level view, SmartDock provides two key functions:

- Secure physical mounting of the Surface Pro tablet
- Access to the AV connections and signals needed within the meeting room

To be clear – SmartDock is more than simply a physical vessel for the Microsoft Surface Pro. SmartDock makes the Surface Pro more accessible and comfortable for users in the meeting room, and gives the Surface Pro the feel of a ruggedized appliance, while simultaneously protecting the device from theft and vandalism.



Logitech SmartDock is available in three different packages:

- SmartDock only (MSRP US \$599) – includes the SmartDock device, several cables, and a few accessories (Torx screwdriver, etc.). With this configuration, connections for the power supply, camera, mic(s) and speaker, network, and display(s) are made at the base of the SmartDock.
- SmartDock + Extender Box (MSRP US \$799) – includes the SmartDock and an Extender Box that connects to the SmartDock using an included 16.4-foot extender cable, and moves the AV and USB signals to a location a few meters away from the SmartDock (e.g. behind the display, under the table, in a credenza, etc.).
- SmartDock + SmartDock Flex (MSRP US \$1,399) – includes the SmartDock, and the SmartDock Flex Base and Extender Box combination that consolidates the AV and USB signals into a single CAT6 cable for transmission across the room (supports distances up to 50 feet).



Figure 1: SmartDock (Left), SmartDock Flex Base (Top Right), and SmartDock Flex Extender Box (Bottom Right)

The SmartDock / Skype Room System combination can be used with any Windows-compatible USB audio and video accessories, but many customers will use one of Logitech's conferencing solutions like Logitech GROUP, Logitech MeetUp ([see evaluation report](#)), or the soon-to-be-available Logitech Rally.

# Prior Test Results

In Q1 2017, long before the announcement of Flex, members of our team performed an assessment of Logitech SmartDock + Extender Box. Overall, we were quite pleased with the results. However, we noted several cable management issues that impacted the feel and flexibility of the solution. Specifically:

- When using **SmartDock** without the Extender Box, the installation was untidy due to the large number of cables coming out of the base (see image at right). And the lack of strain relief meant the cables could be dislodged easily.



- When we tested **SmartDock + Extender Box**, we found that the extender cable that connects the SmartDock Base to the Extender Box was, (1) too bulky to fit into a standard conduit, and (2) too short to make its way from a table to the back of a display in many rooms.

At that time, we suggested that Logitech put some additional thought into cable management. Logitech Flex is the company's response. We love it when a vendor takes and acts on feedback. Well done.

## Understanding SmartDock Flex

Logitech SmartDock Flex (a.k.a. Flex) is an expansion kit for Logitech SmartDock that improves cable management and adds additional features.

As shown in the graphic at right, Flex includes two parts:

- The Flex Base installed underneath the SmartDock Base.
- The Flex Extender Box installed near the room display.

The Flex package (MSRP US \$799) also includes an HDMI passthrough adapter, cables and other accessories.



## System Installation

### Preparing the Surface Pro 4

Surface Pro 4s with the Skype Room System (SRS) software pre-installed are available from numerous resellers, but for our testing we started with a standard SP4.

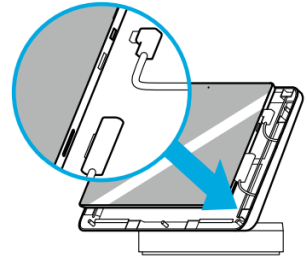
The process of installing the SRS software on a Surface Pro 4 tablet is detailed in Microsoft's [online guide](#). While we muddled through it, this is best completed by a trained IT professional.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Installing SRS the first time is a bit complex. Subsequent installs, however, require less time and less expertise.

## Installing the Surface Pro 4 into the SmartDock

The physical installation of the Surface Pro 4 tablet into the SmartDock required opening the dock base, placing the SP4 in the dock, connecting the dock's mini-display port and Surface connect cables to the SP4 (see drawing at right), and closing the dock base.



## Installing SmartDock Flex Base

Installing the SmartDock Flex Base on the SmartDock Base was quick and easy. First, we connected a few color-coded cables between the Flex Base and the SmartDock base.

Then we connected a standard Ethernet cable to the SmartDock base to provide IP network to the SP4. Next, we connected the provided CAT6 cable (other end will connect to the Flex Extender Box), HDMI and USB cables (used for AV Passthrough – covered below), and closed-up the Flex Base.

## Installing SmartDock Flex Extender Box

Installing the SmartDock Flex Extender Box involved connecting power, the other end of the provided CAT6 cable to the Flex Extender Box, and HDMI cable(s) between the Box and the room display(s).<sup>3</sup>

## Installing the USB (Audio and Video) Accessories

SmartDock and SmartDock Flex can be used with any Windows-compatible AV devices (e.g. webcams, mic / speaker systems, etc.).

During our testing, we used a variety of AV peripherals including Logitech GROUP and Logitech MeetUp, as well as USB devices from other vendors.

**Author's Note** - SmartDock Flex has dedicated connectors for Logitech Group. As shown in the image below, the Group speakerphone connects to the Flex Base, and the Group camera connects to the Flex Extender. In this configuration, a single power connection at the Extender Box provides power to the SP4, the Group Speakerphone, and the Group camera.



While difficult consuming to describe, the entire installation described above (not including the preparation of the SP4) took our team less than 20 minutes to complete.

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<sup>3</sup> Any standard CAT6 cable up to 50-foot length can be used to connect the Flex Base and Flex Extender Box. This provides installation flexibility by allowing the use of pre-existing cabling, flat-ribbon cabling (for under carpets), or creative cable runs.

# Hands-On Testing

## Added Features / Capabilities

### Dual Screen Support

The use of two displays (one showing local camera or content, and the other showing the remote participants) is extremely common – especially in medium-sized rooms. The SP4, however, offers only a single display-port output. Fortunately, the SmartDock converts the display port into two HDMI outputs ideally suited for two-display meeting rooms.

### HDMI Input for Wired Content Sharing

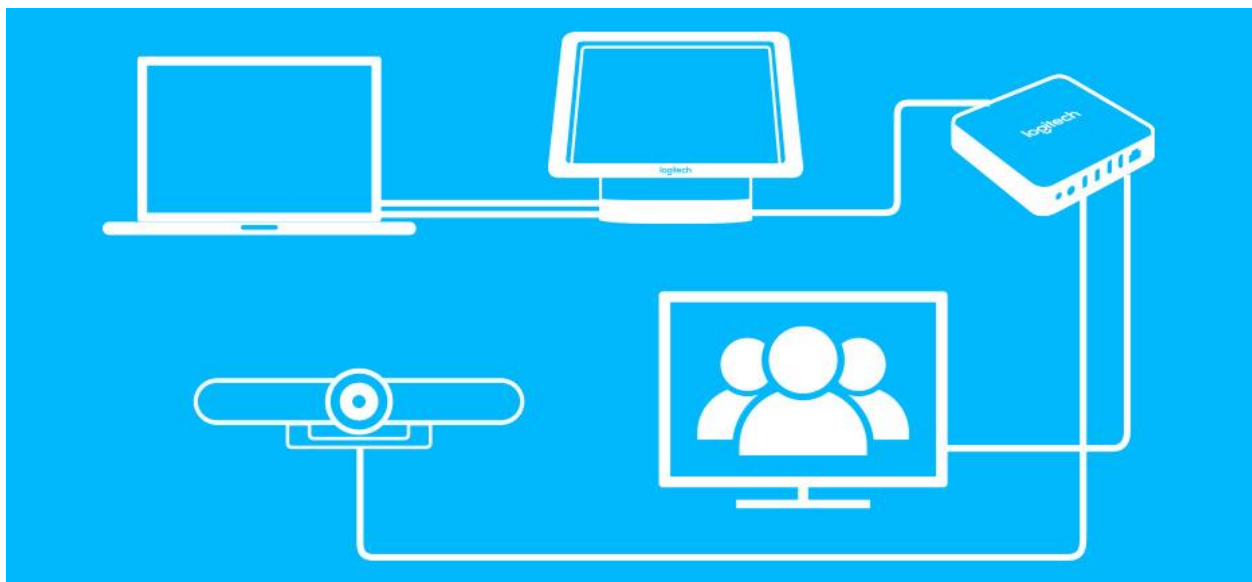
The ability to present and share content from a user's notebook is extremely important. However, a standard PC, notebook, or tablet PC (like the SP4 used in a Skype Room System), does not include an HDMI input. SmartDock adds a wired HDMI input to the SP4.

### AV Passthrough (Bring Your Own Codec)

As described below, Skype Room System brings a Skype for Business calling experience to a meeting room. However, some organizations may wish to use other conferencing platforms such as (in alphabetical order): BlueJeans, GoToMeeting, Videxio, WebEx, Zoom, etc. Natively, a Skype Room System will support only Skype for Business meetings. That's where SmartDock Flex comes in.

Flex supports a function called AV Passthrough that allows users to host conference calls on their notebook PC, and leverage the in-room AV peripherals (e.g. Logitech GROUP, MeetUp, etc.), without having to redo the existing connections in the room. RR refers to this as, "Bring Your Own Codec" or BYOC mode as the user is bringing his own conferencing application to the room.

With AV Passthrough, the user connects a USB and HDMI cable between his notebook and the Flex Base. Then he presses a button on the HDMI Passthrough Adapter (provided with Flex), and a few seconds later his notebook PC gains access to the meeting room mic, speakers, camera, and display(s).



This Logitech SmartDock Flex feature adds significant flexibility to a Skype Room System.



## The SmartDock + Flex / Skype Room System Experience

Look and Feel - When we first started using the system, we were struck by the professional look and feel of the SmartDock + Flex with the SP4 installed. The SP4 fit nicely inside the dock, and the color scheme and materials used by Logitech create a ruggedized, yet attractive overall package.

Stability - The next thing that caught our eye was the physical stability of the SmartDock / Flex / SP4 combination. Despite its relatively low price, the SmartDock itself is quite heavy, and its center of gravity is low enough to make the unit extremely stable on the table. In addition, the curved rubber strips on the Flex Base ensure that the unit does not slide around the table.

Accessibility - We also appreciated the ability to swivel the SmartDock 90 degrees in either direction. This feature makes the SmartDock, and specifically the SP4's touch surface, accessible to several users without having to move the unit around the table.

Security – As we pondered the notion of leaving a top-of-the-line tablet PC in a meeting room unattended, we realized that needing a Torx screwdriver to remove the SP4 from the SmartDock adds a layer of security. The SmartDock also includes a Kensington slot.

Usability - the SmartDock contains a motion sensor that automatically wakes the SP4 when a person approaches the system. We tested this capability, and it worked exactly as expected.

### Call Experience

We placed many test calls using our Skype Room System with Logitech SmartDock + Flex. Without exception, our test calls worked as expected, providing a solid Skype for Business call experience.

In addition, the HDMI input worked extremely well – both during calls (for content sharing during video meetings) and while not in a call (for local content presentation).

Next, we tested the AV Passthrough capability using two notebook PCs – one Windows notebook, and one Mac notebook. For each notebook, we connected a USB cable and HDMI cable to the SmartDock, and placed calls with various platforms including BlueJeans, GoToMeeting, Polycom, StarLeaf, Videxio, WebEx, Zoom, and even consumer Skype and Microsoft Teams.

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*AV Passthrough enables the use of other conferencing platforms in rooms with a Skype Room System. This power feature worked perfectly throughout our testing.*

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In all cases, AV Passthrough worked perfectly. Press the AV Passthrough button, and a few seconds later your notebook “sees” the USB peripherals in the room. No tech support required here.

# Analysis and Opinion

We like the Logitech SmartDock concept, as well as the added features and improved experience offered by SmartDock Flex.

In the last few years, many enterprises have installed DIY Skype room solutions including some form of meeting room PC (e.g. an Intel NUC) controlled by a keyboard / mouse and running Skype for Business. While functional, this approach yielded a distinctly unnatural user experience.

Logitech SmartDock allows organizations to use a Surface Pro 4 (or 5) tablet as the in-room touch panel and compute platform for a Skype for Business meeting room experience.

The result is a combined Microsoft / Logitech solution that is easy to buy (SmartDock is available from resellers or from select e-tailers including CDW), can be installed by an organization on its own, and sports a professional look and feel – all at a consumer-ish price point.

Plus, SmartDock adds several key capabilities to a Skype Room System including support for dual displays, and an HDMI input for wired content sharing.

However, the first variant of SmartDock, even when used with the optional Extender Box, had a few limitations - mostly around cable management and connectivity. Logitech SmartDock Flex addresses those issues extremely well.

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*The combined Microsoft / Logitech solution offers easy installation, strong ease of use, and a professional look and feel – at a consumer-ish price point.*

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First, Logitech SmartDock Flex installs quickly and easily onto a new or existing SmartDock. No special expertise required.

Once installed, SmartDock + Flex brings several key benefits including:

- A reduced cable footprint for the system
- The flexibility to install the Extender Box up to 50 feet away from the base
- Simplified connections for Logitech GROUP
- Support for other conferencing platforms hosted on the user's notebook PC

We tested SmartDock alone, SmartDock + Extender Box and SmartDock + Flex in our test environment, and the solution did not disappoint. We especially appreciated that Flex made it possible to use other conferencing applications (e.g. BlueJeans, WebEx, Zoom, etc.) in a “Skype Room System” space.

Organizations seeking to Skype-for-Business-enable their meeting rooms, without sacrificing usability, cable management, and the flexibility to use other conferencing platforms, should take a careful look at Logitech SmartDock, and specifically the SmartDock + Flex combination.



# About Logitech



(Information below provided by Logitech)

**Logitech** designs products that have an everyday place in people's lives, connecting them to the digital experiences they care about. More than 35 years ago, Logitech started connecting people through computers, and now it's a multi-brand company designing products that bring people together through music, gaming, video and computing. Brands of Logitech include [Ultimate Ears](#), [Jaybird](#), [Logitech G](#) and [ASTRO Gaming](#). Founded in 1981, and headquartered in Lausanne, Switzerland, Logitech International is a Swiss public company listed on the SIX Swiss Exchange (LOGN) and on the Nasdaq Global Select Market (LOGI). Find Logitech at [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com), the [company blog](#) or [@Logitech](#).

# About Recon Research



**Recon Research (RR)** is an analyst / market research firm focused on the enterprise communications space. Our areas of coverage include unified communications, video conferencing, collaboration and ideation, audio visual AV solutions, wireless presentation, and more.

RR provides enterprise customers, vendors, channel partners, and investment professionals with the information and insight needed to make fact-based decisions.

What makes RR different is the depth of our knowledge and experience that comes from 15+ years of company briefings, market analysis, and hands-on testing of products and services in the space.

For more information, visit us at [www.reconres.com](http://www.reconres.com).

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