

Initiative Reaches Emerging Markets with Virtual Training

Cisco Entrepreneur Institute uses WebEx technology to cost-effectively train businesspeople in the developing world

Executive Summary

Challenge:

- Offer high-quality business training to entrepreneur support organizations in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East
- Reduce costs and maximize productivity for both trainers and trainees

Solution:

- Delivered efficient, interactive virtual training sessions across multiple cultures and time zones in advanced developing countries with Cisco WebEx™ Training Center
- Enabled dynamic, self-paced collaboration among attendees with Cisco® WebEx Connect

Results:

- Achieved US\$60,000 in travel and productivity savings from the first training session alone
- Enabled attendees, many from nonprofits, to reallocate funds by eliminating their need to travel
- Cut carbon emissions by 85,238 pounds (38.74 metric tons), equal to the CO₂ emissions from 4397 gallons of gasoline

Challenge

The Cisco Entrepreneur Institute is at the forefront of Cisco's efforts to nurture new business leaders in emerging markets around the globe. Founded in 2006, the Institute partners with public- and private-sector organizations throughout the developing world, delivering hands-on business training workshops to thousands of entrepreneurs in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Through these workshops, the Institute forges new connections across the human network, empowering entrepreneurs to participate more vitally in the global economy.

"We reach out to organizations like nonprofits and chambers of commerce in emerging markets such as Chile and the Ukraine, and we show them how to deliver our curriculum," says Kevin Warner, senior director at the Cisco Entrepreneur Institute. "Once those organizations understand how to teach our business enablement workshops, they return to their local areas and engage directly with business owners and entrepreneurs who want to learn more effective entrepreneurial skills."

Initially, the Institute conducted live, week-long training engagements in locations as diverse as Warsaw, Santiago, Kiev, Dubai, and Mexico City. "Our original model was to deliver four days of intensive in-person training in each location," says Juli Dempsey, manager of operations and customer experience at the Cisco Entrepreneur Institute. "That meant arranging flights, hotels, and time away from the office for our facilitators, and it meant asking our nonprofit partners to budget for a trip to one of our training locations. Logistically, it just wasn't practical. So we started to think about how we could offer the same level of training in far less time and at a far lower cost. That's when we started looking at Cisco WebEx Training Center."

Solution

Employees at the Cisco Entrepreneur Institute already knew that WebEx could accelerate a wide range of business processes. They had used WebEx Meeting Center™ and WebEx Training Center internally to share documents, collaborate on projects, and reach out to customers and partners, but they had not used WebEx technology to execute a project as ambitious as a global training program. "Once we made the decision to go virtual, we moved very quickly," says Dempsey. "We organized our first virtual session in just a matter of weeks, and WebEx really delivered for us."

The Institute's first virtual training session went live in December 2008 with 28 participants from the Ukraine, Poland, Serbia, Dubai, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. Over the course of a single week, the facilitators used a combination of WebEx Training Center and WebEx Connect to deliver 3-4 hours of daily training followed by group breakout sessions and online discussions. "During each of our sessions in WebEx Training Center, we would ask for some form of attendee participation for every 10 minutes of facilitated instruction," says Ann Shofner, program manager of Facilitator Training and Development at the Cisco Entrepreneur Institute. "For instance, we might do something simple like ask a question and have participants use emoticons to answer, or we might have them identify where they are on a global map using one of the annotation tools." At the

end of each session, attendees could participate in virtual Q&A with panelists and offer their feedback using the polling feature. “At the Institute, we’re big fans of collaborative, interactive learning,” says Shofner. “WebEx enabled us to simulate the richness of a live learning environment, and the attendees were frankly very impressed by that.”

Cisco WebEx Connect played a crucial role in broadening the learning experience for attendees. After each training session, participants could log on to WebEx Connect and gain instant access to self-paced assignments, follow-up discussions, file sharing, and peer coaching. “It was invaluable for the attendees to have a centralized space where they could collaborate and learn from each other at the end of each training day,” says Shofner. “WebEx Connect is a wonderful platform for building a true community of remote learners.”

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— Juli Dempsey, Senior Manager, Operations and Customer Experience, Cisco Entrepreneur Institute

Results

WebEx made it possible for the Cisco Entrepreneur Institute to minimize travel expenses, saving tens of thousands of dollars in a single virtual training. “Even by a conservative estimate, Cisco saved about \$30,500 in hard travel costs on just one training,” says Dempsey. “When you add productivity savings to that number, the total comes close to \$60,000 in reduced costs. And when you consider that we’re planning to do at least one training per quarter, the long-term savings are just enormous.”

Virtual training also made it possible for attendees, many of whom work for nonprofits, to save an estimated \$22,500 on travel costs so that their organizations could invest those savings elsewhere. “It’s difficult to imagine how this training could be delivered without WebEx,” says Alex Tumanoff, a session attendee from the Computer Academy STEP in the Ukraine. “I was able to communicate with and learn from people all over the world, and I was able to do that while keeping my organization’s travel budget low.”

Reduced travel also means a smaller carbon footprint. Dempsey estimates that by using virtual training to minimize travel for both presenters and attendees, the Institute cut carbon emissions by 85,328 pounds (38.74 metric tons), equal to the CO₂ emissions from 4397 gallons of gasoline. “WebEx isn’t just about reducing costs,” says Dempsey. “It’s about creating more sustainable business practices that reduce our impact on the environment.”

With WebEx, the Institute was able to reduce the length of each instructor-led session by almost half, giving facilitators a few extra hours each day to take care of other business. “When we delivered this training in person, we usually needed 7-8 hours per day to cover all of the material,” says Shofner. “But with WebEx Training Center, we cut that down to 3-4 hours by maintaining a more focused learning environment and avoiding long, disruptive breaks. We could also split the session into smaller groups quickly and smoothly, avoiding the usual chaos of finding a physical space for each small group.”

Attendees were thrilled with both the quality and the convenience of the Institute’s virtual training sessions. “Our feedback has been tremendous,” says Shofner. “One attendee told us that he

thoroughly enjoyed receiving first-rate training while drinking a cup of tea in his kitchen. WebEx made it possible for us to deliver a rigorous learning experience within such a relaxed atmosphere.”

Virtual training also helped attendees feel more connected to one another in unexpected ways. “When you're in a session with people from Dubai and South Africa and Chile, you really feel like you're part of a virtual UN of entrepreneurial learning,” says Dempsey. “And I think everyone, from trainers to trainees, experienced a little thrill when they began to see themselves as part of such a large and vital human network.”

Next Steps

Not surprisingly, the Cisco Entrepreneur Institute is embracing a 100 percent virtual training model going forward, with eight trainings scheduled for 2009. The Institute also plans to provide more options for participants to access training materials, such as offering recorded sessions for anytime access. “We're busy developing our next round of sessions,” says Dempsey. “With WebEx, we have a lot more flexibility to meet the needs of our attendees while keeping everyone's costs low. As far as we're concerned, it's the only way to conduct global training.”

For More Information

To find out more about the Cisco Entrepreneur Institute, go to: <http://ciscoinstitute.net>

Product List

Collaboration

- Cisco WebEx Training Center
- Cisco WebEx Connect



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