

Web Conferencing Software Enables New Business Model

CPDlive creates engaging and effective live, online professional training environment using WebEx Event Center.

Executive Summary

Customer Name:

CPDlive

Industry:

Professional Services

Location:

Melbourne, Australia

Number of Employees:

8

Challenge:

- Train people geographically scattered throughout Australia and around the world
- Make live online training as fun and engaging as face-to-face setting
- Implement commercial web-conferencing solution robust enough to support eight live online sessions with up to 200 attendees per session

Solution:

- WebEx Event Center offers secure, interactive platform to host large-scale training seminars
- Integrated audio and chat features facilitate more personal engagement
- Reliable connectivity and dedicated WebEx support team help ensure smooth online experience

Results:

- Served more than 30,000 professionals in 40 countries without travel
- Created strong bond and sense of community in live online environment
- Prevented more than 590 tons of carbon emissions from entering atmosphere

Challenge

Chocolate frogs, tangos, and bottles of wine are not what most people would expect in a tax and accounting-related training seminar. But for Anthony Morris and Errol la Grange, co-founders of CPDlive.com Pty Ltd, this fun, unconventional approach toward professional training in a face-to-face environment has allowed them to gain an edge in a live online world. “As with face-to-face training, we wanted to take what could sometimes be rather dry subject matter and teach people about it in a more engaging and interesting way,” says la Grange, the company’s strategy and innovation lead. “We knew that to be successful, we had to appeal to the human element and create an environment in which people were able to relax and enjoy themselves.”

Before the official launch of CPDlive in 2007, however, the only way to deliver this highly engaging format was to travel to a physical location. This meant that Morris and la Grange were often on the road as many as five days a week. “Back then we mainly provided tax training to public sector clients spread throughout Australia, which is 11 times the size of Texas but with fewer people and more sheep,” says Morris, head of operations for CPDlive. “We eventually felt we needed a more cost- and time-effective way to deliver our training. Ultimately, the question we found ourselves asking was, ‘How can we provide this same engaging experience to our clients in a live online environment and convince a prospective audience that it is worth paying the same price as face-to-face training?’”

Solution

In 2006, Morris stumbled upon Cisco WebEx™ technology and immediately signed up for a trial. He and la Grange started with small groups using Cisco WebEx® Meeting Center. “There was no blueprint to follow for establishing a commercially successful, live online training business and program catering to the public,” says Morris. “Certainly in Australia, we were the first to embark on this kind of adventure.”

From a technology perspective, the team needed reliability and the ability for attendees with a whole range of hardware and Internet combinations, not to mention computing expertise, to easily and securely log into and stay in sessions. “In practice this was easier said than done,” says Morris.

Notwithstanding the technology challenges, the transition to a purely virtual training format took some getting used to for the team. “Going from an environment where you’re getting up and doing a tax tango with the attendees to one where you’re just sitting at a computer screen wearing a headset was a bit challenging in the beginning,” says la Grange. “I was a bit dumbfounded as to what to do.”

However, as things evolved, the team found that it could maintain an equally, if not more interactive atmosphere through the Cisco® WebEx audio and chat features. “For example, it is very important to set things up correctly from the outset,” says la Grange. “So we always make sure to

acknowledge and welcome each attendee by their first name as they log in to the session, and we try our best to remember the people who are repeat users. By engaging with attendees on a personal level, we're able to create a warmer, welcoming environment. And when people open up, that creates a space for learning."

With solid growth in the business, Morris and la Grange have found that WebEx Event Center, in particular, offers the reliability and large-scale environment they now require. "We often get as many as 150 people in a single session, and we run between 8 and 10 sessions a week," says la Grange. "So we needed something that was robust enough to stand up to these demands."

For Morris and la Grange, perhaps the most valuable aspect of working with Cisco WebEx in meeting the inevitable challenges of managing large-scale training programs in this environment has been the technical support that the company provides. "It's when things go wrong that really determines the measure of an organization," says Morris. "I'm happy to say that the WebEx support team has been absolutely fantastic. When people are paying good money to attend a live online training session, expectations are high, and we aim for a 100 percent satisfaction rate. This is a constantly evolving environment, and every day we learn something new or find better ways of doing things."

"As our business continues to evolve and grow, I'm sure Cisco will be the first place we look for additional solutions and technologies."

— Anthony Morris, head of operations, CPDlive.com

Results

Since implementing WebEx technology as part of its live online training business, CPDlive has coached approximately 250 expert presenters in the art of live online training, managed and hosted more than 1000 live online training sessions, and in the past two years has reached more than 30,000 professionals in 40 countries. CPDlive works with leading professional associations in Australia to provide professional development training programs to their members and customers regardless of their location around the globe.

To demonstrate the beauty of this delivery model, la Grange points to the following example: "We had one presenter who was very high profile in the banking industry. It was at the very start of the global financial crisis, and he was almost untouchable in terms of getting access to him, let alone on short notice. But he was able to start his training session from the back of a cab and then finish up at his hotel room. He literally addressed a national audience in between appointments. If it wasn't for our use of WebEx technology, there's no way we would have been able to bring him into the session."

Today, CPDlive is setting new expectations for live online training and pushing the boundaries to make the experience as good as or even better than face-to-face training. "As odd as it may sound, we've actually found that people tend to open up more in our virtual environment," says Morris. "They'll reveal things in writing in the chat boxes that they may not have the courage to say in person. When you can create a safe environment where the technology really just disappears, people feel more comfortable and connected. Barriers that exist in a face-to-face environment often just dissolve."

By taking its training to a live online environment, CPDlive has also been able to further an Australian initiative to reduce the country's carbon emissions. According to a green savings counter on the CPDlive homepage, the company's live online training sessions have prevented more than 590 tons of carbon emissions from entering the atmosphere since August 2008.

Next Steps

For Morris and la Grange and their closely knit team, the innovation does not stop here, however; their goal is to continue to enhance CPDlive's current training platform and service to help ensure the best live online environment they possibly can. "For us, the real story is about revolutionizing the distribution of learning and 'democratizing' access to high-quality professional training and development. WebEx technology, and our great ongoing relationship with Cisco WebEx is a very important and valuable component of the process," says la Grange.

Looking ahead, Morris and la Grange expect to see CPDlive continue to grow organically. "We want to leverage the platform and know-how we have here in Australia, and expand our services to the UK market," says Morris. "As our business continues to evolve and grow, I'm sure Cisco will be the first place we look for additional solutions and technologies."

For More Information

- To find out more about Cisco WebEx, go to: <http://www.cisco.com/go/webex>.
- To read other success stories, go to: <http://www.cisco.com/go/webexcasestudies>.
- To provide feedback or participate in the WebEx customer reference program, email: real.results@webex.com.
- To learn more about CPDlive and live online professional training, go to www.cpdlive.com.

Product List

Cisco WebEx Event Center



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San Jose, CA

Asia Pacific Headquarters
Cisco Systems (USA) Pte. Ltd.
Singapore

Europe Headquarters
Cisco Systems International BV
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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