

State Department Uses Web Conferencing to Cut Travel Costs

Government agency connects with stakeholders and anticipates cutting travel costs by AU\$500,000.

Summary

Customer Name:

Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries, Department of Employment, Economic Development, and Innovation

Industry:

Government, food, and agribusiness

Location:

Queensland

Number of Employees:

3000

Challenge:

- Foster collaboration both throughout Queensland and around the world
- Reduce cost of local, interstate, and international travel
- Provide online meetings and presentations compatible with existing IT infrastructure

Results:

- Expected to lower intrastate travel by 10 percent
- Will enable annual cost savings of approximately AU\$500,000
- Will improve productivity by eliminating more than 500 in-person meetings

Solution:

- Web conferencing reduces need for excessive travel
- Online meetings enable cost-effective intrastate, interstate, and global communication

Challenge

Early in 2009, the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F) merged with several other departments to form the Queensland Department of Employment, Economic Development, and Innovation (DEEDI). To drive employment growth in Queensland, DEEDI focuses on key economic drivers, from mining to fishing to tourism to trade, that power the state's AU\$11 billion annual contribution to the Australian economy. Collaborating across the region requires multiple meetings and hours of planning that come with a substantial cost. DEEDI has received a directive to reduce travel costs by 20 percent, so the Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries (QPIF) agency needed to find cost-effective ways to collaborate with stakeholders and keep up with an industry that is in constant flux.

Although face-to-face meetings are critical for maintaining strong relationships, QPIF found that engagement among meeting participants diminished when meetings ended. To encourage idea-sharing and innovation, the department needed to find a way to stay connected with farmers and other constituents within Queensland, as well as interface with international colleagues and experts.

To achieve this continuous collaboration and communication with key stakeholders, QPIF started the eExtension project, an initiative designed to deploy a number of online tools including web conferencing, blogs, and wikis. To implement these tools, the eExtension team worked closely with IT professionals to search for a solution that would integrate with the organization's existing IT infrastructure and work on any computing platform.

Results

By lowering meeting costs and reducing the need to travel, Cisco WebEx™ solutions have transformed the way QPIF conducts business, resulting in significant cost savings for the agency. "We've been using the technology for over two years, and it has made a difference in how we can communicate with farmers," says Geoff Knights, project manager at QPIF.

In addition to communicating with farmers, QPIF has made significant strides in using WebEx® technology internally as well. "WebEx can replace more than 500 in-person meetings and reduce our intrastate travel by 10 percent," says John James, principal extension officer at QPIF. "We anticipate saving approximately AU\$500,000 each year."

Not only is WebEx a cost-effective option, but the solution is environmentally friendly as well. QPIF staff members interact with many colleagues throughout Australia and around the world, and they are involved in internationally funded projects that require collaboration with stakeholders in the United States, India, and Malaysia. QPIF estimates that conducting a single online meeting involving 10 participants across regional and remote Queensland can save an average of 60 hours of travel time, approximately AU\$6000 in associated salaries, more than AU\$2500 in airfares, and over three metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂).

An additional benefit of using WebEx is the ability to continue working during a flu outbreak or other health scare. “Instead of our teams unknowingly sharing flus and viruses at work, we have the option to stay at home, stay connected, and keep our projects going,” says James. “Overall, WebEx has provided us with convenience, cost savings, and an innovative way for us to work.”

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— John James, principal extension officer, Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries, Department of Employment, Economic Development, and Innovation

Solution

After evaluating several options and conducting a rigorous review process, QPIF selected Cisco® WebEx solutions to communicate with farmers on a more frequent basis through the agency’s eExtension initiative. Based on education requirements, staff reallocations, and the need to draw on expertise from around the state, QPIF hosts web conferencing for 100 to 130 farmers on a wide range of subjects such as marketing, animal health, and business management.

QPIF also uses WebEx web conferencing to connect with staff across Queensland, engage participants following in-person meetings, and collaborate with international colleagues and experts. Recently, the team hosted an online event to discuss how U.S. farmers are positioning themselves in regard to emissions policies. The interactive event connected 60 participants from both the U.S. state of Iowa and Australian cities including Brisbane, Canberra, and Melbourne. “We estimate that we saved approximately AU\$10,000 in travel costs for this international event by eliminating the need to meet in one location,” says James.

In addition to using the technology for online events and meetings, QPIF is using web conferencing as a cost-effective follow-up to in-person workshops. “We found that once people left a meeting, they were not maintaining contact,” says James. “The follow-up web conferences provide updates on developments and offer long-term support on adopting new innovations. This effective online approach has energized the participants to take action and stay more connected.”

Next Steps

In the future, QPIF hopes to expand its use of WebEx even more, utilizing the solution to accelerate cost-cutting efforts. “More and more people are interested in using WebEx, but there is room to find more ways to reduce excessive travel and take our usage of it to the next level,” says Knights. “We have received many positive comments about WebEx from farmers and other stakeholders. That encourages us to find additional uses for this technology going forward.”

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco® WebEx, go to <http://www.cisco.com/web/products/webex/index.html>.

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