Training the Field with Webex

The Cisco World Wide Sales Processes and Systems (WWSPS) group revamped its approach to conducting virtual sales training. With an eye toward significant cost savings and productivity benefits as Cisco continues its global expansion, the group adopted Webex Training Center, one of the Cisco Webex applications, as its primary online mechanism for delivering sales tools and process training to field sales.

Webex Training Center provides live interactivities through polling, live videos, and application sharing with screen annotation tools, and it has features to measure class attentiveness and content retention. By giving trainees a richer, more lifelike, online learning experience, Cisco can mitigate the cost of dispatching trainers around the world during its global growth spurt, while scaling its training program to accommodate volumes of new and existing sales employees.

"Putting live collaborative training sessions online enables Cisco to extend the reach of a trainer to many parts of the world," says Rich Reiner, IT manager for the Cisco WWSPS training team.

Cost savings are one important goal with Synchronous E-learning with Webex Training Center: the group aims to save at least US$50,000 per year from training travel alone and at least another US$200,000 in cost avoidance by lowering the number of additional contracted trainers needed, says Reiner.

New Hires Trained Faster

Other critical objectives involve increased sales efficiency and proficiency. For example, using Webex Training Center to deliver synchronous e-learning means not having to pull the sales force out of the field (and away from customers) to physically attend a remote training session. It also accelerates new-hire training on various sales tools applications so that new hires can start tracking and closing business more quickly. To date, the average sales new hire has received the requisite training three to six months after being hired, because scheduling conflicts and budget constraints frequently impact trips to instructor-led classes.

"We want to train sales new hires within 30 days of their start dates," says Janie Mah, a Cisco IT project manager and the team lead for the deployment of WWSPS Synchronous E-Learning with Webex Training Center. "The sales force excels at selling Cisco products and services, but it is equally important that they know how to use our tools effectively and apply the correct processes to drive, manage, or close any Cisco business," says Reiner.

Mah says that, until now, only about 40 percent, or approximately 800 sales new hires per year, have been able to attend live training in San Jose. A primary reason is that emerging markets represent the fastest growing sales force, and many find traveling costs and procuring a travel visa in time to come to Cisco San Jose headquarters for a five-day new-hire training program an obstacle. By emulating a live learning experience online, however, employees globally can experience the same training and get it soon after they join Cisco.
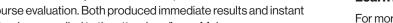
Session in Progress

So what happens during these training sessions? The first few minutes are devoted to familiarizing attendees with Webex Training Center features and benefits. Participants can see the instructor on video, and a list of all attendees. Attendees and the instructor can converse with each other by audio or online chat.

Training content and application sharing is delivered in the Webex main content window. The instructor can call out and review key points with the annotation tools, such as the pointer, a highlighter, check marks or rectangles. Attendees are invited to participate in polls to promote interactions with results instantly tabulated and shared with everyone. Attendees are also encouraged to ask questions by "raising their hands," or typing their questions in the chat or Q&A panels. Instructors can gauge individual and overall group attentiveness at any point with a visual attention indicator. In addition, attendees are invited to virtual breakout rooms for group projects and brainstorming. Within the breakout rooms the attendees can share presentations and documents, whiteboards, and applications.

"Instructors can also provide additional supporting materials during class by using file sharing or streaming training videos. At the end of the course, attendees may be asked to complete an online assessment or course evaluation. Both produced immediate results and instant feedback are emailed to the attendees," says Mah.

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Different Learning Styles

Training is also customized to a particular business segment or job role by including related subject matter experts in the training sessions. While a large majority of the sales processes are consistent worldwide, there are unique differences that need to be considered. "We use Webex to introduce as many ways for interaction as possible and address each individual's learning style," says Mah.

"The synchronous e-learning strategies provide ways to address the various learning diversities of our sales force."

Each Webex session can be recorded for playback or "asynchronous e-learning," for re-usability for new or existing learners.