

Web Conferencing Enables Successful Global Reading Event

“Authors for Peace” campaign uses WebEx technology to break record as world’s largest live online reading event.

Executive Summary

Customer Name:

internationales literaturfestival
berlin (ilb)

Industry:

Events

Location:

Berlin, Germany

Challenge:

- Deliver a 24-hour, global, live online reading
- Connect 80 authors from all over the world
- Provide access to the event via different technological requirements

Solution:

- Web conferencing with integrated teleconferencing
- Use of Cisco WebEx Event Center for live broadcast of the reading

Results:

- Successfully hosted non-stop worldwide online reading event
- Earned an entry in the *Guinness Book of Records*
- Attracted worldwide attention toward the “Authors for Peace” campaign

Challenge

The United Nations International Day of Peace on 21 September commemorates wars and political conflicts. On this day in 2010, 80 authors from around the world marked this day of remembrance with a special “Authors for Peace” campaign. In a 24-hour, global, live online reading, they read from their work as a gesture of solidarity with those affected by war and conflict. Authors took turns reading approximately every 20 minutes, so that the reading made its way once around the world according to time zones.

The campaign centre was the internationales literaturfestival berlin (ilb), where the reading marathon began at 00:00 h local time on 21 September 2010 and ended at 24:00 h. Although a number of authors read at the Berlin House of World Cultures (Haus der Kulturen der Welt), the majority were connected via online conferencing. Listeners and spectators from around the world were able to follow the event in real time and also put questions to the authors. The event was presented by the joint initiator of the campaign, British author Priya Basil, who also presented by a text contribution of her own. Authors taking part furthermore included Liao Yiwu (China), Ko Un (South Korea), Joanne Harris (UK), Eliot Weinberger (USA), Hans Christoph Buch (Germany), Eva Menasse (Austria) and Elke Schmitter (Germany).

The idea for this campaign had been developed by initiators Basil and Jan Oesterlin with Ulrich Schreiber, the head of ilb. Within a short space of time it had succeeded in attracting authors from around the world, who were available at the relevant times and who could also contribute texts, which fitted the theme of the event. “It was a big challenge for the initiators to persuade writers from very different cultures to take part at short notice,” says Oesterlin, joint initiator at eGames Media. “But we quite deliberately wanted the campaign to be broad based.” It was important for the initiators that the entire project had to be staged at short notice and on a tight budget.

Solution

Oesterlin was already familiar with web conferencing, and thought it only made sense to utilise a solution that had been specially designed for events: Cisco WebEx[®] Event Center. The technology was particularly suitable because it is easy to use and functions securely; participants, whether authors or listeners, basically merely required Internet access; and no software of any kind had to be installed and the solution could be operated on any conventional hardware or software systems. In addition, having an infrastructure of its own that operates independently of the Internet, but simultaneously provides an interface via the web, guarantees high availability and performance.

Conventional telephony, which was available to all authors, was selected as the audio channel instead of internet telephony. And thanks to the video options of the solution, images were able to be transmitted via normal webcams. In fact it turned out that with two exceptions all the authors had an Internet connection, and most of them in addition had a webcam, so that video transmission was also possible. The two authors who did not have their own internet

connection made their way to the Cisco branch in Melbourne, Australia for their reading and took part in web conferencing there.

In order to guarantee a smooth broadcast, every participant received extensive data on the procedure and technology from a Cisco WebEx employee. Furthermore, a trial run was carried out, during which the equipment and the steps for operating the equipment were tested. Cisco WebEx also provided a 24-hour hotline during the preparatory period for technical queries. So as not to jeopardise the world record, and also in case of any technical hitches, additional authors were on stand-by at the House of Word Cultures in Berlin as literary “reserves” ready to step in if necessary for their colleagues.

“It was fantastic to hear and see authors from around the world. The power of stories and the desire for peace united all the participants and made this a very personal event.”

—Priya Basil, author

Results

The “Authors for Peace” campaign was a great success in more ways than one. For one, it attracted public attention toward the International Day of Peace, triggering widespread media coverage in newspapers, magazines, and online portals around.

The reading was also registered with *Guinness World Records* as being a reading of work by the largest number of authors worldwide. “The brand *Guinness World Records* has a very high profile everywhere,” says Oesterlin. “And our campaign immediately attracted keen interest from the editors.”

WebEx conferencing also gave participating authors the opportunity to interact with far-flung colleagues. “It was fantastic to hear and see authors from around the world,” says Basil. “The power of stories and the desire for peace united all the participants and made this a very personal event.” In response to this positive outcome, ilb is currently contemplating repeating this campaign or even turning it into a regular event.

For more information

- To find out more about Cisco WebEx, visit: <http://www.cisco.com/go/webex>.
- To read other success stories, go to: <http://www.cisco.com/go/webexcasestudies>.
- To find out more about Authors for Peace, visit:
 - www.literaturfestival.com
 - www.authorsforpeace.com
 - Facebook Authors for Peace

Product List

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Singapore

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