

Government Agency Expands Training with Online Classes

The European Patent Office uses web-based tools to offer remote training sessions on patent research.

Summary

Customer Name:

European Patent Office

Industry:

Civil service

Headquarters:

Munich, Germany

Number of Employees:

6500

Challenge:

- Enable online training sessions for patent developers
- Demonstrate capabilities of large, complex patent database
- Support easy access for multinational users

Solution:

- Online training provides easy participant management tools
- Web-based application allows for smooth international deployment
- Hosted solution facilitates easy user access from multiple platforms

Results:

- Expanded training program reach by enabling move from in-person to online classes
- Provided highly interactive online training sessions
- Established value of online training efforts for patent developers

Challenge

The European Patent Office (EPO) is responsible for providing a uniform patent application process for individuals and companies located in 38 nations across Europe. Since it was founded in 1977, the EPO has received about 2.5 million applications and granted well over 800,000 European patents. Today it is the second largest European organisation, employing almost 6500 people from 30 nations at five sites in four countries.

Before applying for a patent, developers must search EPO databases, which contain more than 60 million documents, to help ensure that they do not encroach on existing patents. “We support users searching for and accessing the desired information with our free-of-charge patent information services,” says Dr. Ronald Feinäugle, coordinator of patent information promotion and training at the EPO office in Vienna. These services include esp@cenet, the world’s largest online patent database.

To help ensure users were making the most of esp@cenet and utilizing all of the service’s features, the EPO offered a variety of in-person training sessions that were held at the EPO location in Vienna or onsite at company offices. After Feinäugle noticed a decline in attendance and faced cuts to his own travel budget, he knew that he needed to find a solution that would enable his staff to conduct remote training sessions for offsite users. “Company employees no longer have that much time for classroom training. Moreover, our travel budgets have been cut, and it’s more difficult to visit companies to offer training,” he says. “Developers, researchers, legal advisers, and other decision-makers cannot do without patent information, so we had to find a way to offer training that was easy to access from any location.”

Solution

When Feinäugle and his team decided to establish a distance training program, they explored several web-based delivery tools but opted for Cisco WebEx™ solutions because they can accommodate a variety of computer platforms and are easy for users to access. “There are many unknown factors when users register for our trainings,” Feinäugle says. “The WebEx solution covers a wide range of platforms and helps ensure easier access for all attendees.”

The ability to assign roles during online training sessions is another valuable WebEx® feature that Feinäugle and his team have discovered. “Not all e-learning solutions offer the same level of control for the host,” he says. “With WebEx, our training sessions go very smoothly, because there is always a host who coordinates the participants, explaining how they can raise their hands and ask questions within a session. That makes it easier for us to deliver an online classroom experience that is comparable to an in-person training session.”

Because WebEx offers support in multiple languages, deploying the solution across Europe has been a smooth process. “Half of our participants come from Europe, and the rest attend from locations in the United States and Asia,” Feinäugle says. “We hold courses in German, French, and English, so the ability to help our users in a variety of languages helps ensure that the training sessions are as useful as possible.”

“By making it possible for us to provide training sessions that are highly interactive and easy to attend, WebEx has helped make the EPO online learning program extremely successful.”

— Dr. Roland Feinäugle, training coordinator, patent information promotion and training, European Patent Office

Results

By implementing Cisco® WebEx, the EPO has been able to improve its esp@cenet training efforts and expand the reach of both the training program and the organisation overall. “The virtual classrooms allow us to connect with target groups that we were unable to address before,” Feinäugle says. “We now have more contact with companies in the United States and Asia, as well as Eastern Europe.”

WebEx has also allowed the EPO to provide users with important updates and new product information more quickly. “We can update the content in our online training sessions very easily, so we can tell our participants about new developments in the field as they are happening,” says Feinäugle. “From that perspective, WebEx is helping us promote innovation and raise awareness about patent systems.”

After using WebEx to move training efforts online, the EPO has been able to minimise the difference between online and onsite training. “One of our biggest objectives is to establish virtual classrooms as an accepted channel for training,” Feinäugle says. “By making it possible for us to provide training sessions that are highly interactive and easy to attend, WebEx has helped make the EPO online learning program extremely successful.”

Next Steps

To meet a sharp increase in demand, the EPO wants to expand the number of online sessions and double the number of people who conduct trainings. Feinäugle is also exploring ways to reach even more developers in more countries around the world. “We consistently get positive feedback from participants,” Feinäugle says. “They greatly appreciate the fact that we offer WebEx, and I look forward to introducing this technology to even more users in the future.”

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco WebEx, go to www.webex.co.uk

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