

University Reaches More Students Online, Spending Less

Munich University uses WebEx technology to enhance instruction and offer academic courses across the globe.

Executive Summary

Customer Name:

Munich University

Industry:

Higher Education

Location:

Munich, Germany

Number of Employees:

1420

Number of Students:

14000

Challenge:

- Employ online collaboration tools to provide globe-spanning courses
- Meet new Bologna Process European teaching requirements for higher education
- Allow international students and professors to attend lectures without travelling

Solution:

- Cisco WebEx technology offers easy-to-use interface and interactive features
- Students can view lectures in real time or play back recorded sessions later
- Chat function allows students to actively participate in virtual discussions and breakout sessions

Results:

- Achieved average student usage rate of 20 percent for web-based lectures
- Improved student preparation before tests and examinations
- Overcame complex logistics and expenses associated with mobility of professors

Challenge

Founded in 1971 as an integration of seven colleges of technology and higher education, Munich University is one of the largest institutions of its kind in Germany. The college has more than 180 partner universities in Europe, North America, South America, and Asia, and roughly 11 percent of the 14,000 students are located abroad.

To better accommodate this international presence, the university was looking for a way to provide online lectures and globe-spanning courses that could easily be integrated into the regular teaching curriculum. The university also had to meet the new teaching requirements established in the Bologna Process, the European reform process aiming to standardize academic degrees and quality assurance requirements in the higher education system. For these reasons, Munich University adopted an initiative to supplement traditional teaching methods and start offering classes in new formats.

In the 2009 summer semester, the Department of Industrial Engineering launched a research project to test the potential of new teaching media for instruction purposes. In particular, the team began testing the feasibility of implementing online technologies in the classroom, focusing specifically on communication and collaboration tools. "Outside the university environment, many companies are already using such solutions with much success," says Wolfgang Döhl, a professor in the Department of Industrial Engineering. "That's why we wanted to implement a solution that would not only enhance our academic offerings, but also prepare our students for real-world business collaboration."

Solution

Cisco WebEx™ technology proved to be well-suited for the university's needs. "WebEx Meeting Center can be easily installed anywhere, allowing professors and students to log in right away without any problems," says Döhl. "And since we don't have to set up a separate infrastructure to accommodate the solution, it further simplifies implementation."

In the 2010 summer semester, Munich University's continuing education program offered its "Technical Marketing" course in a "hybrid" Cisco WebEx® format that included both in-class and online segments. Students were able to attend the course in person or participate actively online using the Cisco® WebEx conferencing tool. Using the tool's chat function, students could ask questions during the lecture and engage in discussions with other online participants and professors, as well as other students in the lecture hall. A recording of each lecture was made available online after the class as a "lecture on demand," giving students the option to review certain lessons or play back any class meetings they might have missed.

WebEx technology is proving to be especially useful in the international studies program. Students and professors no longer need to travel to attend classes, saving both time and money for students and university administration. “Now we can hold international seminars without students having to leave their university,” says Döhl. “We are making it possible for students, wherever they may be, to follow our lectures. And we can integrate foreign professors without travel.”

“I believe that in the near future, web conferencing solutions like WebEx technology will be part of any undergraduate or graduate student’s basic knowledge, just like Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.”

Wolfgang Döhl, professor, department of industrial engineering, Munich University

Results

Munich University’s hybrid Cisco WebEx teaching format has found considerable approval among its students. In the Department of Industrial Engineering’s MBA and Masters program, web-based lectures have achieved an average usage rate of 20 percent over an entire semester. “I have found that the blended learning model, or a combination of both in-class and online instruction, is very effective,” says Döhl. “However, the key thing to realize is that these new technologies should only be used to supplement traditional teaching methods and not to replace them.”

One aspect of WebEx meetings that has proven especially beneficial to students is the lecture-on-demand option. “By recording lectures and allowing students to play them back at any time, we enable our students to prepare much better for examinations,” says Döhl. “It also allows students who may have been absent in class to catch up on missed lessons.”

Munich University has also successfully completed an online strategy seminar on the automobile industry as a pilot project with a partner institution, the Université de Haute Alsace Mulhouse Colmar. In December 2009, participants met at the start of the semester to get to know each other, and over the course of the semester, worked entirely online using Cisco WebEx Meeting Center. At the end of the semester, the international and interdisciplinary teams presented their results in a joint closing ceremony.

“I’ve been working as a university professor for more than 25 years,” says Döhl. “And there have been few changes in this period. But now I’m seeing fundamental changes in the course-delivery process. I believe that in the near future, web conferencing solutions like Cisco WebEx will be part of any undergraduate or graduate student’s basic knowledge, just like Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.”

Next Steps

Munich University's plan is to continue offering online lectures through the Cisco WebEx platform. In addition to offering academic courses through a hybrid learning format, the university will offer another online strategy seminar in October 2011 on the subject of prospects and risks in aging companies.

For More Information

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

Product List

- Cisco WebEx Meeting Center



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