

Online Meetings Offer Eco-Charity Greener Way to Work

WWF uses WebEx technology to collaborate more efficiently on global projects while reducing its carbon footprint.

Executive Summary

Customer Name:

WWF (World Wildlife Fund)

Industry:

Non-profit, Conservation

Location:

Gland, Switzerland

Number of Employees:

5400

Challenge:

- Connect global employees quickly, reliably, and easily on day-to-day basis
- Reduce air travel and carbon emissions
- Find cost-effective solution for collaboration

Solution:

- WebEx technology enables geographically dispersed teams to collaborate regardless of location
- VoIP compatibility provides more robust and secure audio compared to free-to-use video-conferencing solutions
- Global deployment of WebEx solution helps ensure consistent experience for all users

Results:

- Reduced air travel, along with associated time, carbon emissions, and cost savings
- Accelerated troubleshooting on remote computers and servers
- Streamlined international training sessions

Challenge

Founded in 1961 as the World Wildlife Fund, WWF is one of the largest and most respected independent conservation organizations in the world. Acting both locally and globally through a network of more than 90 offices across 40 countries, the charity strives to achieve its twin goals of saving biodiversity and reducing humanity's impact on nature.

As part of this effort, WWF manages on-the-ground conservation projects in more than 100 countries, many of which require collaboration among multinational teams. Being an environmentally conscious organization, WWF knew that air travel was not the greenest way to work on multicountry projects, nor manage financial and human resources-related matters on a global scale, for that matter.

WWF had already been using audio- and video-conferencing technologies to conduct some of its meetings. However, video conferencing proved to be complicated to use at times, and also made it difficult to share documents. This method can also be expensive, especially when running on an ISDN line. Although video conferencing served as a high-quality alternative to face-to-face meetings, it was not the best solution for simpler team project meetings. This led WWF on a search for a more cost-effective online option.

Solution

Given that many WWF projects involve sensitive details and collaboration with external partners, a secure and reliable solution was necessary to make online meetings a reasonable alternative to travel. The ability to share documents in real time was also an important factor in the decision.

"We needed a viable and trusted alternative to getting on an airplane," says Linda Humphrey, global technology services manager for WWF. "Seeing that Cisco WebEx Meeting Center was a market-leading collaboration solution, we decided to test it out in a few of our offices."

The organization was thrilled to learn that the audio part of a Cisco WebEx™ meeting could be conducted using voice-over-IP (VoIP), which is much more secure and reliable than a free-to-use video-conferencing tool. The desktop and document-sharing capabilities of the online tool were equally useful to collaborate in a more synchronous fashion.

Convinced that Cisco WebEx® Meeting Center met the needs on all counts, WWF deployed the web-conferencing software across its entire network of more than 90 offices to help ensure a consistent user experience for all employees.

Results

Accessibility

WWF teams working on global programs need to communicate with team members based in various geographical locations. Yet the video-conferencing solutions that the charity used were not accessible in all countries in the network, especially in remote locations. Thanks to Cisco® WebEx Meeting Center, these teams can now meet virtually, significantly reducing the need for air travel.

“The beauty of WebEx technology is that we can access it in remote locations like Tanzania, Cameroon, and Vietnam,” says Humphrey. “As a result, we’re seeing a steady but significant increase in usage. Over the course of two years, the number of WebEx meetings conducted within our organization has grown by 58 percent.”

“By reducing our reliance on travel, we are also minimizing our carbon footprint. So not only does WebEx technology meet our business needs, it aligns with our conservation efforts as well.”

— Linda Humphrey, global technology services manager, WWF

Senior management meetings

WWF is using WebEx Meeting Center not just for regular catch-up meetings, but for meetings between its senior network executive team as well. Because attendees can now share presentations and documents in real time, Humphrey notes a smoother meeting flow than on previous occasions. The success of these WebEx-led executive meetings inspired WWF to share its best practices with industry colleagues.

“At the WWF annual conference, we took the opportunity to explain the benefits of WebEx technology as one of our collaborative working solutions, and how it facilitates a different style of working,” says Humphrey. “We explained that not only does it eliminate the costs associated with travel, such as taxis, hotels, subsistence, and time out of the office, but also saves a significant amount of time, which helps boost productivity.”

IT support

WebEx technology is also proving invaluable for the IT support team, because the team can now remotely fix server problems in countries such as Zimbabwe, Senegal, and Fiji. In the past, troubleshooting with staff over the phone often proved challenging, especially when talking to employees whose first language was not English. Using WebEx Meeting Center, however, an IT manager can share his or her desktop with a technician on Humphrey’s team, allowing WWF to fix its IT problems at a more rapid pace.

“When there was a server problem in another country, we used to have to drop our normal workload, jump on an airplane, and fix the problem,” says Humphrey. “To have this unscheduled trip was highly disruptive and kept me out of the office for a week. But with WebEx Meeting Center, we can solve these IT issues remotely, saving me valuable in-office time to work on more strategic projects.”

Job interviews

WWF also uses WebEx technology to conduct job interviews with remote candidates, further reducing the need for air travel. “Our WWF staff in Switzerland recently interviewed an HR director based in Cameroon through a WebEx session,” says Humphrey. “It was a much more convenient experience for both parties.”

Training

WWF recently implemented a new finance system in its China and Kenya offices. Because the software was complex, a substantial amount of user training and orientation was needed. Although the initial training session was undertaken face-to-face, all the follow-up training and support were carried out using WebEx technology over a period of six weeks. This approach is a vast improvement in efficiency, considering it used to require four to five people based in Switzerland to fly out to Kenya and China to complete the training in person.

“Organizations have to bear in mind that it’s not just a case of attending a meeting, it’s the travel to the airport and to the office,” says Humphrey. “All of that additional time takes people away from their core functions. WebEx technology, in contrast, allows you to carry on with business as usual.”

Carbon savings

Of particular importance to a conservation charity such as WWF are the carbon savings that WebEx solutions provide. “By reducing our reliance on travel, we are also minimizing our carbon footprint,” says Humphrey. “So not only does WebEx technology meet our business needs, it aligns with our conservation efforts as well.”

Next Steps

WWF’s staff and external partners are increasingly noticing improved collaboration as a result of WebEx technology. “We are still receiving requests from offices that are recognizing the benefits of WebEx meetings,” says Humphrey. “I suspect that our number of host licenses will only continue to grow.”

For More Information

- To find out more about Cisco WebEx, go to: <http://www.cisco.com/go/webex>.
- To read other success stories, go to: <http://www.cisco.com/go/webexcasestudies>.
- To provide feedback or participate in the WebEx customer reference program, email: real.results@webex.com.

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