

Collaborative Tools Bring Together Film Students and Industry



Portuguese university leads EU project to create environment for creative and commercial success in cinema

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: University of Lusofona

Industry: Higher Education

Location: Portugal

Number of Employees: 12,000

Challenge

- Help ensure effective knowledge transfer between academia and business
- Better equip students with entrepreneurial skills
- Establish learning platform, irrespective of geography

Solution

- Cisco Collaboration environment comprising Cisco WebEx Social, Cisco Show and Share, Cisco Jabber, and Cisco WebEx Meetings
- Cisco Unified Computing System for virtualized hosting and delivery
- Cisco Services for design, implementation, and knowledge transfer

Results

- Secure and scalable platform for collaboration and learning in film and media industry
- Ability to share, manipulate, and manage video content among students and the film and media industry, thereby better leveraging resources and creative talent
- New student generation equipped with skills and mindsets for creative and commercial success

Challenge

The film and media industry is big business. It is also operating in an era of change, driven by digital technologies, which are revolutionizing production processes, and the Internet, which is dismantling long-established value chains by enabling direct links between producers and consumers.

Change, even when it is disruptive, creates market and economic opportunities for organizations willing to quickly adapt and innovate. In the film and media industry, the European Union (EU) is moving to address long-standing problems faced by the continent failing to reap the true economic rewards from its undoubted creative talent.

Key to this success is improving the relationship between the industry and academia through more cooperative alliances. Academia and industry need to cooperate to help ensure that students are best prepared for careers in industry, and that the industry can tap into this talent and keep itself up-to-date with new skills and technologies. However, barriers to improved cooperation must be overcome.

For its part, industry is concerned that academia does not always understand the skills needed by industry. “European universities have a long tradition of seeing themselves as beacons of knowledge and cultural excellence,” says Dr Manuel José Damásio, head of communication arts and information technologies at the University of Lusofona in Lisbon, Portugal. “However, in the past, they have often felt that they did not need help from outside the industry to fulfill this mission.”

It is a view not shared by Damásio, who leads a team of industry experts and lecturers drawn from the best talent available around the world. Lusofona is the largest privately-owned university in the country and part of a successful group of higher learning institutions in the Portuguese-speaking world, including Brazil and Africa.

Damásio’s department is one of the world’s leading film schools, and a member of the Groupement Européen des Ecoles de Cinéma et de Télévision (GEECT), the prestigious European network of the global film school association, the Centre International de Liaison des Ecoles de Cinéma et de Télévision (CILECT). It prides itself on equipping students with both the technical skills and the creative critical acumen needed for success in an increasingly global business.



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“The reality is that the European film industry can only be successful when countries cooperate,” says Damásio. “We need to find ways for academia and industry to work together, recognizing that both have something to give and to get back. Not just in terms of technical skills and an entrepreneurial mindset, but also in how productions are conceived, critiqued, and executed by making use of the best talent wherever it is physically located, at every stage of the process.”

Solution

An opportunity to move this vision forward came when the EU launched a new initiative, called Knowledge Alliances, aimed at improving university–business cooperation to create new multidisciplinary curricula and to promote entrepreneurship within education.

As part of a privately-owned, international group of institutions, the university is used to sharing best practices. In 2010, as part of its e-learning program, Lusofona started to use Cisco WebEx® Meetings. The web conferencing solution was well received, helping enable teaching staff in Portugal, Africa, and Brazil to virtually collaborate regularly to discuss and review plans and content. The university also has a successful experience in working with other European universities and industry on a number of projects.

When Knowledge Alliances invited proposals for projects, the University of Lusofona seized the opportunity. Its Cinema and Industry Alliance for Knowledge and Learning (CIAKL) project was one of only three, out of over 90 submissions, to be accepted for partial funding by the EU. CIAKL will see the university lead a consortium of five other European universities, and partners from the cinema and digital media industry.

“From the start,” says Damásio, “we wanted to create an infrastructure, a rich collaborative environment not just for this particular initiative, but for other projects, eventually across all disciplines throughout the university.”

The Lusofona team looked at solutions from a number of vendors, but eventually decided on a Cisco collaboration platform. “We trusted Cisco technology. They were the only supplier able to offer a complete set of tools and an end-to-end environment in which video was integrated throughout. Choosing Cisco also meant we could easily scale to meet the needs of thousands of users in the future,” says Damásio.

Cisco® WebEx Social is at the heart of this new environment. It is a people-centric collaboration platform that combines the power of social networking, content creation, and real-time communications. The solution provides a unified workspace, cohesively integrating collaboration tools such as Cisco Jabber, IM/Presence, and WebEx web conferencing.

Cisco Show and Share® has also been integrated with the platform. Often thought of as “YouTube for the enterprise,” this video-sharing application provides teachers, students, and project team members from outside industry with the ability to post high-definition video of nearly any format for people to view and review in a secure environment. With the right permissions in place, it also enables content to be easily pulled out of storage and manipulated to revise programs, or to create entirely new ones.



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Although the Cisco collaboration applications can be delivered as cloud services, the university chose an on-premise solution so as to better manage and control development in the future. The strength of the Cisco portfolio and the benefit of its architectural approach were underlined by the ability to run new applications on a Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS®). Four Cisco Unified Computing Solution C210 M2 Servers provide an easy-to-manage, redundant, scalable, and virtualized host platform. The servers connect to the university’s existing network at 10Gbps via redundant Cisco Catalyst® 3750-X Series Switches. The solution’s flexibility made it possible for the university to avoid the cost of creating a dedicated storage area network, by installing 10 hard drives within the UCS chassis to provide 3TB of storage.

To help reduce risk in its investment, the university also drew on Cisco Services’ expertise in deploying WebEx Social in multivendor environments. “Having Cisco Services overseeing everything provided extra confidence, both in terms of achieving a successful project outcome and also getting the maximum benefit from the new technology,” says Damásio.

In addition to creating the high-level design, Cisco Services produced the detailed low-level design, helping ensure the solution integrated perfectly into the university’s existing Microsoft Exchange environment, thereby enabling users, for example, to set up Cisco WebEx sessions directly from Outlook. The university entrusted Cisco Services with implementation and skills transfer to the university’s ICT partner. Using a “train the trainer” approach, Cisco Services also provided operational training to the university’s own staff and were on hand to help resolve any issues during the first month of operations.

Results

“Thanks to Cisco’s collaboration platform and innovations such as WebEx Social, we are creating a common environment where teachers, students, and business can come together. Students will experience firsthand the needs of the industry and, likewise, the industry will be exposed to students, energized with new ideas and creativity and skills at the forefront of technology,” says Damásio. “With success, the project will shake things up, by alerting both industry and universities to the need to collaborate and share experiences.”

For the first six months or so, the platform is being run as a proof-of-concept for 40 users, from the university and industry. When the new academic year begins, the solution will be deployed to 200 users drawn from the project’s member organizations. The use of Cisco Unified Workspace Licensing (CUWL) will enable the solution to be implemented at a pace that best suits the project. After 12 months, pending a successful evaluation, a total of 10,000 users from the broader university and partner community will have access to the system.

Even as a proof-of-concept, the new platform is already delivering a rich collaborative environment, supporting new ways of working and of sharing and developing content.

Ph.D. students in Portugal and Brazil are now collaborating together on topics of mutual interest. The Cisco solution makes it simple, but completely transparent, to control who attends meetings and what content is reviewed, thereby encouraging rich interactions.





The platform is also having a significant impact on the production process. The university is a member of Essemble (European Network of Film and Animation Schools for Digital Creation), a project in which joint teams from four universities are collaborating to push the boundaries of 3D animation. Production meetings take place via Cisco WebEx sessions, with film crews and other team members sharing materials and swapping creative insights that will be used in the later stages of production. In the same way that email signaled the paperless office, so this unified workspace promises a significantly reduced reliance on email collaboration.

In addition to helping enable real-time collaboration, Cisco WebEx Social provides a feature-rich environment that brings together in a workspace every meeting, document, or chat associated with a particular project. The facility to automatically track an individual's contribution in meetings, for example, is seen as a valuable aid in guiding learning and evaluating achievement. The platform's inherent security and permission-based management protect content-related intellectual property, while the use of tags enables easy indexing and search and retrieval of video material, a major issue in conventional video archives.

The platform is also enabling the university to collaborate with businesses outside the film industry. One example is a series of webinars that the university is running in partnership with a Portuguese bank. The seminars on the Portuguese and Spanish economies bring together invited customers of the bank, and subscribers of a leading financial newspaper. A mix of desktop-based Cisco WebEx Meetings and in-room conferencing allows the audience to hear and interact with experts in real time.

For More Information

To learn more about the Cisco architectures, solutions, and services featured within this case study, go to:

www.cisco.com/go/collaboration

www.cisco.com/go/datacenter

www.cisco.com/go/services

Product List

Data Center Solutions

- Cisco Unified Computing System
 - Cisco UCS C210 M2 Servers

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Catalyst 3750-X Series Switches

Collaboration Applications

- Cisco WebEx Social
- Cisco Jabber
- Cisco WebEx Meetings
- Cisco Show and Share

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