

Cisco's Experience with Next-Generation Events

Enhancing Meetings and Events with Collaboration Capabilities To Improve Business Impact, Reduce Costs

Brian Suckow, Cisco IBSG Innovations Practice

Introduction: Need for a New Approach

With the pressures of globalization, increased competition, and the continually accelerating information explosion, the need for employees, customers, and partners to come together, exchange knowledge, gain fresh perspectives, build networks, and nurture relationships has never been greater. Internal events are essential to ensuring effective communication, creating organizational alignment, and enhancing motivation. External events are critical for positioning the company with key stakeholders and helping grow the business. Employee participation in industry events keeps the company in touch with the market and ultimately drives innovation.

Despite these important benefits, many organizations are questioning whether events deliver business impact commensurate with their costs, especially during an economic downturn. Annual spending exceeds \$200 billion for large meetings and events. Challenges associated with traditional in-person events include:

- **Costs:** significant investment by both the event organizer (venue, marketing) and participants (registration, travel, time)
- **Audience:** difficult for organizer to attract target attendees, and for participants to send all team members that could benefit
- **Flexibility:** all-or-nothing structure; schedule conflicts
- **Impact:** mixed success in communicating with diverse audiences; "one-shot" structure that doesn't meet organizer or attendee needs for ongoing interactions

New Approach: The Next-Generation Event

Many of the challenges associated with in-person events can be overcome by augmenting a traditional event with a wide range of technology-enabled enhancements tailored to deliver specific business outcomes. A next-generation event expands options for participation in both space and time, enabling the attendee to choose to attend in person or remotely, live or on a delayed basis, and for the entire program or just selected sessions. Expanding the options for attendee participation can help the event organizer attract a broader audience, engage that audience more effectively, and lower costs for both the host and attendees.



Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG)

Cisco's Collaboration For Events experience¹ (see www.cisco.com/go/collaboration4events) provides a broad range of capabilities to enable any organization to create next-generation events tailored to their needs, including:

- Broadcasting event video (e.g., via Cisco IPTV or WebEx LiveStream) to large groups of participants located either at physical event locales or in remote locations
- Making these broadcasts available for later downloads as videos on demand (e.g., via Cisco Show and Share)
- Connecting participants from different physical event locales using immersive, high-definition video (e.g., Cisco TelePresence)
- Enabling sharing of information and interactions among presenters and remote attendees—before, during, and after the event (e.g., via Cisco WebEx)
- Creating a platform that supports event registration, pre-event previews, attendee social networking, real-time feedback, a document repository, and interactions that extend beyond the life of the physical event (e.g., 6connex, InXpo)
- Providing mechanisms for participants to interact and provide feedback in real time with the host via audio or video (e.g., via WebEx, Cisco IPTV) and to network with each other (e.g., WebEx Connect)

These capabilities are used to enable a wide range of interactions. Audience members at sites linked by Cisco TelePresence can actively participate directly in the event, such as during question-and-answer sessions. Audience members not linked by TelePresence can provide real-time feedback via text chat. Online communities can enable ongoing dialogue between the host and attendees before, during, and after the event, and can also enable interactions among attendees that foster networking and relationship building.

Figure 1. How Next-Generation Events Differ from Traditional Events

From Traditional Events To Next Generation Events
Incur cost, lost productivity, and environmental impact of travel	Reduce costs, lost productivity, and environmental impact from travel
One physical location	Multiple physical locations possible
Must attend in person, limiting participation	Can attend remotely, greatly expanding audience
Must attend in real-time	Can view on delayed basis
One-size fits all agenda	Individually tailored agendas
Experience is limited to event itself	Experience extends before and after event
Audience feedback given after event	Real-time feedback given during event
Personal networking is random process	Interest driven networking via social tools
Awareness generation via traditional marketing	Awareness generation amplified via social media

Source: Cisco IBSG, 2010

Strategic Event Management Framework

Based on Cisco's experience in conducting next-generation events, Cisco IBSG has developed a simple framework to aid in planning adoption of these new capabilities. The framework categorizes different types of events using two dimensions:

1. **Audience Type:** The audience is segmented into three groups with distinct characteristics. While some events may include multiple segments, our focus is on the primary audience needed to accomplish the business objectives for the event:
 - *Employees:* An organization has much more knowledge about and control over internal audiences than external audiences. It is easy to communicate with employees, and attendance can be strongly encouraged or made mandatory. These events are private, and provide a low-risk environment for trying new approaches.
 - *Partners and influencers:* Organizations generally have a moderate understanding of—and influence over—strategic partners (e.g., channel partners, suppliers). Similarly, they likely have an ongoing relationship with key influencers, such as analysts and the press.
 - *Customers and the public:* Customers often are the most demanding audience, and also the most difficult to identify and recruit. A great deal of effort is needed to craft the value proposition for each target customer segment and ensure that it is well-communicated. These events are often public, creating pressure for flawless execution.
2. **Complexity of Event:** This dimension is rated along a scale of low, medium, and high. Key factors that drive increasing complexity include:
 - *Broader business objectives:* Complexity increases when the primary objective extends beyond communication of information to recognition and motivation (e.g. for a salesforce) or persuading and selling (e.g., for analysts and customers).
 - *Longer event duration:* A three-day conference has much greater complexity than a one-hour seminar.
 - *Wider geographical span:* Global events introduce challenges with time and language differences.
 - *Increasing heterogeneity of audience:* Increasing diversity of the audience (e.g., in knowledge, interests, motivation) requires tailoring of breakout sessions to meet the needs of different segments of participants.
 - *Size:* Increasing the size of the remote audience impacts the technology enablers selected, the amount of planning required, and the degree of monitoring and management needed during the event.

Figure 2. Cisco's Experience Conducting Next-Generation Events

Cisco Strategic Event Management Framework

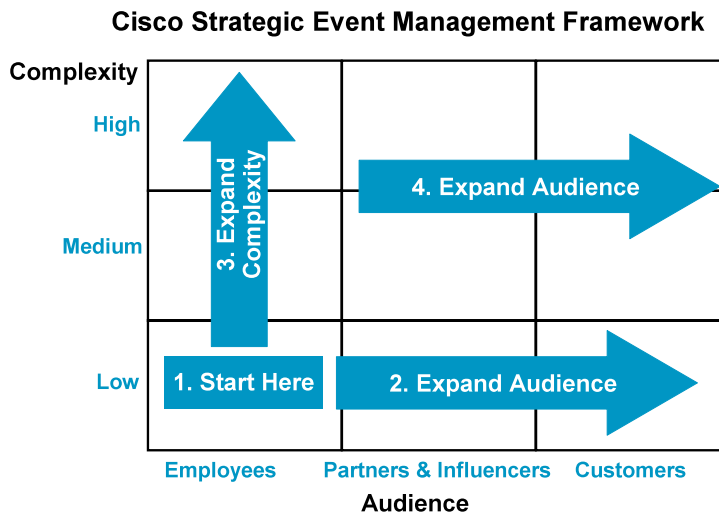
Complexity	High	Sales Meeting (GSX)	Partner Summit	User Conference (Cisco Live)
	Medium	Senior Leadership Offsite (SLO)	Analyst Meeting (C-scape)	Product Launches
	Low	Company Meeting	Supplier Business Reviews	Marketing Seminars
		Employees	Partners & Influencers	Customers
		Audience		

Source: Cisco IBSG, 2010

Getting Started with Next-Generation Events

The good news is that it's easy to get started. Organizations seeking to adopt next-generation events, however, face a wide array of choices. While the technology options have greatly expanded, in many ways the job of the event planner in this new world is not significantly different. Planning an event still begins with clarifying the business objectives of the organizer, and then assembling the resources to accomplish these objectives. Event planners have long relied on outside help from event marketing companies such as George P. Johnson and Maritz to produce traditional in-person events, and these providers are developing new capabilities to support next-generation events as well. Beyond offering key technology enablers, Cisco also provides a range of event planning and execution services through its Collaboration for Events offerings (see www.cisco.com/go/collaboration4events).

Figure 3. Recommended Sequence for Adopting Next-Generation Events



Source: Cisco IBSG, 2010

We recommend a four-step approach:

1. Begin with employee meetings of modest scope where the primary objective is communication. This provides a low-risk environment to fine-tune the process, people, and technology elements required to execute next-generation events. By getting some early wins, it's easier to build momentum for broader adoption.
2. Keeping the event complexity low, expand the audience to partners and customers. This might include events that are smaller in scope, focused primarily around communication of information, and aimed at existing (rather than new) partners and customers.
3. Build additional capabilities for larger, more complex events with more challenging business objectives by turning again to employee audiences. Initially, this might focus on gradually expanding the scale of the meeting (e.g., participants, locations, duration, time zones). Eventually, it should encompass more ambitious business objectives beyond communication of information (e.g., to recognition and motivation).
4. Extend these new capabilities for higher-complexity events to the more demanding partner and customer audiences.

Throughout this progression, focusing on building new process, people, and technology capabilities will help make these events scalable and repeatable. Gaining some early wins helps reassure executive sponsors of the value of next-generation events and builds momentum.

It's also important to remember that no event is an island. That is, it's important to integrate an organization's event strategy with its overall communications strategy for both internal and external audiences. Next-generation events represent just one portion of the overall communication program's portfolio, and the impact from events can be enhanced by other elements. For example, social media can greatly facilitate building "buzz" within the target audience around topics of interest, independent of specific events, and then stimulate higher attendance for external events. For employees, using multiple channels (e.g., CEO's video blog, employee blogs, wikis, communities, and social networks) to communicate with and help build connections among employees can significantly improve alignment and morale.

Profiles of Selected Cisco Events

Cisco has been an active early adopter of next-generation events. We recognized they had the potential for great benefit, and could serve as case studies to demonstrate the capabilities of collaboration solutions. More important, our experience validates that these concepts apply across a wide range of meeting types. A snapshot of recent Cisco next-generation events is given in the table below. These and others are profiled in detail in a series of "Cisco's Experience with Next-Generation Events" white papers and case studies.²

	Strategic Leadership Offsite (SLO)	Cisco Live	Global Sales Experience (GSX)
Date	May 2009	June 2009	Sept. 2009
Format	Virtual	Hybrid (in person and virtual)	Virtual
Audience	Cisco leadership (directors, VPs, and above)	Cisco customers and partners	Cisco sales employees
Duration, days	3	5	4
Number of attendees:			
- In person	0	9,058	0
- Virtual	2,954	5,000	17,306
- Total	2,954	14,058	17,306

Benefits from Next-Generation Events: Cisco's Experience

Based on Cisco's experience, next-generation events not only reduce costs and increase attendance, but also enrich the attendee experience and greatly increase the event's impact. Demonstrated benefits Cisco achieved in 2009 from next-generation events include:

- *Substantial cost savings:* Costs decreased from \$65 million to \$9 million for our sales meeting (GSX), and from \$7 million to \$4 million for our strategic leadership meeting (SLO).
- *Increased productivity:* Time savings from reduced employee travel were worth \$19 million for GSX and \$2 million for SLO.
- *Improved communication:* Cisco sales meeting participants rated the virtual presentation sessions as highly or higher than previous in-person events.
- *Greatly expanded reach:* Virtual new-product launches attracted audiences three to five times larger than those of traditional launches, while reducing costs by 80 percent or more.
- *Enhanced flexibility and choice:* Attendees were able to consume content when and where it was convenient, avoiding schedule conflicts and choosing from a wider range of content (breakout sessions increased from 37 previously to 54 at GSX).
- *Real-time feedback:* Event organizers and speakers received real-time feedback that allowed immediate adjustments to improve the attendee experience.
- *Reduced environmental impact:* Carbon emissions avoided by meeting virtually totaled 34,000 tons for GSX.

While Cisco has received tremendous benefits from next-generation events, we are still in the early stages of the learning curve and are continuing to work through a number of challenges. We recognize that it hasn't been easy for employees to give up the perks of travel to attractive locales for major events. And, for our global sales meeting, while our communication objective was clearly met, we did not fully achieve all of our goals around recognition and motivation. To meet these goals more effectively, we are evaluating different

options for the future, such as a hybrid approach where we combine local, in-person gatherings with virtual components that connect us globally.

Figure 4. GSX Virtual Environment Homepage



Cisco's next-generation events were recently lauded by *Event Marketer* magazine, the leading publication for the event marketing industry. Out of 600 entries in the 2010 competition, Cisco Live won first place in the category of Best Hybrid (Live plus Virtual) Program, and won the Grand Ex Award for the overall best event. Cisco is the first business-to-business grand-prize winner (previous winners were all business-to-consumer). Cisco's Global Sales Experience won first place in the Best 100% Virtual Event category. In selecting Cisco Live, *Event Marketer* praised "the powerful combination of on-site and online," recognized Cisco for "showing the power and ROI of this red hot hybrid trend," and observed that "it's a great example of how virtual plus live is not a trend, but a reality."³

References

1. Overview of Cisco Collaboration for Events experience can be found at www.cisco.com/go/collaboration4events
2. "Cisco's Experience with Next-Generation Events: Enhancing Meetings and Events with Collaboration Capabilities To Improve Business Impact and Reduce Costs," Cisco IBSG, July 2010; series of additional white papers and case studies will be available under the "Featured Content" and "Experience" sections of <http://www.cisco.com/web/about/ac79/innov/index.html>
3. *Event Marketer* Awards, May 2010, <http://www.eventmarketer.com/article/ex-award-winners-announced>

Acknowledgements

The author would like to recognize the contributions of Cisco's LaSandra Brill, Lisa Dixon, Vera Fisher, Jovi Gayac, Regina Gordon, Melissa Mines, Mike Mitchell, Petra Neiger, Abby Smith, Angie Smith, Dannette Veale, and Doug Webster, without whom this chronicling of Cisco's experiences with next-generation events would not have been possible.

Contact

For additional information, please contact:

Brian Suckow

[Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group, Innovations Practice](#)

bsuckow@cisco.com

408 527 6319

More Information

Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG), the company's global consultancy, helps CXOs from the world's largest public and private organizations solve critical business challenges. By connecting strategy, process, and technology, Cisco IBSG industry experts enable customers to turn visionary ideas into value.

For further information about IBSG, visit <http://www.cisco.com/go/ibsg>.



Americas Headquarters
Cisco Systems, Inc.
San Jose, CA

Asia Pacific Headquarters
Cisco Systems (USA) Pte. Ltd.
Singapore

Europe Headquarters
Cisco Systems International BV
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Cisco has more than 200 offices worldwide. Addresses, phone numbers, and fax numbers are listed on the Cisco Website at www.cisco.com/go/offices.

Cisco IBSG © 2010 Cisco and/or its affiliates. All rights reserved. Cisco, the Cisco logo, and Cisco Systems are registered trademarks of Cisco and/or its affiliates in the United States and certain other countries. All other trademarks mentioned in this document or Website are the property of their respective owners. The use of the word partner does not imply a partnership between Cisco and any other company. (1002R)