

Inc./Cisco—Growing with Technology Awards



Start Up Category

CENTRA SOFTWARE IS THE DEVELOPER OF SYMPOSIUM SOFTWARE APPLICATIONS, WHICH ALLOWS GROUPS OF UP TO 250 PEOPLE TO AUDIO-CONFERENCE AND COLLABORATE OVER THE WEB USING ANY CONNECTION SPEED, FROM A 28.8 MODEM LINK TO HIGH-SPEED T1 LINES.

Challenge

The Internet holds enormous promise for distributing knowledge across geographic boundaries and bringing people together in collaborative teams. But to date, most network-based learning and collaboration lacks the inter-action of face-to-face meetings or even conference calls. Video-conferencing solutions today offer an alternative, but their high-cost and complexity limits them to larger sites and deep-pocketed organizations.

Solution

With SYMPOSIUM, says CEO Leon Navickas, Centra can deliver the experience of high-bandwidth interaction over low-bandwidth connections.

Rather than replacing face-to-face meetings, Symposium enables more frequent, ad hoc visual communication without the complexity of dedicated video-conferencing solutions.

The software can serve as a “virtual water cooler,” Navickas said. “Groups of people can come together on-line to engage in higher-order interaction, not just by talking to each other, but also by sharing data, negotiating, and solving problems.”

The beauty of SYMPOSIUM, Navickas related, is simplicity. The interface places non overlapping “panes” of information in front of users: call status, an electronic whiteboard, an online PowerPoint presentation, and perhaps a spreadsheet. The design of SYMPOSIUM lightens the load on the customer’s network and provides clear audio even over low-speed modem connections. No network upgrade is required to accommodate the software.

While many network-based training approaches rely on a one-way, streaming-video model for delivering information, SYMPOSIUM aims to make electronic learning more interactive. “With Web browsers on everybody’s desktop and the move to Internet-based TCI/IP networks,” Navickas said, “we can bring back the live aspect, where people can learn as they go and apply what they learn consistently across the company.”

IT Director Ken Griffin said the Centra internal network incorporates a wide array of Cisco solutions: a Cisco Catalyst® 2900 series XL switch for primary Local area network (LAN) service at the headquarters; Cisco 5200, 2514, and 1600 routers for LAN interconnection, remote office links over Frame Relay, and the primary Internet connection; Cisco Catalyst 1900 and 2900

XL switches and FastHub® 400 for the approximately 250 desktop and server links; the Cisco PIX Firewall for security; and CiscoSecure software to manage remote access.

“Because we’re growing so fast, we don’t have a lot of time to evaluate products,” Griffin said. “We chose Cisco because we know it will work.”

The company also values having a consistent platform, Cisco IOS® software, deployed across its entire network, noted Griffin. “New features can be added all the time but fundamentally it won’t change,” he said. “That makes it all easier to manage.”

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*Ken Griffin
IT Director
Centra Software*

