

How Cisco Enabled Collaboration During Natural Disaster

When a hurricane prevented travel, executive meetings continued using multipoint IP video conferencing.

Cisco IT Case Study / Video / IP Video Conferencing for Business Continuity : In late October 2005, disastrous weather in the southeastern United States prevented Cisco marketing executives from traveling to a conference in Florida. And yet, the executives already in Florida were able to meet with their counterparts in San Jose, California and Milan, Italy via an IP videoconference—and conducted the meeting more swiftly than they likely would have in person. This case study provides an example of the value of internal video conferencing and explains what was required to connect an off-campus location to the Cisco intranet. Cisco customers can draw on Cisco IT’s real-world experience in this area to help support similar enterprise needs.

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— Denise Peck, Vice President, Cisco Central Marketing Operations

CHALLENGE

In late October 2005, Cisco Systems® global marketing staff members in the United States and Europe were preparing to attend an executive marketing planning meeting in Amelia Island, Florida, the site of the Cisco® CIO Summit. But in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the impending arrival of Hurricane Wilma, Cisco preferred that its employees avoid travel. A few days before the meeting, the Cisco executive team decided that marketing executives and staff members already in Florida should remain there, while team members in

San Jose, California and Milan, Italy would remain where they were and attend the meeting via a multipoint IP videoconference.

SOLUTION

Typically, scheduling a videoconference at Cisco simply requires reserving a Cisco IP/VC 3500 Series Multipoint Control Unit (MCU) via the Microsoft Outlook Scheduler. At the scheduled time, someone at each location dials the number of the MCU to join the meeting. Cisco IT generally does not need to provide assistance, or even to be aware that a meeting has been scheduled.

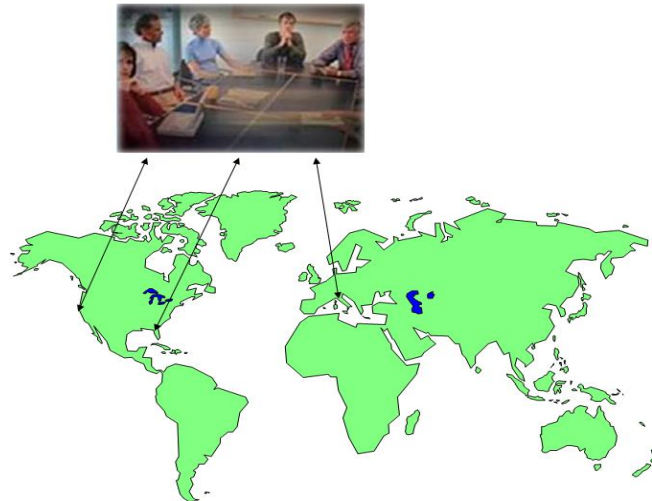
In this situation, however, since one meeting location—the Florida hotel—was off the Cisco network, Cisco IT provided assistance in setting up a secure VPN connection to the Cisco intranet. Four days before the scheduled meeting, Cisco Central Marketing Operations approached Cisco IT for assistance in providing connectivity to the executives at the hotel. A Cisco video conferencing engineer contacted the network support personnel at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel on Amelia Island to discuss the network connectivity available for video conferencing. The hotel did have a broadband Internet connection, so the Cisco IT group shipped a video conferencing camera and monitor as well as a Cisco 831 Ethernet Broadband Router for VPN connectivity. Cisco IT personnel, already onsite at the hotel for the CIO conference, configured the router and connected the video conferencing equipment to the hotel’s broadband Internet connection.

In some of its San Jose buildings, Cisco is setting up rich-media conference rooms for internal and customer videoconferences. The specially equipped rooms provide sound and lighting treatments as well as high-quality viewing screens optimized for video conferencing. The meeting attendees in San Jose and Milan met in rich-media

conference rooms at their respective campuses (Figure 1).

Around 20 marketing staff members joined the conference. They could see and hear speakers in any location. Each of the three conference room locations appointed someone to be in charge of projecting presentation slides, which had been distributed earlier. A meeting coordinator gave verbal instructions when each numbered slide should be displayed.

Figure 1. The Cisco IP/TV Solution Enabled a Videoconference with Participants in Three Locations on Two Continents



RESULTS

Travel Avoidance

The Cisco IP video conferencing solution enabled Cisco employees to conduct an important collaborative meeting as scheduled despite adverse travel conditions. “The multipoint videoconference was a positive experience for us,” says Denise Peck, vice president of Cisco Central Marketing Operations. “Several executives were able to collaborate without taking a long-distance plane trip.”

Greater Efficiency and Focus

Peck observed some advantages in the meeting dynamics of the real-time videoconference compared to when all participants are physically present. “Instead of a lot of socializing before the meeting, it was mostly business,” she says. “We scheduled the meeting for five or six hours but actually completed it in four.”

Attendees also seemed to be more focused than they typically are in face-to-face meetings, in Peck’s view. “Perhaps because of the novelty, participants seemed to be more alert and attentive, sending fewer e-mails on their laptops, for example.”

Excellent Audio and Video Quality

Available bandwidth and quality of service (QoS) in the intranet resulted in excellent audio and video quality. QoS ensures that time-sensitive voice and video traffic receives priority over data traffic. “All the executives involved in the meeting said we should conduct videoconferences more often,” says Peck.

LESSONS LEARNED

Peck and the Cisco IT group recommend the following best practices for companies planning executive

videoconferences:

- Consider time zones when planning the meeting. Participants in other countries might need to begin their days early or stay late.
- When planning the meeting agenda, know what equipment is available in the conference room, such as number of cameras and resolution of the projection screens. Plan the content accordingly.
- Make sure that executives and their assistants know how to set up videoconferences, including how to reserve rooms and equipment. This avoids unnecessary calls to IT. At Cisco, employees can set up videoconferences entirely without IT support unless they require off-campus connectivity.
- Predefine the roles of the meeting organizer, presenters, and participants.

NEXT STEPS

The Cisco Media Network group is adding more capabilities to the rich-media rooms, enabling greater interactivity that even more closely approximates face-to-face interaction. The pilot is currently in process, and details will appear in a new case study.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To read the entire case study or for additional Cisco IT case studies on a variety of business solutions, visit Cisco on Cisco: Inside Cisco IT www.cisco.com/go/ciscoit

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