Waters Edge specializes in guiding information systems (IS) professionals to better understand the risks and rewards of managing digital information. The firm has developed a unique solution called CastleQuest™, an online course library that focuses on best practices for building and defending information management programs. The training relies on the creation of customized CastleQuest “maps”—documents that articulate clients’ IS needs in a visual and actionable form.

The Challenge

In 2006, Jeffrey Ritter founded Waters Edge with the goal of bringing high-impact online training to information systems professionals. “In order for our business model to succeed, we needed a training tool that would conserve financial resources while reaching out to and engaging with a distributed customer database,” says Ritter. Dynamic interaction, he felt, would also be key to the success of his new firm, so he began looking for an online solution that would offer optimal collaboration within a reliable, secure environment. “We were looking for something robust enough to form the backbone of a brand-new company,” adds Ritter. “Our entire business model depended on finding the right solution.”

The Solution

Ritter was familiar with WebEx before he founded Waters Edge. “I had already seen first-hand the eLearning capabilities of WebEx Training Center,” he explains. “So WebEx was really the ideal that I had in mind when I began putting my business model together.” After surveying other solutions, he determined that the features and capabilities he had always admired in WebEx were the features he wanted to offer in his own online courses.

For Ritter, one of those features was the ability for users to share applications easily within WebEx Training Center. This powerful capability enables students to immerse themselves in the CastleQuest environment, heightening the impact of Ritter’s visually engaging educational tools. The whiteboard functionality makes it possible for him to collect ideas from participants so that everyone can prioritize their needs in any given training session, and he uses the chat and poll features to similar effect. “We can present a map through the share feature and ask students to vote on which problems they want to explore first,” says Ritter. “With these interactive tools, I can help students feel empowered—and that’s really the whole point of the course.”
The flexibility of WebEx enabled Ritter to create a unique online presence for his company that was powerfully reinforced by the WebEx platform. “WebEx has a terrific capability of co-branding their tools with our trademarks and design elements,” Ritter notes. “When customers are ready to take one of our courses, they can click on the ‘Register Now’ button and be transferred to the WebEx Training Center platform—but that platform retains the look and feel of the CastleQuest experience, so it’s completely integrated from the customer’s point of view.”

Waters Edge uses WebEx Meeting Center™ to engage with prospects. When a prospective customer is identified, Ritter conducts a live sales presentation in Meeting Center to demonstrate both the depth of content offered by Waters Edge and the richness of interactivity made possible by WebEx. The ease of connectivity in Meeting Center helps ensure that these demonstrations are never a hassle for prospective customers. Ritter also uses Meeting Center for internal conferences, as when he and his team meet to discuss what content to include in the firm’s course offerings. “Whether for internal or external use, WebEx has really emerged as a relationship that defines our company,” says Ritter. “It’s a relationship that we simply couldn’t do without.”

The Benefits
“In the business of technology, the biggest barrier to closing the sale can be the customer who doesn’t have the knowledge he or she needs to make the purchase,” says Ritter. “We use Meeting Center to make sure that prospective customers understand precisely the value of what they’re purchasing, and we use WebEx Training Center to help those same customers make informed decisions about the solutions they will embrace for smarter information management.” For Ritter, one of the most important elements in reaching customers for optimal effect—whether in the U.S. or abroad—is the creation and delivery of visually engaging content. With WebEx Training Center, he can deploy visual aids that make his content more accessible. “The risks that these courses explore are global risks,” Ritter notes. “As Waters Edge and CastleQuest grow, we want our iconography and richly visualized approach to help us expand to non-English speaking countries.” The intuitive user interface in WebEx, he goes on to say, will be key to the firm’s expansion into foreign markets—one more reason why he sees WebEx as a partner for the long term.

The interactive tools in WebEx Training Center have helped Ritter create a community of collaborative learners who contribute to the constant evolution of the Waters Edge curriculum. “We want our subscribers to bring their knowledge to this process in a wiki sort of way,” he explains, noting that 85 percent of past attendees have since volunteered to offer their expertise and input in later courses. “With WebEx, it’s easy for participants to go on to the map and toss something out, add something, suggest new topics,” he says. “This is a powerful tool for capturing what’s in people’s brains and using that information to enrich the classroom environment and deepen each student’s experience.”

The Future
In 2008, Waters Edge will steadily expand its offerings, using WebEx to deliver project templates and other tools that will help information professionals better manage their data. Ritter also plans to start offering pre-recorded courses so that his educational resources can be available to students at all times. “This solution not only provides us with a great deal of flexibility,” he says. “It helps us offer our customers flexibility as well. It’s just priceless.”