

Cisco sales department accelerates productivity by over 20% with the Cisco WebEx Technology Group

About the Specialist Optimization Access and Results (SOAR) program at Cisco

Team headquarters:

Southfield, Michigan

Cisco WebEx services:

- Cisco WebEx Connect™
- Cisco WebEx Meeting Center™
- Cisco WebEx Training Center
- Cisco WebEx Event Center™
- Cisco WebEx Sales Center
- Cisco WebEx Support Center
Remote Support WebACD

Program launch:

2007

Summary:

The Cisco Advanced Technology (AT) sales team at Cisco needed a scalable solution that would enable real-time, mission-critical collaboration and response across the enterprise. By virtualizing specialists with the help of Cisco® WebEx® collaborative technologies, salespeople were able to improve productivity 20%, increase customer interactions 40%, and cut travel-related expenses by 40 to 60% over the course of three quarters.

The Specialist Optimization Access and Results (SOAR) program at Cisco aims to optimize the company's network of advanced technology specialists. SOAR's mission is to enhance competitive advantage by accelerating sales productivity, developing a sub-specialization framework for more efficient knowledge transfer by finding innovative ways to leverage expertise using virtual and Web 2.0 tools.

The Challenge

Within the sales organization at Cisco, each team is assigned a product sales specialist who serves as a primary resource to support the sale of advanced technology. "For a long time, each sales specialist was part of a linear, one-size-fits-all model," says Patrick Romzek, North American operations director for Advanced Technology at Cisco. "Our specialists can handle a lot of questions, but only up to a point. With really complex inquiries, they inevitably need to find someone with even more focused expertise." Until recently, neither formal processes nor tools existed for finding the right specialist for each issue. If a product sales specialist was unable to answer a customer's question, he or she would often resort to broad-base email blasts to locate the best possible resource. As a result, product sales specialists spent only 30% of their time on strategic activities such as sales engagement and execution, devoting much of their time to non-strategic, tactical tasks such as locating product resources.

Cisco also faced the challenge of an aggressive growth forecast that, according to the traditional linear model, would require tripling the existing number of product sales specialists in order to meet sales targets over the next four years. To maintain a competitive edge without hiring huge numbers of specialized employees, Cisco needed a strategy that would improve the availability and scalability of expert resources for real-time, mission-critical collaboration and response across the enterprise.

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— Patrick Romzek, operations director for Advanced Technology (United States and Canada)

The Solution

Romzek and his team worked hand-in-hand with WebEx Consulting Services to determine the most effective strategy for enhancing collaboration. Beginning with an initial assessment and mapping of current business processes, WebEx consultants identified where collaborative technologies could be strategically implemented to enable the SOAR team to support aggressive, long-term sales growth and improve the productivity, scaling, and work-life balance of its specialists.

One key to the SOAR strategy is to drive specialist productivity through the creation of a Sales Engagement Portal, an on-demand resource center and collaborative community for efficient response to sales issues. Cisco WebEx technology is central to this portal, enabling users to access self-help tools such as virtual product demos, product references, an expert locator, and a wiki knowledge base. If those tools fail to answer a user's question, a Rapid Response Team (RRT) can be accessed via WebEx WebACD. The RRT is trained to answer tactical questions and find information quickly, resolving roughly 80% of all issues brought to the Sales Engagement Portal. However, if greater specialization is required, the RRT can access a network of virtualized specialists and sub-specialists through a community built on the WebEx Connect platform.

WebEx Connect is crucial to the SOAR strategy, combining WebEx core applications with an open development platform to deliver flexible collaboration. This open platform enables customers to develop mash-ups of WebEx technology, Cisco technology, and third-party applications. For instance, if a user wants to find customers who can provide references on a given topic, one mash-up combines Google Maps with a CRM database to locate the strongest references as quickly as possible. The WebEx Connect platform makes these mash-ups easy to create and deploy, encouraging collaborative problem-solving for a constantly evolving, easily customizable solution.

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— Patrick Romzek, operations director for Advanced Technology (United States and Canada)

The Benefits

During its initial rollout in the Canada Commercial Theater, the SOAR program produced stunning enhancements in productivity, enabling salespeople to spend over 20% more time on productive, strategic tasks. Increases in productivity and decreases in travel cut overall expenses by approximately 50% over the course of three quarters.

By gaining quick and easy access to a virtualized community of specialists, the advanced technology sales team increased external interactions by over 40% while decreasing their average number of working hours by 10%, resulting in higher levels of sales engagement while improving quality of life. Virtualization also contributed to extremely high rates of user satisfaction, with virtual interactions earning an average score of 4.88 on a five-point scale. “WebEx helps us ensure that our specialists can offer their expertise to those who need it most in the least amount of time,” says Romzek. “That aligns our resources and optimizes our market coverage, increasing the depth and quality of interactions across the board.”

As Cisco continues to grow, virtualization offers a scalable solution for long-term success, enabling an increase in the number of salespeople without a proportional increase in the number of product specialists. “The role of our specialists hasn't changed,” Romzek says. “What's changed is how we access their expertise. And by improving access to our most specialized resources, we can improve our business results and empower everyone to be more proactive and productive.”

WebEx tools provide yet another way for Cisco to continue to lead the industry in best practices for optimizing specialized knowledge across an increasingly distributed workforce. “We can look at

these results, show them to our partners, and offer an actionable strategy that's proven to increase a company's operating margin in a matter of months," says Romzek. "So these tools not only improve the responsiveness of our own sales team, but serve as a compelling example of how a more virtualized, collaborative model can be applied at any organization."

The Future

Romzek and his team will continue to expand virtualization capabilities for Cisco sales teams throughout the United States and Canada, but the ultimate goal is to go global. "With the collaborative tools in WebEx, we can maximize the strengths of our specialists, not just in North America, but ultimately around the world," says Romzek. "It's a new operational advantage for Cisco, and ultimately it means even better service for customers. So you'd better believe we're thrilled about that."

Highlights:

- The SOAR pilot program produced stunning enhancements in productivity, enabling salespeople to spend over 20% more time on strategic tasks.
- SOAR increased the sales team's external interactions by over 40% while decreasing their average number of working hours by 10%.
- Virtualization enabled the advanced technology sales department to cut expenses approximately 50% over the course of three quarters.



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