



## Web conferencing can let you extend your training reach with an interactive virtual classroom.

### Customer and industry

Monash University, e-learning

### Cisco WebEx services

Training Center

### Summary

The Faculty of Education at Monash University needed an innovative way to connect distance learners to its on-campus classroom. WebEx demonstrates the benefits and adaptability of web conferencing as a training solution. Other faculties at Monash University have expressed a keen interest in using the technology for a range of purposes.

### About Monash University

Monash is one of Australia's leading universities. It has eight campuses including one in Malaysia and South Africa, and centres in London, UK and Prato, Italy. An energetic and dynamic university, Monash is committed to quality education and research.



Today, organisations in both the private and public sectors face increasing challenges when it comes to training. Budget restrictions and an increasingly competitive market place, mean people need to learn and be trained more efficiently than ever before. Training methods need to consider the different ways that people work or are able to learn, and flexible working hours as well as the increase in remote workers, has also challenged more traditional means of training. Web conferencing is gaining popularity as a means of overcoming these challenges.

The public sector, in areas such as education, is facing some of the biggest challenges. Traditional learning methods have had to be adapted to meet the needs of a diverse range of students. To meet these challenges, trainers, teachers and students are turning to alternative forms of learning, such as e-learning.

Traditional forms of e-learning often require a library of content to be 'packaged' and stored, which is only suitable for training modules that have a long shelf-life and lead time. Applications such as email and video streaming are effective to a point, but can be impersonal and un-interactive.

Web conferencing is an application that has steadily increased in popularity over the past two years as a solution to the restrictions of traditional e-learning. With Web conferencing it is possible to create 'virtual classrooms' where trainers and trainees interact in real time, for a richer and more dynamic experience. Trainers can

automatically track individual performances, share and collaborate on documents and presentations, and 'walk around the room' interacting with trainees.

As the leading provider of web conferencing services, WebEx has seen a steep increase in the use of web conferencing as an online training solution. WebEx Training Center makes an ideal e-learning platform because there are no investments in software, or expensive hardware setups. All that's needed is the internet and a phone to produce the dynamics of a live classroom, without the associated travel, accommodation and venue expenses.

Recently, WebEx was approached by the Faculty of Education at Monash University. Monash needed an innovative way to connect distance learners to its on-campus classroom, in response to a tender from The Department of Education and Training to run a Masters in School Leadership.

### The virtual classroom

There were 40 students enrolled in the first cohort of the Masters in School Leadership. At the beginning of each semester, students attended a series of intensive full-day classes, which off-campus students travelled into Melbourne to attend. However, throughout the rest of the semester, classes were held in the evening, making it difficult for remote students to join the classes in person.

Approximately three quarters of the students attended Monash's Clayton

campus in Melbourne, while the rest of the students were spread across regional Victoria and attended classes using WebEx. The Faculty of Education wanted to make sure that off-campus students were able to take part in every class, even if they couldn't physically attend. By connecting a computer to the lecture theatre's projector and PA system, the Faculty of Education adapted WebEx's functionality to benefit both the large on-campus class, and the widely dispersed off-campus students. WebEx allowed the on-campus students to see and hear the remote students, and to participate actively with their instructors and colleagues.

Dr. Brenda Beatty, Director of the project and Senior Lecturer at Monash's Faculty of Education has spoken very positively about the trial, "I have worked with remote students before, using methods like online discussion forums. While these sorts of methods can work, and I continue to use them to interact with students after class hours, I find that they don't allow students to really become part of the classroom experience, which can impact their learning.

"I attended an Australian Association for Research in Education lecture that was held as a web conference using WebEx. I realised immediately that WebEx was a valuable tool that could help off-campus students interact and stay engaged with the on-campus class. Consequently, we began a three month trial of WebEx's technology to see how it would work in a class room environment," said Dr. Beatty.

"We've experimented a lot to get the most out of the virtual classroom, and we've

been able to create a significant amount of interaction amongst on and off-campus students, and their lecturers. WebEx web conferencing has real potential for opening up new national and international markets by connecting the university with remote students. But more importantly, it has greatly improved the educational experience of 'distance learners'.

"Feedback from both the on and off-campus students has been positive. Students have commented that they feel like everyone is in the one room together and that the real-time interaction has created a more dynamic class.

"Things like the 'hands up' icon for remote students to request audio time, and the chat line for collaborating on notes and exercises make WebEx a highly interactive tool. During one class thanks to his use of a webcam and the WEBEX video function we could see a student presenter in Mildura. He could operate his part of the group's slideshow and contribute to the presentation even though the rest of his group was on-campus.

"We've used WebEx applications in a number of different scenarios with encouraging results. We had one meeting where every student and both of the instructors were off-campus and connected through WebEx. The students were clustered in small groups at 12 different ports and we were able to hold a class as if we were actually in a classroom.

"We've also had a guest lecturer from Florida present while the entire class was on-campus. WebEx gave the lecturer the ability to control her slide presentation while

speaking and then engage in a Q and A with the class afterwards. On another occasion we had four different guest lecturers give a series of 10 minute presentations, with about 12 distance learners attending via WebEx. After the presentations, the class split into three groups: two on campus and the third at a remote location. The lecturers rotated around spending half hour with each of the three groups. The remote group particularly enjoyed having the lecturers to themselves as they extended their learning.

### The future

The early trials of WebEx in the Master in School Leadership program at Monash University have demonstrated its potential. Now, other Faculties such as Law, Pharmacy and Medicine are showing an interest in experimenting with WebEx for a variety of purposes. Monash Information Technology Services department is also supportive of continuing to trial the technology.

The Monash University example is a unique WebEx application that demonstrates the benefits and adaptability of web conferencing as a training solution. But WebEx is just as valuable for company training programs. Organisations are under increasing pressure to keep staff up-to-date on business initiatives, and industry regulations, through cost-efficient training schemes. Web conferencing cuts the cost of training programs, and provides an interactive training module that engages learners for increased productivity. Web conferencing is the next generation of online learning, where learners can experience the benefits of live training, without leaving their desktops.