Web Conferencing Opens Doors for Students in Rural India

Seer Akademi uses WebEx technology to equip students with world-class engineering skills, helping change lives.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Seer Akademi

Industry: Educational Services

Location: Hyderabad, India

Number of Employees: 20

Challenge:
- Give students access to high-quality education, regardless of location or social background
- Address shortage of qualified professors and lack of electronics research in India
- Bypass time-consuming travel required to attend class in person

Solution:
- Cisco WebEx technology provides interactive platform for collaborative learning
- Reliable connectivity and mobile access help ensure uninterrupted classroom time
- Desktop-sharing and chat features allow for synchronous, real-time working sessions

Results:
- Provided students in rural India with access to leading engineering experts around the globe
- Empowered students with industry-leading skills and best practices
- Improved educational outcomes and opened doors for greater student opportunities

Challenge

"All startups must solve a problem." With this philosophy in mind, California-based entrepreneur Srikanth Jadcherla launched Seer Akademi, an educational infrastructure and services company that delivers high-quality education to colleges located throughout rural India.

In 2008, Jadcherla observed that India faced a two-fold problem: "We are going to consume about USD $320 billion in electronics goods by 2015, yet we produce very little of our own products, which leads to a huge trade deficit and concerns about security," he says. "On the other hand, we cannot produce electronics, because skilled manpower is not available. Indian colleges have, on average, a 45 percent shortage of faculty with expertise in this area. And the lack of electronics research here often means the coursework is out of date."

Considering India has the world's largest population under the age of 14, Jadcherla knew these educational challenges would only continue. A former executive at electronic design automation company Synopsys, Jadcherla wanted to leverage his industry connections and find a way to connect experts in the field with students in rural towns. He had used web conferencing extensively in his professional career and realized it offered a viable solution.

Solution

Due to bandwidth limitations in rural areas, the solution needed to offer a robust, reliable platform. Ease of use was Jadcherla's other main requirement. After evaluating several products, Jadcherla found the ideal solution in Cisco WebEx® technology. "Not only did Cisco provide the most robust platform, it also offered a number of useful features to aid in collaborative learning, such as desktop sharing, chat, and recording functions," says Jadcherla.

Today, Seer Akademi uses Cisco® WebEx Meeting Center to build its patent pending Global Classrooms that facilitate collaborative learning between students in rural India

> "By using WebEx technology, our goal is to bring high-quality education to students who would not have the opportunity or access to it otherwise."

Srikanth Jadcherla
Chairman and CEO
Seer Akademi

and professors located anywhere in the world. Using the screen-sharing feature, remote lecturers in the United States are able to present and discuss detailed chip designs and electronics process in real time, enabling a truly interactive session. Compared to interactive whiteboards, says Jadcherla, the WebEx interface is far superior and costs just a fraction of the price. "We are bridging industry content into a university format," he says. "Students in even the most remote towns can now learn from industry professionals and professors at Stanford or Purdue University, who are the best in their respective fields."

Thanks to its compatibility with a range of mobile devices, WebEx technology also gives students the convenience to attend lectures from home. "In 2009, the remote town of Nandyal was completely cut off from the rest of the world due to flooding, but the students there did not want to miss class," says Jadcherla. "So a group of them gathered around an Apple iPhone and attended the WebEx session that way." Even in less extreme situations, WebEx allows students to avoid time-consuming travel to physical classrooms, which in certain traffic-heavy locations, can take up to two hours.

Results

Since it launched in 2009, Seer Akademi's reach and service offerings have rapidly grown, so much so that today it offers a full-time Master's degree program. "In a short span, we have changed the entire methodology of engineering education in India, producing highly skilled people," says Jadcherla.

More importantly, however, Seer Akademi has changed the lives of students in rural India. Many come from blue collar towns where they are often not only the first in their family to graduate college, but the first in their village. "As a result of Seer Akademi, my career has developed very well," says Mahesh Goud, a Seer Akademi student. "WebEx has played a vital role in shaping my career and hundreds of other students across India."

Jadcherla is quick to note that Cisco WebEx has not only solved a practical problem in India, it has also created a major social impact. "These students are now going on to get hired by cutting-edge startups and achieve their dreams," he says. "For me, there couldn't be a more rewarding experience."

With a successful pedagogy established, Jadcherla hopes to set a new educational model for engineering colleges worldwide. "This platform will allow us to continue to expand our reach," he says, citing an expected 14 times growth in the coming year. "By using WebEx technology, our goal is to bring high-quality education to students who would not have the opportunity or access to it otherwise."

Next Steps

Jadcherla has big plans for the future of Seer Akademi. In India, he hopes to build a microelectronics laboratory that will give students hands-on experience with real-world electronics engineering technologies. "We want this to be a truly collaborative atmosphere, where we'll leverage video, specifically Cisco TelePresence, in conjunction with Cisco WebEx technology, to foster effective communication with remote industry experts."

On a larger scale, Jadcherla's goal is to expand Seer Akademi's geographic reach. "We are looking at places like Vietnam, Malaysia, Dubai and other South Asian and Middle Eastern countries that are in the same situation that India is facing," says Jadcherla. "We want to make a difference in as many students' lives as possible."

For More Information

· To find out more about Cisco WebEx, go to: http://www.cisco.com/go/webex.

· To read other success stories, go to: http://www.cisco.com/go/webexcasestudies.

· To provide feedback or participate in the WebEx customer reference program, email: real.results@webex.com.

Product List

Collaboration Solutions
· Cisco WebEx Meeting Center

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San Jose, CA	Singapore	The Netherlands

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