Collaboration Turbo-charges Business Brainstorming

Cisco WebEx provides ideal platform for online mind-mapping to slash time and cost of collaborative problem-solving.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: iSpot

Industry: Business Advisory

Location: Scotland Head Office

Number of Employees: 6

Challenge
- Transform business model for proven strategic business software tool
- Enable direct, hands-on facilitation without travel or physical meetings
- Bring in multiple participants from any location, using any connected device

Solution
- Cisco WebEx collaborative platform enables powerful pre-sales demos
- WebEx online desktop-sharing via multiple devices with live audio and video
- Easy access to conference recordings for quick linkage to mind-maps

Results
- WebEx reach and scalability support global business model
- Average travel-related cost avoidance for meeting of ten people is £65,000 a day
- 100 percent sales conversion success rate from Cisco WebEx sales presentations

Challenge

iSpot provides an independent, impartial online service that is designed to help companies solve their business problems faster and at less cost. It helps teams formulate plans from the collaborative input of individual team members, and tracks implementation to fulfillment. The process is enabled by a live facilitator, using desktop-based mind-mapping tools created by the Scottish software developer, MindGenius Ltd

iSpot's founder, Ralph Clark, worked for five years on commercializing MindGenius. His role involved showing customers, face-to-face, how to get the most from the software, travelling to meetings, demonstrating its capabilities in person, and teaching them to use it effectively. Clark, believed that there was a clear demand for a fully serviced online approach, supported by a live facilitator.

To make real his vision, Clark needed a solution that would enable him to meet several challenges. The first challenge was to scale up capacity to serve a larger customer base, and cut out the need for costly, time-consuming travel, both for himself and his customers. The second challenge was to reach a potentially global market, enabling corporate collaborations across multiple time zones and geographies. The third challenge was to find an effective way to sell his service directly to top executives with the power to sign off expenditure, such as chief executive officers (CXOs), but who typically have little time to spend on promotional literature or listening to sales pitches.

Importantly, the solution would have to enable iSpot to replicate the live interaction and rapid exchange of ideas among a group of people meeting in person, but without their having to be physically present, and for whom English might be a second language. This requirement meant that, as well as being able to shape and follow a collaborative mind-map developing in real time, participants should have the option to see as well as hear one another.

Clark was already familiar with Cisco WebEx® and saw in the online platform the answer to his needs.

> "WebEx has created the single biggest revenue stream and the single biggest opportunity for the company. It's a very strong foundation for building on collaboration in a virtual environment."

Ralph Clark
Founder
iSpot

Solution

The facilitated iSpot process enables an exceptionally rapid and clear group definition of business problems, breaking them down into their component parts, seeing the cross-linkages quickly, and moving on to an agreed solution in which each group member knows exactly what actions they need to take and when. Thereafter, management of the plan can be tracked swiftly and effectively by regular Cisco® WebEx-based progress meetings.

iSpot has a range of effective tools to propel the mind-mapping process, from "disruptive" thinking through consensus-modeling and prioritization, to the assignment of individual tasks and timescales and determination of success metrics. It enables participants to harness their collective brainpower and drill down quickly to specifics, then manage implementation of an agreed plan through to completion.

Cisco WebEx enables the MindGenius software suite to be operated virtually, sweeping away the traditional clutter of Post-It notes and flip-charts. It requires no software download to corporate operating systems or end-user devices, and can be accessed not only from desktops and laptops but also wirelessly, on smartphones, tablets, or PDAs.

The Cisco WebEx platform is "device-agnostic," allowing participants to join wherever they may be, and contribute as fully to discussions as if they were in their offices. It also enables groups of people, located together physically in conference rooms, to join through network nodes and interact with the planning process via a digital display screen.

Cisco WebEx offers a virtual environment in which each step of the process can be initiated, on cue, by a skilled facilitator. One key to its success is WebEx's easy-to-use desktop sharing capability, coupled with the capacity to hand control of material shared to any participant, and type in mind-map text entries directly from their keyboards. "What WebEx allows you to do is to connect up brainpower at any time," says Clark.

Video can be added using webcams, showing participants' faces as screen thumbnails, which is a preferred option for some iSpot customers. WebEx also integrates smoothly with advanced Cisco TelePresence® technology to combine mind-mapping with a truly lifelike communication experience. iSpot can thus run fully immersive sessions, or blend TelePresence with WebEx. And sessions can be recorded for future reference on the WebEx digital audio function, or saved "live" within the mind mapping software and sent on to participants as slide-packs or maps.

"Video allows people to see the whites of the eyes and assess how someone is reacting within the group," says Clark. "WebEx enables the process to happen, and you can then enhance it with video capability. Immersing it into a TelePresence room pretty much stops organizations from having to travel, ever."

The scalability and flexibility of Cisco WebEx allow iSpot customers to participate in meetings in a variety of ways. For example, one group of people might be sitting together in a conference room, engaging with the process over a digital projector, with others connected over Cisco TelePresence, and others collaborating via WebEx from their desktop computers.

Even if video is not included, Cisco WebEx offers an easy way for participants to see who is speaking by displaying a telephone transmission logo onscreen next to the speaker's name, which is especially useful when people have not met before. Ease of scheduling by WebEx email invitations is another plus. Accepted invitations automatically integrate conference dates into e-calendars, with built-in adjustment for time-zone variations.

"The WebEx environment was perfectly suited to what we wanted, and we saved the best part of £25,000. Cost aside, I don't think we would have done it any other way."

Malcolm Beattie
Regional Personnel Manager
WesternGeco

Results

Clark says that by using MindGenius, he can achieve in one day results that would take five times as long to accomplish by traditional means. He says this is the same as if he attends a mind-mapping session in person and talks executives through the process face-to-face. The key advantages of using Cisco WebEx, for him and his customers, include avoiding the disruption, inconvenience, lost time, and cost of travel.

These advantages multiply when the customer group is large, or made up of very busy senior executives based in distant parts of the world. During a global banking merger, for instance, iSpot connected 23 senior executives across three continents to work out a new architecture to guard against money-laundering and fraud.

They had just four days to come up with a plan, which left no time for a physical meeting. In addition to speeding up high-quality decision making, Clark was told the bank avoided more than £100,000 in business costs for a single day, including avoidance of first-class flights and five-star hotels. He estimates the average daily saving for a group of ten, meeting virtually, at around £65,000.

The ease of collaboration achieved on Cisco WebEx means planning can be a continuous process of fine-tuning and review, replacing the old corporate routine of holding one grand meeting at lengthy intervals, and helping executives to maintain focus.

Malcolm Beattie, the personnel manager for the Middle East and North African operations of WesternGeco, a part of Schlumberger, the global oilfield services company, needed to coordinate worldwide induction processes for up to 250 new employees each year, across a confusing and heterogeneous mix of contracts and different paper-based information formats that varied widely by region.

He used regular monthly sessions with iSpot to work through the problems with recruiting managers based in Europe, the Americas, and the Middle East. "As a quality improvement project, it was better than everyone sitting down and hammering something out in a room," says Beattie. "It enabled tasks to be set and for people to then carry them out and come together again to review progress and the next steps. The WebEx environment was perfectly suited to what we wanted, and we saved the best part of £25,000 in travel costs. Cost aside, I don't think we would have done it any other way."

iSpot's service enables customers quickly to reach any chosen level of granularity, which is especially useful as business strategy and tactics become more closely entwined. Much the same applies to iSpot's progress tracking. Clark has customers who "block-book" 100 hours of review sessions and draw them down when required.

Ian Stevenson, Health, Safety and Environment Director at the global oil and gas technology and project management company, Technip, deals with seven regional reports in Rio, Houston, Paris, Aberdeen, Rome, Kuala Lumpur, and Abu Dhabi.

Having first experienced iSpot's methods face-to-face, he found the WebEx environment helpful in a multilingual context. "People who don't have English as their first language find this process much easier on WebEx, because they can actually see what is being written in English and not just have to listen to what's been said," says Stevenson.

For Clark, Cisco WebEx is highly effective in helping to win new business from prospects all over the world. He writes, by hand, to top executives in target companies, offering a 15-minute session to demonstrate iSpot over WebEx. That gets him a 70 percent response rate, but the conversion rate once people

experience online is 100 percent. He pays a fixed monthly fee for WebEx usage, making his costs predictable, and 70 percent of revenue is earned via WebEx consultations.

"WebEx has created the single biggest revenue stream and the single biggest opportunity for iSpot," he says. "It's a very strong foundation for building on collaboration in a virtual environment."

Next Steps

After establishing the viability and benefits of combining iSpot with Cisco TelePresence capabilities from both Cisco and iSpot customer TelePresence suites, Clark plans to install a TelePresence terminal.

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

Product List

· Cisco WebEx

· Cisco TelePresence CTS 500