

Telepresence Sparks In-Person Exchanges for Global Artists

Customer Case Study



National Dance Institute Uses Cisco TelePresence, Tata Communications Network to Allow Far-Flung Dancers to Share Stage

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: National Dance Institute

Industry: Arts Education

Location: New York, NY

Number of Employees: 55

Number of Students: 5200+

Challenge:

- Collaborate and provide cultural exchanges globally with artists and children.
- Train teachers nationally and internationally in NDI pedagogy.
- Extend NDI reach and sustainability without large capital outlays.

Solution:

- Integrated Cisco TelePresence with audio and video systems at new NDI facility in Harlem
- Connected to Tata Communications' Global Meeting Exchange Telepresence inter-exchange network to unite teachers, musicians, and dancers in New York, Shanghai
- Took advantage of partnership between Cisco and Tata Communications to facilitate real-time global choreography/performance session

Results:

- Composed music and choreographed dance in real time with distant collaborators
- Transformed NDI center into hub for international arts exchanges
- Aided development efforts and increased NDI visibility among artists, educators

Challenge

Former New York City Ballet star and dance world legend Jacques d'Amboise is a firm believer in the power of the arts. So much so, in fact, that he has devoted the better part of his life to making arts education a part of every child's life, not just those who are economically privileged or have demonstrated some rare talent or aptitude. He knows that the arts can be used to inspire and instill excellence in all children, and it is with that vision that he founded National Dance Institute (NDI) in 1976.

What started as an effort to use dance as the catalyst to bring arts to the public schools of New York City more than 35 years ago has since spread to 11 formally affiliated NDIs across the United States. NDI has also participated in cultural exchanges with countries across the globe and has seeded a program in Shanghai that began last year in 8 schools and is expanding to 17 schools in the coming year. Although each program is unique and adapted to local culture, all share the NDI teaching methodology, which focuses on performance, immediate and honest feedback, and real-time assessment.

Distance, however, can prove an obstacle to this approach, and NDI has struggled to overcome challenges of time and space as it attempts to extend its mission: reaching as many children and training as many teachers as possible. Says NDI Executive Director Kathy Landau, "In the early days, we would send teams to schools in San Francisco, Boston, and other locales, and we would work with them for a couple of weeks and then leave. Not only was this a drain on our resources, but when we left, the program generally left as well. We learned that the key to seeding and sustaining programs is training people locally in our pedagogy. TelePresence will allow us to maintain a relationship with and mentor these programs in real time regardless of locale."

To that end, NDI offers teacher artist training, which takes place in New York and abroad. Even so, there are organizations whose budgets are too small to send teams to New York or that are too remote for the Teacher Training Residencies to come to them. D'Amboise wants to reach them, too. In addition to reaching more teachers, he wants NDI students to become global citizens through dance, collaborating with their cohorts across the globe.



“Our challenge has always been in getting people to see the program. Now, with Cisco TelePresence and a Tata Communications network connection, we can get people ‘into the room’ without actually having them in the room.”

Ellen Weinstein
Artistic Director
NDI

Solution

D’Amboise has long known that technology would play a key role in carrying out his vision, but it was not until his 2010 introduction to Cisco® TelePresence® technology that he saw what was truly possible: immersive, real-time, in-person collaboration with colleagues separated by 5 miles or 5000 miles. Says d’Amboise, “I first came across TelePresence when our artistic director, Ellen Weinstein, and dancer/choreographer Dou Dou Huang were co-choreographing a piece in Shanghai. I was in New York, giving notes and adding to the choreography, and we were doing it all through TelePresence. I was so excited about the experience that I immediately ran out and bought Cisco stock!”

Says Weinstein, “In anticipation of bringing five children from Shanghai to New York, we thought it would be wonderful to bring the children together via TelePresence. When they finally met in New York, it was as if they were old friends, already familiar with each other and the choreography. We also wanted to get some feedback from Jacques, so we presented our new choreography to him, and in real time he coached the dancers in Shanghai and gave us feedback on the movement. It was amazing to be able to have this exchange in real time.”

Landau concurs. “Through this exchange, we saw that we could not only connect long distance but actually move through space together,” she says. “That was a revelation. We suddenly realized that our goal of making these children global citizens could be realized through Cisco TelePresence without a huge commitment of time, money, and personnel and without extensive long-range planning.”

D’Amboise knew instantly that NDI had to incorporate Cisco TelePresence in its new Harlem facility, which was slated to open in 2011. “When I told George Soros what I planned to do with TelePresence, he said, ‘If you can get involved in global communications, you’re walking into the future,’” says d’Amboise. “Well, that’s precisely what we wanted to do. We realized it would be extraordinary for our children and artists to have the immediacy afforded by TelePresence.”

With d’Amboise championing the technology and the board giving the go-ahead, NDI soon entered into a partnership with Cisco and Tata Communications to bring TelePresence to its new Harlem facility. Integrating the Cisco TelePresence Codec C40, a 22-inch-by-18-inch device that transmits and receives video, with the projectors and sound system already installed in the new performance space, Cisco then used a leased circuit from Tata Communications to facilitate a reliable and wide-reaching global connection. By connecting via that company’s Global Meeting Exchange telepresence inter-exchange network, NDI now had access to more than 40 public telepresence rooms across five continents as well as all of Tata Communications’ private TelePresence rooms. With a camera connected to the Cisco TelePresence Codec, NDI was set to begin its TelePresence adventure.

Results

In January 2013, NDI put its own Cisco TelePresence installation, connected via the Tata Communications network, to work for the first time to collaborate once again with students and teachers in Shanghai. This time, however, the session involved not just d’Amboise coaching the kids from the Harlem facility but rather a full choreography session between the far-flung participants that resulted in a new dance and an original musical composition.

Placing the TelePresence camera on a tripod on the floor of the NDI performance space alongside the dancers, NDI enabled artists separated by more than 8000 miles to connect, move, and interact as if they were sharing the same stage. Says Weinstein, "Using five children, a choreographer, and some musicians from Shanghai and a similar combination of artists in our Harlem facility, we created four bars of music here in New York, had our choreographer come up with movement in real time, and then taught it to the children here and in Shanghai. Then, we threw it all back to Shanghai, where their musicians and choreographer added to the piece, again in real time, and we all learned it and danced it together. The result was absolutely thrilling. In New York, the movement was very strong. In Shanghai, it was much more delicate. What was really gorgeous was the melding of the two. The result of the TelePresence collaboration was a beautiful piece of choreography that each group contributed to and was stronger than the individual parts."

But the benefits of that TelePresence session did not end with the completed piece of choreography. Once the dance was finished, an impromptu information exchange between teachers in Shanghai and New York took place. Says Landau, "We happened to have a team of teachers leading training in Shanghai at the time, and our teaching artists in New York needed feedback on choreography that was to be rehearsed at the NDI center that weekend. By the end of our TelePresence session, our New York and Shanghai teachers had reviewed and enhanced choreography that would be rehearsed with the children in our advanced program here in New York."

Next Steps

While NDI is still in the very early stages of Cisco TelePresence use in its Harlem facility, d'Amboise, Weinstein, and Landau are all brimming with ideas about how they can use it going forward. Says Landau, "Each time we use Cisco TelePresence, we come away inspired and with additional plans for employing it to bolster the delivery and management of the NDI process." These plans include aiding the organization's fundraising and development efforts as well as its ambition to make the Harlem facility a global hub for learning and the arts. Plans also include using TelePresence to extend best practices, training, board development, and infrastructure support to NDI's satellite programs around the country.

Says Landau, "Anything that helps deepen and broaden our reach, as TelePresence does, also helps with fundraising. For people who believe in distance learning and cultural diplomacy, TelePresence will make a huge difference."

Weinstein agrees. "Once you get somebody in the room to experience NDI, they fall in love," she says. "Our challenge has always been in getting people to see the program. Now, with Cisco TelePresence and a Tata Communications network connection, we can get people 'into the room' without actually having them in the room. TelePresence is going to have a huge impact on our ability to convey the power of the arts in the life of a child and to train teachers, directly impacting the quality of arts education nationally and internationally."

D'Amboise sums it up best. "Feeling like you're in the dance room together, communicating when the person you're collaborating with is actually a projection from the other side of the world, is one of the most thrilling examples of hands across the globe one can imagine," he says. "Now, let's make it a common thing!"

For More Information

- To find out more about Cisco collaboration, visit: www.cisco.com/go/collaboration.
- To find out more about Cisco TelePresence, visit: www.cisco.com/go/telepresence.
- To find out more about Tata Communications' telepresence ecosystem, visit: www.tatatelepresence.com.

Product List

- Cisco TelePresence Codec C40
- Cisco TelePresence PrecisionHD 1080p camera
- Cisco 2900 Series Integrated Services Router



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