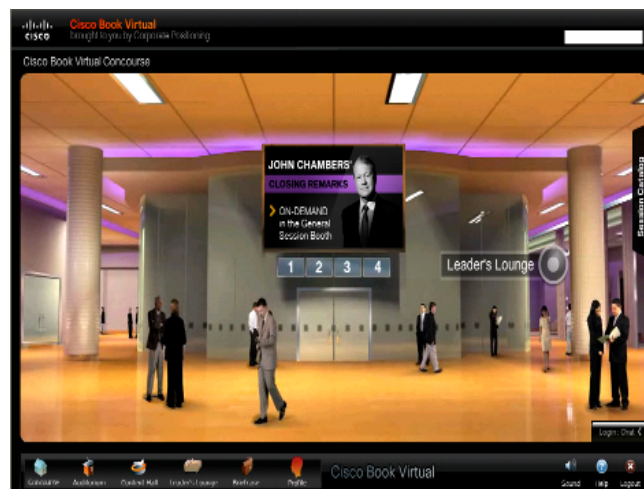


## Next-Generation Events

### Cisco Strategic Leadership Offsite



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Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG)

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### Overview

With the pressures of globalization, increased competition, and the continually accelerating information explosion, the need for employees, customers, and partners to come together, exchange knowledge, gain fresh perspectives, build networks, and nurture relationships has never been greater. Despite these important benefits, many organizations are questioning whether events deliver business impact commensurate with their costs, especially during an economic downturn. Traditional events suffer from high costs, limited audience reach, low flexibility, and inconsistent outcomes.

Many of the challenges associated with in-person events can be overcome by augmenting a traditional event with a wide range of technology-enabled enhancements. The resulting next-generation event expands options for participation in both space and time, enabling the attendee to choose to attend in person or remotely, live or on a delayed basis, and for the entire program or just selected sessions. This flexibility can help the event organizer attract a wider audience, engage that audience more effectively, and lower costs for both the host and attendees.

Cisco has been a pioneer in creating highly successful next-generation events, and we are sharing our experiences through a series of case studies and a strategic event management framework for getting started.<sup>1</sup> Cisco also provides a wide range of products and services that enable next-generation events under Cisco's Collaboration for Events experience<sup>2</sup> (see [www.cisco.com/go/collaboration4events](http://www.cisco.com/go/collaboration4events)). In this paper, we profile our experience in shifting our Strategic Leadership Offsite (SLO) from an in-person format to a completely virtual next-generation event.

**Figure 1.** How Next-Generation Events Differ from Traditional Events

From Traditional Events . . .	. . . To Next Generation Events
Incur cost, lost productivity, and environmental impact of travel	Reduce costs, lost productivity, and environmental impact from travel
One physical location	Multiple physical locations possible
Must attend in person, limiting participation	Can attend remotely, greatly expanding audience
Must attend in real-time	Can view on delayed basis
One-size fits all agenda	Individually tailored agendas
Experience is limited to event itself	Experience extends before and after event
Audience feedback given after event	Real-time feedback given during event
Personal networking is random process	Interest driven networking via social tools
Awareness generation via traditional marketing	Awareness generation amplified via social media

Source: Cisco IBSG, 2010

**Strategic Leadership Offsite (SLO) Highlights:**

- Reduced cost per attendee from \$2,500 to \$1,400
  - Maintained high employee ratings of communication effectiveness
  - Avoided 19 hours of travel time per attendee
  - Enhanced flexibility with 49 percent more sessions
  - Extended event over time (before and after live event)
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**Introduction: Cisco Strategic Leadership Offsite (SLO)**

Cisco's annual Strategic Leadership Offsite (SLO) is one of the most important events for Cisco's senior leadership team (directors, vice presidents, and above). Its primary focus is on communicating the updated vision, strategy, and execution plans for the coming fiscal year. Its overarching objective is to collapse the time to alignment, and thereby enable speed, flexibility, and effectiveness in execution. Additional business objectives include enabling leadership development and providing networking opportunities.

**Challenge**

Traditionally, SLO was held as an in-person event at an offsite conference center near Cisco's San Jose headquarters. Leaders from around the world would fly in for this two-day event, incurring significant travel costs and lost productive time. The event format included several general sessions attended by everyone (2,000+ people), smaller breakout sessions organized by market area or customer segment (100-300 people), and highly interactive sessions where groups of 20-30 directors and VPs would discuss strategic issues with Cisco's senior leaders. There was also an informal evening dinner that provided extensive opportunities for socializing.

For our fiscal year 2010 event held in May 2009, the leadership team decided that incurring the expense of a traditional in-person meeting would not be prudent in the face of the downturn. We began to explore conducting SLO as a virtual event to respond to the need to cut travel costs, demonstrate the power of collaboration technologies, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We realized, however, that we faced a serious challenge because we had never attempted to hold an event of this scale, complexity, and duration via a virtual approach. Thus, significant effort was required to plan and implement this first-of-its-kind virtual event.

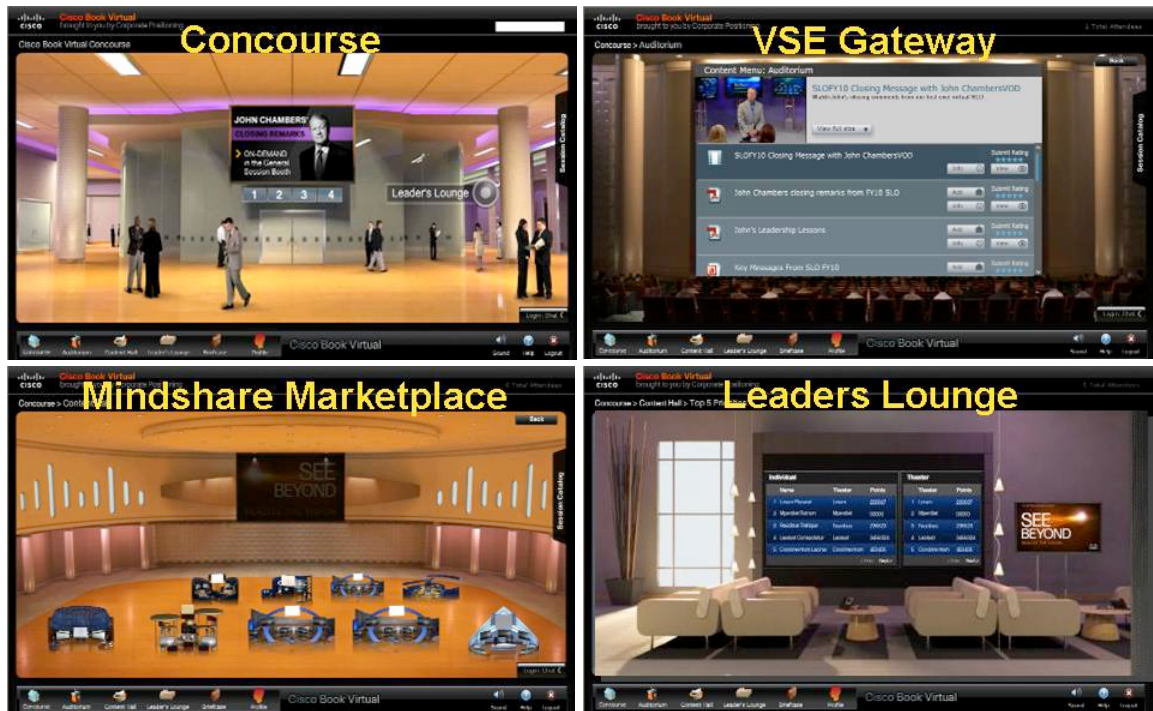
**New Approach: Adding Virtual Capabilities**

As we began planning for the event, we realized that rather than replicating the format of the in-person meeting, we had the opportunity to adapt the format to take advantage of virtual capabilities. Key enhancements included increasing the number of session options, providing more content (documents and videos), and making much of the information available prior to the event.

We deployed different collaboration technologies to align with the business requirements of the different session formats. For example, we employed IPTV for the large-scale sessions with all 2,954 attendees, while Cisco TelePresence created a more intimate experience for

the leadership exchanges in groups of 20. A virtual platform provided by 6Connex was used to build the virtual environment in which attendees could interact and access content.

**Figure 2.** Places in the SLO Virtual Environment Emulate a Physical Conference Center



## Results

Overall, the first virtual SLO was highly successful. We demonstrated that this virtual format was effective in helping meet the company's communications objectives:

- Eighty-two percent of attendees indicated they understood Cisco's updated vision and strategy.
- Seventy-four percent of attendees reported having a clear direction on where to allocate their staff, time, and resources to achieve FY10 priorities.
- Many of the presentation sessions were rated just as highly as they had been in the prior year. For example, the keynote sessions scored 4.5 out of 5.0 in both the virtual SLO and the prior year's in-person event.

As expected, we attained significant cost savings. Total costs of the event (travel, production, and internal labor) declined from \$6.7 million to \$4.2 million, a 37 percent savings. On top of these direct cost savings, the value-of-time savings from reduced attendee travel were \$1.8 million.

While all of these results were extremely encouraging, we did identify areas for improvement. For example, we did not fully achieve our leadership development and networking goals. Participants felt that the virtual format did not provide sufficient networking opportunities or produce the same level of impact on leadership development as the in-person event. To address this, we are considering options for evolving the format to a hybrid

physical/virtual approach. In the future, we may ask employees to gather in person at our major sites, and link these sites using remote collaboration technologies.

Additional details on Cisco's first virtual SLO can be found in two case studies: one from a business perspective<sup>3</sup> and one from an IT perspective.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 3.** Key Metrics for SLO

	Traditional Event	Next-Generation Event
Date	May 2008	May 2009
Attendees	2,662	2,954
Total Event Costs	\$6.7 million	\$4.2 million
Cost Per Attendee	\$2,508	\$1,408
Duration	2 days full-time	3 days part-time
Attendee Travel Time	2 days	0
Value of Time Savings from Avoided Travel	\$0	\$1.8 million
Number of Sessions:		
- General/Breakout	15	40
- Leadership Exchanges	64	78
Real-Time Interaction	No	Yes, via text chat
Attendee Rating of Keynote Sessions	4.5 out of 5.0	4.5 out of 5.0

Source: Cisco IBSG, 2010

## References

1. "Cisco's Experience with Next-Generation Events: Enhancing Meetings and Events with Collaboration Capabilities To Improve Business Impact and Reduce Costs," Cisco IBSG, July 2010; series of additional white papers and case studies will be available under the "Featured Content" and "Experience" sections of <http://www.cisco.com/web/about/ac79/innov/index.html>
2. Overview of products and services offered by Cisco Collaboration for Events experience, [www.cisco.com/go/collaboration4events](http://www.cisco.com/go/collaboration4events)
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