

Polish Economy Bounces Back With New Management and Technology Education Platform

Executive Summary

CUSTOMER NAME

Foundation for Economic Education,
European Union, Poznan University
of Economics, Poland

INDUSTRY

Public Sector and Education

CHALLENGES

- Provide Polish businesses with management and ICT skills to compete globally
- Help local and regional government transform businesses and communities via ICT
- Make the best use of government funds
- Demonstrate value of technology

SOLUTION

Custom ICT-related education programs

RESULTS

- Built partnerships and achieved financial support from the EU
- Provided ICT-related strategy and management education to professionals
- Developed business plans to secure funding

Despite emerging as a free-market country just 17 years ago, Poland today is enjoying a major economic resurgence. As Poland ascends within the European Union, the need for government, citizens, and business to be connected is encouraging large investments in information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and programs. Polish educators and government agencies are working with the Cisco® Internet Business Solutions Group and the Cisco Entrepreneur Institute (CiscoEI) to build human capital and develop innovative technology solutions in order to take full advantage of these investments and transform the Polish economy.

Business Challenges

All businesses and governments have had to adapt to the modern, global economy, but the transition has been more challenging for some than others. Emerging from decades of Communist rule in 1990, Poland has had to catch up quickly. Whereas almost no small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) existed in the country in 1990, today there are two million. Despite this success, Poland faces many barriers to establishing an economy that is on par with the rest of the European Union (EU). Unlike past generations, in which few citizens earned a college degree, today 50 percent of Polish graduates ages 19 to 24 attend universities. To create employment opportunities for these students upon graduation and grow the overall economy, the country needs to develop and expand entrepreneurship, especially among SMEs, and create a strong private sector based on advanced technology and services.

“Polish SMEs employ an important part of our workforce, but most are local businesses, serving local customers,” says Wojciech Cellary, professor, Poznan University of Economics. “Globalization and international competition are putting these businesses in danger. To participate in the global economy, they need to adopt modern methods of business management and wise use of ICT.”



Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG)

While Poland has developed very quickly over the last few years, it trails behind other European countries in its general use of ICT, says Witold Sartorius, director general of the Polish Competence Centre for e-Government and e-Education (PCC). “This is true for our enterprises as well as for the public sector. One major reason is that many people just do not understand what ICT can do for them and why they should invest in it.”

To help modernize the economy, the EU has committed US\$92 billion to Poland in the next six years, with as much as 10 percent of those funds dedicated to ICT investment. While ample funding will be available, Poland has only recently begun to implement a centralized, government-sponsored master plan to direct ICT spending. Even though some public support schemes exist (mostly fueled by EU funding), investment decisions will need to be led largely by SMEs and thousands of regional and local governments. The problem with this, however, is that many professionals lack the necessary ICT and management skills needed to transform service delivery and compete effectively in a global economy. Polish leaders also worry that the EU funding available for ICT investments in the country over the next several years will not be used and absorbed properly. With so many decentralized decision makers and little ICT knowledge throughout the country, Polish leaders were concerned that this unique opportunity to transform the country might not be exploited to its fullest degree.

Solutions

Polish educators, business development leaders, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) recognized that they had to change the mind-set of the country's professionals and local governments regarding the value of ICT, and provide them with the skills necessary to transform their organizations. They turned to both the Cisco [Internet Business Solutions Group \(IBSG\)](#) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) organization for help in achieving their goals.

PCC and a number of Polish universities had been providing networking training to Polish IT professionals for several years through the [Cisco Networking Academy®](#) program. When Sartorius and Cellary learned about the Cisco Business Essentials program—a course developed as part of the Cisco iExecutive Education Program to help students develop new IT and Internet application strategies—they felt that it was a perfect match for Poland's needs.

“It's a very unique program,” says Cellary. “There are many courses available that explain how to use information technology, but I do not know of any others that teach how to transform an enterprise using information technology to adapt to globalization.”

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Economics

Many believed that having the Cisco name behind the program would help attract students. “Cisco is a very serious company and a great brand,” says Sartorius. “When you explain to people the kind of program you’re offering and you say ‘Cisco,’ they immediately start listening to you more carefully.”

IBSG and CSR worked with PCC and Poznan University of Economics to provide training and support to adapt the program to serve as both a graduate school course and a workshop for local and regional government officials. They then went through an extensive piloting process to determine the best way to deliver the education.

At Poznan University of Economics and PCC, the course is delivered typically within six weeks, allowing students—usually professionals from Polish SMEs—to examine how the course may apply to their organizations and use the lessons learned in their business practices. By the end of the course, students create a business plan for incorporating ICT into their companies. Instructors and fellow students evaluate the proposals, and a banker serving the SME community provides feedback on the strength of the proposals to secure funding. The course offers more than just management education programs; professionals graduate with a strong, detailed business transformation plan that they can use to apply for private or EU funding.

Business Results

Today, PCC and Poznan University of Economics are successfully delivering the Business Essentials course to dozens of Polish students, state-owned enterprises, SMEs, and local governments. The pilot also drew the attention of Poland’s Minister of Interior and Administration, which has incorporated it into Poland’s e-Worker program. The Administration provides millions of dollars in EU funding to train Polish professionals. Using e-Worker funding, the program will train 1,000 SMEs in 2008.

“An SME may not have money to travel directly to customers around the world, but they now have the funding to integrate computer systems and communicate with people by different means,” says Cellary. “However, they need to know how. We are providing that knowledge.”

Many of the course’s graduates are already using the knowledge they have gained to implement new, Internet-enabled business applications. For example, a major Polish tourism and hotel group developed a business plan during the Business Essentials pilot to deploy new booking and management software. Based on the strength of that plan, the organization secured private funding for the project and has since implemented the solution, allowing the company to increase sales and operate efficiently.

Local and regional government officials receiving the training have also responded positively. “It has been a great experience delivering this course to governments because we are raising awareness of how a modern administration should operate,” says Cellary. “It is very exciting to see how the officials we train are discovering new ways of thinking about their organizations and new possibilities to transform the societies around them through ICT.”

“When you introduce ICT in a smart way, it greatly increases the efficiency of businesses and of government,” adds Sartorius. “The barrier to achieving this is not money because the money is now available, and it is not technology because the technology is available. The barrier is in the heads of people, in their understanding of the issue. The Business Essentials course is allowing us to directly address that gap.”

Next Steps

The Business Essentials course and the iExecutive Education Program are now part of CiscoEI, which is being established in Poland with the help of PCC. CiscoEI is forming public and private partnerships with governments, NGOs, and educational institutions to deliver entrepreneurial education; build a community of support across new and existing businesses; and connect participants with mentors, lending organizations, and peers using network technology.

Cellary, Sartorius, and PCC plan to work with CiscoEI and IBSG to create a version of the Business Essentials course in Polish, using Polish business scenarios and examples. When completed, the course will allow PCC to reach tens of thousands of new learners.

The Polish government is creating a new grant program that will make a little more than \$550 million of EU funding available to individuals starting new Internet-enabled businesses. The program is expected to fund the creation of 30,000 new Polish companies. Sartorius and Cellary are working with the Polish government to position the Business Essentials course as basic preparation for anyone applying for funding through the grant. Based on the course's success so far, they believe it will enhance the effectiveness of the grant program by helping applicants develop the skills and the business plans they need to secure funding and to succeed.

More Information

The Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG), the global strategic consulting arm of Cisco, helps Global Fortune 500 companies and public organizations transform the way they do business—first by designing innovative business processes, and then by integrating advanced technologies into visionary roadmaps that improve customer experience and revenue growth.

For further information about IBSG, visit <http://www.cisco.com/go/ibsg>



Americas Headquarters
Cisco Systems, Inc.
170 West Tasman Drive
San Jose, CA 95134-1706
USA
www.cisco.com
Tel: 408 526-4000
800 553-NETS (6387)
Fax: 408 527-0883

Asia Pacific Headquarters
Cisco Systems, Inc.
168 Robinson Road
#28-01 Capital Tower
Singapore 068912
www.cisco.com
Tel: +65 6317 7777
Fax: +65 6317 7799

Europe Headquarters
Cisco Systems International BV
Haarlerbergpark
Haarlerbergweg 13-19
1101 CH Amsterdam
The Netherlands
www-europe.cisco.com
Tel: +31 0 800 020 0791
Fax: +31 0 20 357 1100

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