

State Library Improves Connectivity of Public Library Network



Maine State Library installs video conferencing system to facilitate cross-site resource sharing and benefit patrons.

Executive Summary

Maine State Library

- **Industry:** State and Local Government and Education
- **Location:** State of Maine

CHALLENGE

- Support rapid growth and expansion of library services, specifically to vulnerable populations
- Increase connectivity between remote library sites to facilitate librarian training, communication, and resource dissemination

SOLUTION

- Deploy TelePresence Movi system on existing and new hardware to link geographically dispersed libraries serving as public computing centers.

RESULTS

- Improved connectivity and utilization of Maine public libraries network and distribution of resources across public sector to vulnerable populations.
- Facilitated patron usage of services at public libraries throughout state
- Enabled librarians across Maine to receive competitive technological and informational training

Challenge

The Maine State Library (MSL) works with 269 public libraries throughout Maine and facilitates access to and delivery of library services and collection resources. Recently, the American Library Association found that for 73 percent of Americans, public libraries are the sole source of free internet access. In Maine, public libraries represent crucial resource centers for many citizens, especially for individuals living in rural areas who may lack domestic means of accessing basic computer services. Maine public libraries have access to high-speed connection through the Maine School and Library Network (MSLN) and provide some of the only free access to high-speed broadband in rural parts of the state. In fact, 89 percent of the public libraries in Maine are situated in towns with fewer than 10,000 residences.

Maine public libraries have moved beyond merely “checking-out books” and have become centers where citizens can access a wider range of resources and receive stronger support in areas including technology, career and job assistance, and legal information- sectors. Specifically, the Maine State Library identified three vulnerable populations in the state who would benefit from an expansion of increased access to, and facilitated dissemination of, resources: unemployed persons (at 8 percent in February 2011), senior citizens (16 percent over the age of 65 in Maine), and low-income individuals (11 percent of the population living below the poverty level).

Maine public libraries faced a veritable connectivity issue; the geographic disparity of its library sites posed a significant barrier to communication among the various library centers, negatively affecting resource distribution and training programs. Compounding this issue was the limited physical hardware available in libraries utilizing the MSLN. These particular challenges were identified for the Maine Public Library Information Commons Project and the Broadband Technologies Opportunities Program (BTOP) grant, which establishes partnerships between the MSL, Maine public libraries, and the Maine Department of Labor (Career Centers and Workforce Investment Boards), Department of education Adult Education, Access to Justice (a Justice Action Group), InforME (Information Resource of Maine), multiple health organizations and Networkmaine to address many challenges facing the state. The project identified four distinct goals:

- Increase the number of computers and workstations available to the public by over 40 percent in 107 public libraries;
- Establish 11 regional hubs in 11 counties with IP-based video conferencing capability;
- Use those video conferencing hubs to better connect and serve a maximum of 1,030,714 Maine citizens in their counties; and
- Provide local librarians with advanced training in technology and information skills.

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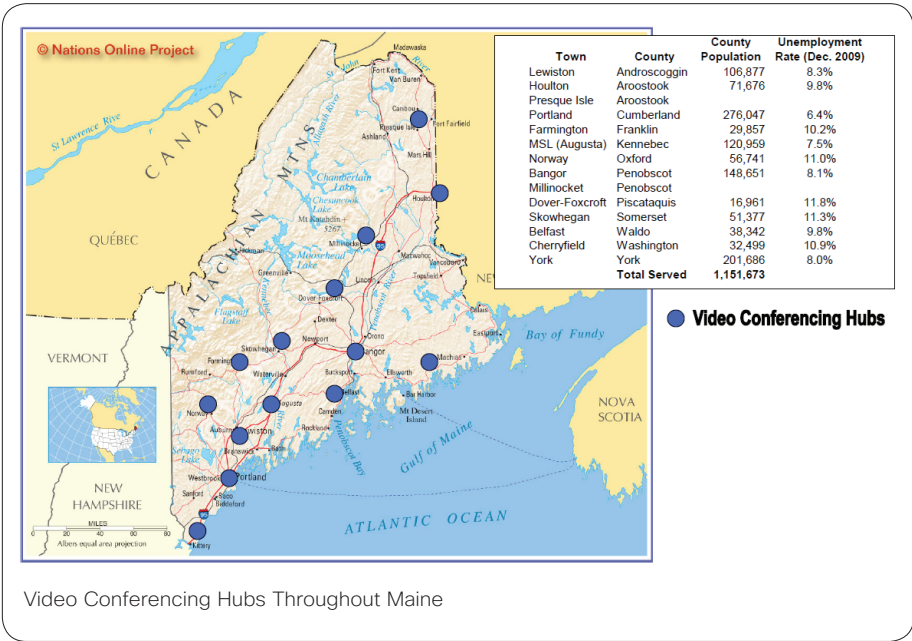


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“The quality of TelePresence has been amazing... Movi is technology that we haven’t had but that we really needed.”

Melanie Taylor Coombs
Library Director, Farmington Public Library

The MSL was aware of the success with existing equipment in schools and wanted to leverage existing Networkmaine resources, so Cisco Tandberg equipment was the logical choice.



Solution

To accomplish the goals set in the Maine Public Library Information Commons Project, MSL officials saw the need for technology that would make online services and resources more accessible to a wider range of constituents and narrow, at least virtually, the gap between library centers. In particular, any technological solution implemented needed to leverage existing Networkmaine infrastructure equipment already in place for over 340 schools and three Maine libraries.

Cisco was identified as a key partner in bringing Maine State Libraries’ goals to life.

Implementing Hardware Initiative

MSL needed to first increase the number of computers and workstations available to the public, further increasing access to the libraries’ valuable resources to more than 683,647 users in Maine. Through the BTOP, Cisco supplied various physical equipment, dependent on sites’ needs and capacities, totaling 247 all-in-one desktop computers with webcams, 265 laptops with webcams, three mobile labs (10 laptops in each with projectors and rolling cases), and 11 TelePresence units with supporting infrastructure.

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Product List

VIDEO

- Cisco TelePresence Movi

Utilizing Cisco TelePresence as Solution

With the hardware in place, MSL identified Cisco TelePresence® as the most efficient means of providing crucially needed video collaboration between remote library sites. Cisco® Movi is a cost-effective mobile TelePresence solution offering high quality, secure face-to-face communications from anywhere. Movi allows library center staff to seamlessly connect with each other regardless of geography, and collaborate on librarian training and information sharing.

How Telepresence Addresses Maine State Libraries' Specific Needs

107 libraries were custom fitted with the Cisco TelePresence technology, each designed to individual needs. For example, libraries in Augusta, Portland and Bangor used mobile labs, while other libraries used all-in-one desktops units.

By using Cisco TelePresence, the MSL maximized its budget. Considering 37 percent of the libraries spend less than US\$25,000 a year for their total budget, MSL needed a solution that provides a significant return on investment (ROI). Telepresence lowers the cost-per-user of video deployment, while raising productivity of an institution, which addresses MSL's budget limitations.

Results

Cisco succeeded in increasing the connectivity of the Maine public libraries and streamlining the distribution of resources across the public sector. Telepresence "helped to melt away the distance," according to Melanie Taylor Coombs, library director for the Farmington Public Library, and allowed MSL to communicate more effectively and rapidly with each other and their respective patrons.

The benefits of Cisco TelePresence can be seen across the board. Using TelePresence, MSL has trained approximately 24,000 individuals per week, with the goal of reaching 120,000 per year. Most excitingly, Cisco introduced librarians and Maine citizens to TelePresence technology at the 11 hubs, up from two sites, leading to significant information resources strides. As a result, MSLs are able to stay relevant as leading information providers for the Maine school system, which has 400 video conference systems already in place. Telepresence enables MSLs to connect with students via interactive video without the need for travel.

Telepresence technology has also provided the foundation for training services to Maine citizens. For example, Cisco TelePresence enabled librarians across Maine to receive face-to-face technological and informational training. In addition, using Movi, MSLs established digital literacy training programs to teach patrons the basics of computer functions, for example, how to set up personal email accounts, social networking, and searching the web. Finally, libraries and librarians have increasingly directed patrons to accurate justice-related resources, such as legal information and web sources.

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Librarians at Main's public libraries raved about the quality of TelePresence. Coombs noted: "The quality of TelePresence has been amazing... Movi is technology that we haven't had but that we really needed." Newly installed, with the benefits becoming more and more apparent, Cisco TelePresence has become an indispensable technology to MSL programs.

For More Information

To find out more about the Cisco TelePresence systems, go to:
<http://www.cisco.com/telepresence>.

