

Not-for-Profit Transforms Communication Service Delivery

Center for Sight & Hearing enhances quality of life for individuals with vision and hearing losses using Cisco tools.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Center for Sight & Hearing

Industry: Rehabilitation and Healthcare

Location: Rockford, Illinois

Number of Employees: 22

Challenge:

- Improve quality of life for individuals with vision and/or hearing losses
- Provide communication support for greater number of individuals regardless of location
- Manage and expand networking and communications infrastructure

Solution:

- Cisco WebEx Meeting Center provides two-way audio/video and desktop-sharing tools
- Cisco WebEx Support Center allows for troubleshooting remote computers
- Cisco Unified Communications delivers convenient voice communications for local and remote staff

Results:

- Increased delivery of captioning services by 100 percent; sign language interpreting services by 50 percent
- Improved productivity, giving employees flexibility to work from any location
- Reduced travel expenses and extended savings to clients

Challenge

Founded in 1962, the Center for Sight & Hearing is a not-for-profit agency that helps individuals with hearing and/or vision losses to enhance their quality of life and live more independently. The Center provides a range of solutions and services, including sign language interpreting and captioning, to a diverse base of clients.

Looking to expand its reach and assist more individuals, the Center for Sight & Hearing's president, Diane Jones, launched a first-of-its-kind remote services initiative. "The driving time necessary to be with a client in person was taking away from valuable service time," she says. "We wanted to leverage technology in a way that would help us broaden our reach and work more efficiently."



Video conferencing was the ideal medium, but a number of factors needed to be considered, especially when communicating through sign language. "Performance and resolution were the primary concerns," says Ann Gronlund, communications specialist at the Center for Sight & Hearing. "We needed a video solution with the highest frames per second to not only transmit our hand gestures in real time, but also to capture the many minute movements in American Sign Language."

Solution

The Center for Sight & Hearing found its answer from a source that was already well-established in the agency's infrastructure: Cisco. Based on years of positive experience with Cisco® networking and Unified Communications technologies, the not-for-profit decided to implement Cisco WebEx® technology to deliver remote services to individuals.



“We now have the opportunity to extend our hearing and vision services outside our physical building, helping anyone, anywhere.”

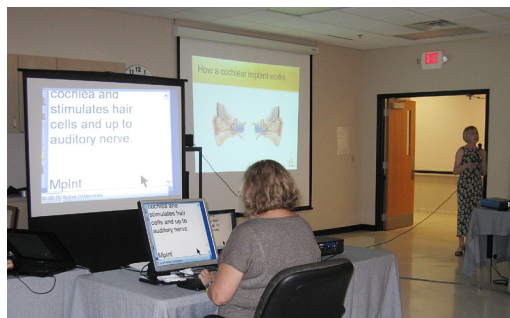
Diane Jones
President
Center for Sight & Hearing

Online Sign Language and Captioning Services

Using high-quality video in Cisco WebEx Meeting Center, Gronlund provides sign language interpreting services for individuals who need help with communication access in certain types of situations, such as doctors' appointments. “We're connected to a number of medical clinics in the area to deliver remote video interpreting,” says Gronlund. “I hear what the doctor is saying and sign what they're saying through video. Then I can see what the client is signing back to me and interpret that vocally to the doctor.” The Center also provides sign language interpreting services for childbirth prep classes, mental health and drug addiction counseling, dentist appointments, and more.

In addition, the Center for Sight & Hearing works with schools and universities, primarily to deliver remote captioning for students with hearing losses. In these cases, a captionist listens to the professor or teacher, who is wearing a wireless microphone, and transcribes in real time through the WebEx desktop-sharing interface. WebEx Meeting Center allows the captionist to be remote, replacing the old model of being at the student's side in the classroom.

“Imagine being 15 years old with a hearing disability; you wouldn't want a captionist sitting next to you in class, drawing attention,” says Kathy Mueller, a former client-turned-captionist for the Center for Sight & Hearing. “But now students can pull out their computer and look just like everyone else. Remote services through WebEx have given them an independence they wouldn't have otherwise.”



Remote Training and Support

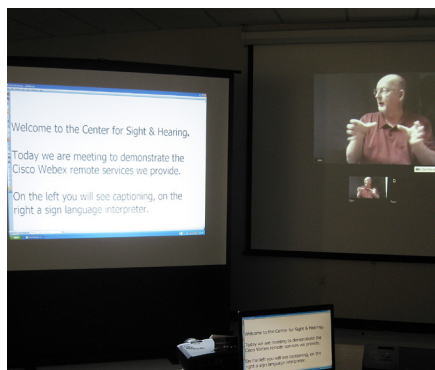
Because of WebEx, the need for travel has decreased, allowing the agency's captionists to work from home. This is a radical change and convenience for them, because the Center's captionists are legally blind and unable to drive. Thanks to assistive technology programs that enlarge text and change

background colors for easy viewing, captionists with vision loss can customize the WebEx interface to suit their needs.

The Center provides remote technical support for both employees and individuals using Cisco WebEx Support Center. “Now I can troubleshoot anyone's computer, whether I'm in the office or at home,” says Information Technology Specialist Anthony Mirabile. “Plus, because WebEx is a hosted service, it's easier for me to manage and administer. When you're working with hospitals and schools, it can be difficult to change their firewall settings to allow access, especially with privacy concerns. But WebEx eliminates the need for any modifications; they essentially just have to click 'Yes' and 'Next,' and they are ready to start.”

Unified Communications for On- and Offsite Workers

The best part of the Center's WebEx implementation is that it ties directly into its existing Cisco communications system, which is provided by Cisco Unified Communications Manager Business Edition.



“We saw the Cisco system as being the easiest to manage,” says Mirabile. “We also liked the fact that Cisco Unity Connection, the messaging application on Business Edition, gave us the ability to access our voicemail from outside the office, which is important for our remote employees.” With Cisco Unity® Connection, teleworking individuals are able to listen to voice messages left on their work extension through a mobile or home phone.

The Center for Sight & Hearing uses a number of Cisco Unified IP Phones and Cisco Unified Conferencing Stations, as well as Cisco Unified Wireless IP Phones. Mirabile is also deploying Cisco IP Communicator, a softphone application that allows remote and traveling employees to dial and receive calls from their laptop using their office phone numbers.

Results

Thanks to WebEx technology, the Center for Sight & Hearing has completely transformed the way that it delivers its services. “We now have no boundaries,” says Jones. “As a result, we have grown tremendously in the last five years.” She cites 100 percent growth in the Center’s captioning services, 35 percent growth in its hearing clinic services, and roughly 50 percent growth in sign language interpreting services.

The Center’s Cisco collaboration architecture has also resulted in marked productivity enhancements, while giving employees added flexibility. “We used to drive two hours to get to a client’s location, provide service for half an hour, then drive two hours back,” says Gronlund. “With WebEx, it’s much easier, and we can do more back-to-back interpreting. There aren’t many interpreters available here in the cornfields of Illinois, so it’s especially valuable for us to have more time and greater access to a larger group of people.”

By reducing travel expenses, the Center is able to pass on its cost savings to businesses and organizations requesting communication services. Says Gronlund, “We don’t have to charge them for added travel time, and the agency doesn’t have to spend money on gas, so it’s a win-win.”

To demonstrate the impact that Cisco collaboration solutions have made on employees and individuals, Mueller points back to the agency’s core values. “In our mission statement we talk about empowering vision and hearing-impaired individuals to be independent,” she says. “Without these tools, that simply is not possible. WebEx has allowed us to execute our mission on a much grander scale.”

Next Steps

Jones’s vision for the future of the Center for Sight & Hearing can be summed up in one word: virtual. “We now have the opportunity to extend our hearing and vision services outside our physical building, helping anyone, anywhere,” she says. “My vision is to have medical and rehabilitation services all done in one place, whether that’s onsite or virtually. What we’re doing now with remote services is just the beginning. With Cisco technologies, we hope to do much more.”

For More Information

- To find out more about Cisco collaboration, visit:
<http://www.cisco.com/go/collaboration>.
- To read other success stories, visit:
http://www.cisco.com/en/US/solutions/ns1007/collaboration_business_case.html.
- To join conversations and share best practices about collaboration, visit:
<http://www.cisco.com/go/joinconversation>.

Product List

Collaboration Solutions

Conferencing

- Cisco WebEx Meeting Center
- Cisco WebEx Support Center

Voice and Unified Communications

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager Business Edition
- Cisco Unity Connection
- Cisco Unified IP Phones 7945, 7965
- Cisco Unified Wireless IP Phones 7921
- Cisco Unified IP Conference Station 7935
- Cisco IP Communicator

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Catalyst® 3750 Series Switches
- Cisco 2800 Series Integrated Services Routers



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