

Working Professionals Learn English with Video-Rich Meetings

TalktoCanada.com uses online meetings with video, VoIP, annotation tools, and polls to teach students in 35 countries.

Summary

Customer Name:

TalktoCanada.com

Industry:

Online language training

Location:

Ottawa, Canada

Number of Employees:

21

Challenge:

- Provide cost-effective global access to online conversational English classes
- Offer highly interactive lessons requiring students to practice skills in small groups
- Gain access to large corporate clients with innovative online teaching technology

Solution:

- Video allows for face-to-face interaction, creating “at the table” atmosphere
- Annotation tools and polls highlight key ideas and help students remember concepts
- Support materials allow staff to develop best practices for effective coaching and online instruction

Results:

- Successfully expanded business reach to 35 countries within two years
- Offered higher-quality interactive lessons to help students learn advanced skills
- Enabled teachers and students to participate in classes anytime from any location

Challenge

TalktoCanada.com provides customized web-based English language training to corporate and individual clients around the world. The company’s courses are taught by trained and certified instructors and focus on helping global working professionals strengthen their English skills and prepare for international business events including meetings, presentations, and other corporate activities. Headquartered in Ottawa, Canada, TalktoCanada.com’s staff includes home-based teachers located in Canada, Uruguay, China, and France.

When general manager Marc Anderson helped found TalktoCanada.com in 2006, he knew that the company’s success depended on finding the right technology to deliver online instruction. “Our focus has always been on reaching clients worldwide, so we need to offer global access to online classes in a way that’s cost-effective, and we have to provide highly interactive instruction that helps students successfully learn English,” he says.

At first, TalktoCanada.com tried offering lessons over the phone, but remote, voice-only instruction did not offer enough interaction between teachers and students. “We tried using phones and VoIP (voice over IP) applications like Skype, but we were limited to one-on-one sessions, and it was very difficult to do written exercises or review other course materials,” Anderson says.

To provide a robust, interactive online learning experience, the TalktoCanada.com team began looking for a web-based meeting application. “We knew that we needed an innovative technology that would not only help us deliver remote language instruction but also set us apart from our competition and help TalktoCanada.com attract large corporate clients,” says Anderson.

Solution

When Anderson and his team started looking for an online meeting solution, they explored several options, including Adobe Connect and GoToMeeting, but selected Cisco WebEx™ technology based on its ease-of-use and the fact that it is a well-known, established solution within enterprise organizations. “We provide training to a variety of customers, but we target large corporations, and many of those businesses already use WebEx solutions,” says Anderson. “With WebEx applications, IT teams don’t have to install any new technology, so it makes it easier for companies to choose us as a vendor. We actually lost our first enterprise client because we weren’t using WebEx solutions, so it was clear that WebEx technology would be essential to helping us secure deals with corporate customers.”

Other Cisco WebEx® features, including video, also made the solution ideal for distance language instruction. “With video, it’s like we’re sitting around a table, and teachers and students can easily interact with each other,” says Daniel Cotton, corporate sales director at TalktoCanada.com and



one of the company's most experienced instructors. "WebEx video creates an intimate, collaborative learning environment that you can't get over the phone or even in an in-person classroom setting."

In addition to video, Cisco® WebEx annotation tools and document sharing also help TalktoCanada.com instructors provide rich, interactive classes. "We can use WebEx technology to share pictures that illustrate concepts, put up slides to clearly explain ideas, and highlight information so everyone is focused on the same words at the same time," Cotton says. "With WebEx solutions, it's easy to supplement classes with different elements that make learning more enjoyable and help students get the most out of each lesson."

During the implementation process, TalktoCanada.com's instructors used WebEx support materials to learn how to use the technology quickly, making it easy for Anderson and Cotton to rapidly deploy the application to all of the company's teachers worldwide. "We used WebEx University to create our own instructional guides to train our teachers on how use the technology to make classes as interactive as possible," says Anderson. "With WebEx materials, we've been able to develop some best practices for online instruction that our teachers can apply to make classes even more effective."

Cisco WebEx solutions have allowed the company to provide easy worldwide access to its online classes, and TalktoCanada.com can now accommodate more than one student per class. "Before WebEx technology, we could only conduct one-on-one lessons, but now we have up to four students in each session, which provides just the right amount of interaction," Cotton says. "Using WebEx technology to provide a small, collaborative educational environment helps students learn from each other easily, and the remote format actually helps them feel more comfortable about actively participating in lessons."

"WebEx technology allowed us to secure our first corporate client, and since then we've continued to use the solution to differentiate ourselves from our competitors and expand our business tremendously."

— Marc Anderson, general manager, TalktoCanada.com

Results

Since deploying Cisco WebEx solutions, TalktoCanada.com has been able to establish relationships with large enterprise clients and now teaches English to working professionals in more than 35 countries around the globe. "Through WebEx solutions, we've been able to deliver full-service online education to students anywhere in the world," says Anderson. "WebEx technology allowed us to secure our first corporate client, and since then, we've continued to use the solution to differentiate ourselves from our competitors and expand our business tremendously."

In fact, Saudi Arabian company SystemsOnLine recently formed a partnership with TalktoCanada.com to reach new clients in the Middle East based largely on the company's use of WebEx technology. "We were looking for a partner that could provide quality English language instruction to one of our large clients, Saudi Telecom (STC)," says Ferdie Cabanillas, chief operations coordinator at SystemsOnLine. "TalktoCanada.com uses a sophisticated technology to provide expert instruction that includes video and other features that STC wanted."

TalktoCanada.com had all of the capabilities we were looking for, and WebEx technology was a major factor in our decision to work with the company.”

After switching to Cisco WebEx solutions, TalktoCanada.com not only offers teaching services to more clients around the world, but also provides higher-quality lessons that help students learn English more effectively. “Many of our lessons focus on idioms and other conversational language that can be hard to grasp, but using video and pictures to illustrate these concepts is fun and makes the information easier to remember,” says Cotton. “WebEx technology allows students to really practice their English and gain more exposure to native speakers and English-language media instead of just reciting vocabulary lists.”

Cotton also points out that WebEx technology has helped teachers easily overcome any technical issues that might arise during a class, allowing TalktoCanada.com to provide instructional continuity and offer a smooth classroom experience. “If an instructor has a problem with his home Internet connection, he can pass the ball to a different instructor and she can take over the class without any interruption to the lesson,” he says. “With WebEx solutions, our teachers can quickly adapt to any challenge while still giving their students superior instructional service.”

Next Steps

In the future, TalktoCanada.com plans to use Cisco WebEx technology to enable instructors to deliver an even better online classroom experience. “We’re always exploring how we can use WebEx solutions to improve our classes,” Anderson says. “As our company grows, we’re confident that WebEx technology will continue to offer innovative features that will help us provide the best possible online language instruction.”

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco WebEx, go to <http://www.cisco.com/web/products/webex/index.html>.

Product List

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