Lamar University's Enterprise Video Communications Project
Project Description

Executive Summary

In the past, complexity and massive administration costs stalled or prevented the successful delivery of video communications to thousands of simultaneous viewers. Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, is overcoming these obstacles and demonstrating a new level of innovation within state government and higher education by leveraging technology to create an efficient and cost-effective way to reach large audiences and distribute video.

A. Description of the Business Problem and Solution

Lamar University has addressed the challenge to create a user-friendly way to include video in academic course resources for its students. The university has also centralized storage of all video assets to make it easy for students and faculty to find and manage the appropriate course content. These resources can also be made available in a variety of settings, such as distance education and training for government employees.

Lamar University worked with a private partner (Media Publisher) to implement a suite of enterprise video applications to support four key applications, including video-on-demand publishing; archiving classroom sessions; managing a video library/portal; and faculty communications.

Business drivers for the university's implementation of video communications included:

- Growing demand from faculty to include video in their courses as well as archive classroom sessions.
- Need for a management system to centralize existing video assets and allow users to easily locate, publish and re-use them.
- Desire to enhance faculty-to-faculty communications leveraging live video.
- Desire to enhance employee education and training opportunities with video content delivery.
- Desire to enhance communications with students related to available technology.

The reasons for making the decision to implement this particular solution were:

- Increase enrollment by offering technology-enhanced education both in the classroom and through online courses.
- Expand products and services.
- Enhance the return from other IT investments.
- Enhance efficiency.
- Provide video-based employee training and education.

- Allow faculty and administrative staff control of the content and availability of video and online publishing materials.
- Enhance reporting activities for delivery of training materials for employees.
- Enhance reporting activities for the delivery of training materials for students in the classroom environment.
- Enhance customer satisfaction by improving communications and providing alternative methods for delivery of internal and external communications.

Lamar University's suite of enterprise video applications integrates with the university's existing technology infrastructure, including its Cisco Content Delivery Network, as well as ancillary applications from SunGard SCT and WebCT.

Lamar University selected this solution because it needed to make the most efficient use of its investment in the technology infrastructure already in place. The decision to go with this solution also hinged upon the paramount importance that Lamar University placed on making the best possible use of funds and the need to develop in-house training and educational materials that could be distributed across internal networks. Lamar University wanted to leverage its own subject matter experts to create and distribute training materials, which it was able to do with this solution.

B. Significance to the Improvement of the Operation of Government

Lamar University's Enterprise Video Communications Project supports an employee community of approximately 1,000 users and a student community of approximately 9,500 users. The university is supported by an IT staff of approximately 52 employees. As previously mentioned, the Media Publisher application integrated with Lamar University's Cisco Content Delivery Network, as well as ancillary applications from SunGard SCT and WebCT.

C. Benefits Realized by Service Recipients, Taxpayers, Agency or State

Lamar University took a different approach from the traditional view of Return on Investment and considered its enterprise video implementation as a cost of doing business. Video communications — such as live Webcasts, on-demand recordings of classroom communications, presentations and training — can be key differentiators in helping educational institutions build competitive advantage. Video communications can also provide a stronger sense of shared vision and community among students and faculty.

Lamar University's initial implementation of video as part of its course resources for students included the video-on-demand library, classroom archives, and a Web portal. Phase Two of the implementation included live faculty-to-faculty communications via video Web-casting.

The Enterprise Video Communications Project has proved to be a cost-effective way to provide diversity in training and integration of technology in both employee education

and in the classroom. By leveraging live video, the university has enhanced faculty-to-faculty communication. It has also improved employee education and training opportunities. The management system centralizes existing video assets and allows users to easily locate, publish and reuse them.

D. Realized Return on Investment, Short Term/Long Term Payback

At Lamar University, the importance of providing e-learning services increased dramatically after Hurricane Rita in September 2005, which devastated the Texas Gulf Coast. To date, the university has spent more than $30 million on hurricane recovery efforts. Approximately 85 percent of Lamar University's buildings sustained some damage from Hurricane Rita, requiring the university to explore new ways of service delivery to their faculty, staff and students.

The university also realized the critical importance of providing educational materials outside of the classroom and flexible scheduling to allow students to resume their studies after the hurricane.

Enhanced e-learning services have been implemented to allow the university to extend its investment in video management solutions. The e-learning system has allowed the university to increase enrollment and allowed faculty to move to newer, less time-consuming methods of providing video learning for faculty, staff and students.

Enhanced e-learning has also allowed Lamar University to offer in-house training and learning materials that can be disseminated across internal networks. Students can sit at a computer in any location and access university courses anytime on demand. Academic instruction can also be broadcast live from the classroom and teachers can interact with students in real time.

For Lamar University, its e-learning system was an investment that will produce long term benefits. It has proved to be a critical tool for hurricane recovery efforts, for increasing university enrollment without additional facilities construction and for providing the opportunity to expand the university's student population far beyond the Beaumont, Texas area.