The Women’s Executive Network Extends Audience Reach with Webcasts

Web collaboration service delivers professional development events to members across the country

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE WOMEN’S EXECUTIVE NETWORK (WXN)
- Dedicated to the advancement and recognition of women in the workplace
- Live member events in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Mississauga, Ottawa and Montreal
- 14 employees

CHALLENGE
- Live events only in select cities exclude many members from participating
- Members increasingly inquiring about The Women’s Executive Network coming to their city
- Help ensure all members have access to workshops, special events and member intelligence

SOLUTION
- Cisco WebEx collaboration service offers members in any location the opportunity to participate in webcast series
- Cost-effective solution to offer all members the same experience

RESULTS
- All members across Canada able to enjoy all the benefits of membership
- Membership is up following a free-trial webcast for non members
- Webcast program helped enable expansion to Ireland in November 2008

Challenge

The Women’s Executive Network (WXN) is Canada’s leading organization dedicated to the advancement and recognition of executive-minded women in the workplace. Since 1997, WXN has expanded to meet the needs of the growing number of women executives across Canada through networking, mentoring and professional development.

WXN organizes and hosts an exclusive by-invitation-only breakfast series, Canada’s Most Powerful Women: Top 100™ Awards and Summit, Women’s Executive Forum professional development workshops, and other special events for women leaders in the business, government and not-for-profit sectors. These annual events take place in seven cities across the country: Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Mississauga, Ottawa and Montreal.

As the organization has grown, WXN has been increasingly asked about its intentions to expand beyond the seven cities.

“I can’t tell you how many times I was contacted by female managers and executives to ask if we’d considered bringing our events to their cities,” says Pamela Jeffery, founder of WXN. “It became obvious that we needed a way to reach out to women across the country so everyone could benefit from our events and programs.”

“By using Cisco WebEx, organizations are able to collaborate in new and exciting ways. WXN is using the Human Network to connect women across generations and industries to further their careers.”

— Willa Black, vice president, corporate marketing for Cisco Canada

Among the organization’s event speakers are winners of WXN’s Top 100 Awards, which are given to some of Canada’s most powerful women, says Sara Falconer, online strategy and media relations manager at WXN. These women are committed to mentoring and sharing their knowledge with young women intent on rising in the ranks.
“With resource limitations of being able to host live events in only select cities, we felt an opportunity was missing not only for our members but for our future expansion,” she says.

“I can’t tell you how many times I was contacted by female managers and executives to ask if we’d considered bringing our events to their cities. It became obvious that we needed a way to reach out to women across the country so everyone could benefit from our events and programs.”

— Pamela Jeffery, founder of WXN

Solution
WXN decided the best way to give members in other cities the same experience as those attending events in person would be to offer webcasts. As the organization began to explore its technology options, Falconer recommended selecting Cisco WebEx® on-demand collaboration offering because she had previous experience with it and found it extremely easy to use.

“We wanted a solution that was going to be as user-friendly as possible, particularly for those members who are not as familiar with technology,” Falconer says.

In May 2008, after a review of the solution WXN, in collaboration with Cisco, launched a new bi-weekly webcast series called “Wednesdays with WXN” using Cisco® WebExorrowing. Cisco WebEx is a secure, hosted offering that enables companies to conduct web-based meetings, training, presentations and more. Participants only need an Internet connection and a browser to interact with other participants anywhere in the world. People who do not have access to a computer are still able to participate in the audio portion of the meeting.

Through this virtual meeting, presenters can share an application, including a slide deck, video or photos, or their entire desktop if they choose. The application is viewable even if a participant does not have that particular application. Because the solution is hosted, there is no need to download software or install anything on users’ computers.

Depending on what service is selected, WebEx meeting participants can use various audio options which may include toll-free call-in, call-back, or voice over IP (VoIP). Although a webcam is not a requirement, it can be added to a meeting to offer face-to-face interaction.

“By using Cisco WebEx, organizations are able to collaborate in new and exciting ways,” says Willa Black, vice president of corporate marketing for Cisco Canada. “WXN is using the Human Network to connect women across generations and industries to further their careers.”

For WXN, the service allows members from across the country to log into a webcast and interact in real-time with some of Canada’s most powerful executives and managers, as well as other WXN members.

The webcast format invites participants to listen to a presenter for 5 to 10 minutes and view any slides that are being shown. Then the session is opened up for a discussion, so participants can interact directly with the presenter as well as with other members listening in. The technology allows members to listen only, or contribute to the conversation, and so far WXN has seen as many as 60+ members participate together in a webcast.
Results

Since launching the new webcast series, WXN has received tremendous feedback from both members and presenters.

“People like feeling as though they’re having a casual conversation, which (other than our live events) is not something we could provide in any other format,” Falconer says. “Our presenters also remark on how easy Cisco WebEx is to use and how much they enjoy the format.”

For many, public speaking does not come easy. Wednesdays with WXN presenters want to share their experiences with their peers and protégées, and by using WebEx they are able to do so without having to worry about speaking in front of a “live” audience.

The interactivity is key, according to Karen Schulman Dupuis, a WXN member and webcast participant. “If the presentation is too static and not engaging or interactive, you might as well be on a conference call,” she says, adding that having the option to download content or presentation slides is a nice feature. “The WebEx platform is user-friendly, has a very nice GUI (graphical user interface) and is extremely intuitive.”

Most importantly for WXN, using Cisco WebEx helps ensure the organization is able to offer the most to its members, wherever they are located.

“Wednesdays with WXN allows us to deliver on-line networking, mentoring and professional development,” Jeffery says. “Prior to using WebEx, we weren’t able to help a woman who lives in Whitehorse build a network external to her organization. Now we can. Participants can stay at their desks and receive professional development from some of Canada’s most accomplished female executives.”

Next Steps

Building on its Canadian success, WXN is in the process of expanding its offerings. The organization recently launched in Ireland, allowing members to share experiences and skills within a wider international perspective.

“Cisco WebEx technology is helping us create a global community,” says Jeffery. “We’re thrilled to have launched Wednesdays with WXN in Ireland in November 2008.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about Cisco WebEx, go to www.WebEx.com