

Cisco I-Prize Program Accelerates Innovation with WebEx Meeting Applications

About the Cisco I-Prize Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CISCO I-PRIZE PROGRAM

- Cisco WebEx services: Cisco WebEx Meeting Center™, Cisco WebEx Connect™
- Program headquarters: San Jose, California
- Number of participants: Over 2,500
- Program launch: 2007

SUMMARY

- To accelerate innovation among teams competing to create the next billion-dollar business idea for Cisco, the Cisco Emerging Technologies Group needed a flexible, reliable, and interactive platform for remote collaboration. Using Cisco® WebEx® Connect, teams could easily share documents, develop ideas, and create customized Web applications. By empowering each team with next-generation collaborative tools, Cisco reinforced its longtime position as an industry-leading innovator.
- The Cisco Emerging Technologies Group (ETG) is devoted to creating innovative business units that target and capitalize on exciting market opportunities for Cisco. To meet this goal, ETG uses an “innovation engine” program that drives a huge number of ideas through a strict review process. The newest component of the innovation engine is the Cisco I-Prize program, launched in October 2007 for global teams of entrepreneurs to identify and develop the company’s next billion-dollar business. The winning team has the opportunity to join Cisco as the founders of a new emerging-technology business unit. By nurturing and connecting innovators from around the world on the Cisco global network, the I-Prize program continues the company’s heritage as a leader in connecting people through the power of collaborative technologies.

The Challenge

“When ETG first formed in 2005, we began creating processes and tools that would spur innovation across the company,” says David Hsieh, senior director of marketing for Emerging Technologies. “So we created an internal wiki called the I-Zone, a place where any Cisco employee could visit and contribute business ideas.” The I-Zone was a success, garnering ideas from employees from all levels and divisions throughout the organization.

Soon Hsieh and his team realized that they could benefit even more by canvassing for ideas beyond Cisco. “We’re big believers in the wisdom of crowds, and we wanted to tap into the collective expertise and innovative thinking of the global community,” he says. “We had a theory that collaboration on a global scale accelerates and improves the quality of innovation. We wanted to open up an opportunity for smart, creative people all over the planet to make their ideas a reality here at Cisco.” For this experiment, Hsieh and his team needed to provide a platform for remote collaboration that would offer enough flexibility, reliability, and interactivity to power a global innovation campaign.

The Solution

When ETG decided to hold a contest in search of the next billion-dollar business idea, they committed to announcing it at a major globalization launch in India within just 30 days. “We had exactly one month to work with internal groups in IT, finance, HR, marketing, and legal to make this happen,” says Sharon Wong, business development manager for ETG. “And from the very beginning, we used Cisco WebEx Meeting Center and Cisco WebEx Connect to make our collaboration as seamless as possible.”

Cisco WebEx Connect is a collaborative platform that both enables and exemplifies the high-caliber, real-time innovation nurtured by the Cisco I-Prize program. Using common team spaces on the WebEx Connect platform, ETG members shared documents, developed ideas, and even

created customized Web applications to speed the development and coordination of a major worldwide competition.

The success of the Cisco I-Prize launch exceeded everyone's expectations. After the official announcement in India, word spread quickly on blogs throughout the world. "This was truly a viral campaign," says Wong. "It was a Web 2.0 undertaking from beginning to end — conceived as a crowdsourcing experiment, publicized via social media, and facilitated with groundbreaking collaborative technologies like WebEx Connect."

The Cisco I-Prize coordinators were pleasantly shocked to find themselves with more than 1200 ideas submitted by teams from 104 countries. In the first phase of the contest, registrants developed and circulated their preliminary ideas on the Cisco I-Prize site. Once the Cisco I-Prize panel chose the 32 best ideas to advance to the semifinals, the semifinalist teams were provided WebEx Connect and WebEx Meeting Center accounts.

The semifinalist teams represented 14 countries on six continents. Most of the participants held day jobs, so they worked on the Cisco I-Prize project evenings and weekends. Many teams contained members who had never physically met. Yet within a matter of months, these global teams needed to develop their ideas into full-fledged business plans, complete with an audiovisual presentation to be delivered to the Cisco I-Prize panel. "We knew that WebEx Connect would resolve many logistical issues and help each team create the most productive synergy possible," says Wong. "We just didn't anticipate how much it would transform the way these teams developed, refined, and presented their ideas."

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—Sharon Wong, business development manager for the Emerging Technologies Group, Cisco

The Benefits

Cisco WebEx Connect enhanced productivity while accommodating divergent schedules. "With this technology, it's easy to catch up on the latest discussion threads because the most popular topics appear most prominently on the discussion board," says Wong. "I could log on to WebEx Connect at the end of my day and immediately see what each team was discussing, then provide relevant feedback in no time. And because every discussion was so well documented, the entire team could stay up to speed without trying to fit a daily meeting into their busy schedules."

The enhanced collaboration provided by WebEx Connect accelerated innovation. "It was fascinating for me, as an observer, to see how these teams could work in a completely virtualized environment and produce a great quality of output because they were using such effective collaborative technology," says Hsieh. The result was a community of innovators whose interactions were enriched by the flexibility and wide-ranging utility of collaborative spaces. "WebEx Connect was the glue for the Cisco I-Prize program," he says. "It was the essential tool that enabled our semifinalist teams to create high-quality products within incredibly compressed timelines."

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By giving each Cisco I-Prize semifinalist team next-generation collaborative tools, Cisco reinforced its longtime position as an industry-leading innovator. “We’ve heard more than one team say that they honestly don’t care if they win, because the Cisco I-Prize program has been such a fantastic experience for them,” says Wong. “A huge part of that experience was giving them the opportunity to use a best-in-class platform like WebEx Connect. How better to encourage innovation than by using a truly innovative technology?”

The Future

With the success of the Cisco I-Prize program, the ETG hopes to repeat it. “We’re thrilled with the results,” says Hsieh. “The fact is that the Cisco I-Prize program wouldn’t have been as successful without the help of WebEx Connect. So this technology will absolutely play a role in our future efforts to reach out to innovators from all over the world.”

Highlights:

- WebEx Connect enabled Cisco I-Prize participants to stay informed without the need for daily meetings, enhancing productivity while accommodating divergent schedules.
- WebEx Connect enriched the interactions of a community of innovators with the flexibility and wide-ranging utility of collaborative spaces.
- By empowering the Cisco I-Prize semifinalists with next-generation collaborative tools, Cisco reinforced its longtime position as an industry-leading innovator.



Americas Headquarters
Cisco Systems, Inc.
San Jose, CA

Asia Pacific Headquarters
Cisco Systems (USA) Pte. Ltd.
Singapore

Europe Headquarters
Cisco Systems International BV
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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