

Cruise Lines Reach More Agents Globally with Online Training

Princess Cruises and Cunard Line deliver interactive online sales training to thousands of travel agents worldwide.

Summary

Customer Name

Princess Cruises

Industry:

Cruise operator

Headquarters:

Valencia, CA

Challenge

- Deliver timely, cost-effective sales seminars to travel agents
- Host more than 1000 participants in a single training session
- Provide easy accessibility for travel agents worldwide

Solution

- Web-based tools offer easy, reliable method for reaching large numbers of remote agents
- Global online conferences expand reach while controlling costs
- Online training empowers travel agents to manage bookings through exclusive website

Results

- Set record for largest single booking day in company history, thanks in part to using online tools
- Cut travel costs significantly while improving meeting access for international staff
- Met demand for high-quality, interactive content delivery system on reliable network

Challenge

Princess Cruises and its British-based counterpart, the Cunard Line, are two of the largest cruise operators in the world, carrying over 1.5 million passengers per year on almost 20 luxury ships. Princess Cruises offers more than 115 cruise itineraries that sail to all seven continents and call at 350 ports located around the globe, while Cunard focuses on travel in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. Both are owned by Carnival Corporation and are headquartered in Valencia, California.

Princess Cruises and Cunard deliver marketing materials, training, and other services to thousands of travel agents. These services include annual sales seminars held in the fall to prepare agents for the peak cruise booking season from January to March.

In the past, seminars were conducted onsite by Princess Cruises and Cunard sales managers in multiple locations. However, in late 2008, Carnival needed to find a more cost-effective way to confront an anticipated drop-off in consumer travel by providing agents with timely information that they could use to boost sales. J. Martin, e-distribution specialist for both cruise lines, began looking for a web-based meeting tool that could accommodate large numbers of participants in the most efficient manner possible. "We knew we needed a solution that could handle well over 1000 users and deliver a great deal of content on tight schedules without sacrificing connection speed and stability," he says.

Solution

Princess Cruises and Cunard had been using web-based meeting tools for several years, mostly to show small groups of travel agents how to book trips online. Yet when Martin and his team began hosting larger events, they noticed troubling performance issues. "We were using a different vendor and ran into problems with connectivity," he says. "As audiences grew larger, the connections became increasingly slow and unreliable."

Martin and his team explored solutions from several vendors, but picked Cisco WebEx™ technology because it alleviated concerns about connectivity while integrating easily with the company's existing Cisco® infrastructure. "Cisco is the basis of our IT infrastructure," Martin says. "When we looked at the number of visitors WebEx technology could handle within a very easy-to-use interface, it was the obvious choice for us."

WebEx® technology is now the primary vehicle for delivering events and training sessions for both cruise lines, including annual sales seminars. “Since we switched to WebEx meeting applications, our sales seminars have grown tremendously,” says Martin. “We now host a dozen sales-focused events over the course of a week, drawing more than 8000 travel agents.” The events have also become much more interactive. “Travel agents use WebEx technology to ask a lot of questions during executives’ presentations,” he says. “If the management team doesn’t have time to answer them, the questions are logged so that they can be addressed later.”

In addition to sales seminars, Princess Cruises and Cunard use WebEx meeting applications for smaller program release events, where travel agents learn about changes to itineraries and other trip information. The cruise lines also host an Executive Insights series, which enables high-level staff to share product knowledge and strategies with agents. “If an agent can’t attend live, recordings are available so that they can watch later,” says Martin. “Agents appreciate that we provide so much helpful information in such a convenient, flexible format.”

“With WebEx solutions, we have the confidence to host events without worrying about connectivity. It’s simply the best platform we’ve found for keeping travel agents informed about our company.”

— J. Martin, e-distribution specialist

Results

After the implementation, Princess Cruises quickly set a remarkable sales record. “Following the switch to WebEx solutions, we saw our biggest booking day in company history,” Martin says. “Many factors contributed to that achievement, but our ability to provide timely information to such a large number of agents certainly played a role in our success.”

WebEx technology has also allowed Martin and his team to meet company demand for stable, high-quality online meetings. “Our sales seminars, program releases, and other events are a huge part of our business,” says Martin. “With WebEx solutions, we have the confidence to host events without worrying about connectivity. It’s simply the best platform we’ve found for keeping travel agents informed about our company.”

Using WebEx technology has also led to significantly lower travel costs, both for the cruise lines’ staff and for travel agents. “We’re able to host our quarterly management meetings via the web. Instead of flying in, employees in Alaska and other remote locations can attend online,” says Martin. “Since WebEx meeting applications offer such stable international access, our UK-based managers can participate in meetings without having to travel. This technology has been key to making global communications as cost-effective as possible without sacrificing interactivity.”

Next Steps

In the future, Princess Cruises and Cunard hope to expand the use of WebEx technology to reach even more travel agents. "One of our core company values is innovation, and we always focus on moving forward with new ways to help the people who work with us to sell cruises," says Martin. "As more staff learn how to use WebEx meeting applications, they're coming up with even more ideas to enhance our agents' success and provide a great cruise experience for our customers."

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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