

Manufacturer Outpaces Competition with Virtual Meetings

Grote streamlines product launches, slashes travel costs, and improves customer engagement with Cisco WebEx technology

Executive Summary

Challenge:

- Adapt to current economic climate by cutting travel costs while maintaining aggressive sales activity
- Streamline communications so all salespeople receive consistent, timely information
- Virtualize company-wide sales meeting to contain costs and improve productivity

Solution:

- Accommodate wide range of audience sizes with WebEx technology
- Increase customer outreach, offering online training sessions to deliver up-to-date product information
- Deliver two-day international sales meeting to 120+ attendees using WebEx Event Center

Results:

- Cut costs by using virtual sales meetings while investing savings in more aggressive marketing programs
- Improve product launches by delivering faster, more consistent information to global sales force
- Save time and accelerate knowledge sharing and productivity with online meetings

Challenge

Founded in 1901, Grote Industries is a leading manufacturer of vehicle lighting and safety systems, with primary focus on the commercial transportation industry. The family-owned company boasts a long history of innovation combined with a deep respect for tradition.

“Our company has always had a pioneering spirit,” says Dominic Grote, vice president of sales and marketing. “We introduced the very first LED lamp for the trucking industry in 1989, and more recently we’ve become a leader in developing green lighting solutions, such as our new LightForm LED film. So we’re always looking for ways to take best advantage of new technologies.”

As the global economy began to falter toward the end of 2007, Grote Industries’ commitment to innovation took on new importance. “We’re in an extremely competitive market,” says Grote. “And with the current economic situation, the competition has ratcheted up a notch or two. In response to that, we began to take a good, hard look at some of our business processes, particularly in relation to how we communicate with our sales force in North America and Europe. We wanted to streamline our internal dialogue.”

Prior to using Cisco WebEx™, the company distributed product information to salespeople via monthly mailings, following up with quarterly onsite meetings to help ensure that everyone was in agreement. “Under those circumstances, a product launch was very, very difficult to execute smoothly,” says Chris Cammack, product marketing manager at Grote Industries. “Since everything depended on mailings and in-person meetings, it was impossible for us to help ensure that all salespeople had the same information at the same time. I think everyone agreed that we needed to approach our product launches in a more efficient way. So that’s when we started looking into options for doing all of this virtually.”

Solution

Cisco WebEx technology provided Grote Industries with the right combination of an easy-to-use interface and a wide range of interactive features. “We were already using Cisco routers, and we knew that WebEx would deliver our meetings with the same level of network security we’ve come to expect from Cisco products,” says Cammack. “We told our IT department that we’d be happy to consider another solution if it offered a similar feature set and a comparable level of security. In the end, WebEx was the only option that covered all of our bases.”

Grote Industries now uses three WebEx® solutions to accommodate a whole range of audience sizes. For small meetings with clients or employees, WebEx Meeting Center™ fits the bill. WebEx Training Center™ is the platform of choice for larger internal meetings, such as delivering updated product information to an entire sales division. And WebEx Event Center™ became the vehicle for the company’s annual international sales meeting, an event that included over 120 attendees.

“WebEx makes it easy for us to scale depending on how many people we need to reach at any given time,” says Cammack. “We can do everything from a one-click meeting with a few internal people to a coordinated product launch to a large-scale event for our entire sales force. That range of options really improves our agility as a company.”

In less than two years, WebEx has been deployed through most areas of the company. Engineers have their own accounts so that they can schedule meetings among themselves or with vendors. International teams communicate in real time with clients and salespeople in Asia and Europe. Perhaps most important of all, Grote Industries is using WebEx more and more to create new opportunities for customer contact. “Just the other day, we conducted four days of training sessions with a major customer, and the sessions were aimed at 57 dealers across North America,” says Cammack. “The response was just great. About 65 percent of the people we invited were in attendance. And our customer clearly appreciated that we were able to reach all of those dealers so efficiently.”

The virtualization of the company’s international sales meeting proved just as successful. “It’s crucial that we gather all of our salespeople together on an annual basis to touch base and discuss our upcoming product launches,” says Grote. “With the economy taking a turn for the worse, we thought that we would have to cancel the meeting. We wanted to avoid the costs associated with flying 120 people to a single location for a few days. But then we realized that we could make it happen virtually with WebEx.” The event included a full day of presentations for all 120 attendees, followed by a second day of targeted breakout sessions for smaller groups. “We were able to cover all of the necessary material and foster interactivity while saving the time and expense associated with a massive sales meeting,” says Grote. “I think everyone appreciated that we were able to cut costs without sacrificing content.”

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— Dominic Grote, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Grote Industries

Results

By using WebEx to present a training session to 57 dealers across North America, Grote Industries was able to accomplish weeks’ or months’ worth of work in just four days. “We would need between eight weeks and four months for our salespeople to convey the same amount of information to all of those dealers in person,” says Grote. “With this technology, we can engage with customers on a more consistent basis without increasing our travel budget. That’s a major competitive advantage.”

The company also saved significant time by hosting its international sales meeting online. “We were able to deliver our presentations without taking all of the breaks required in an in-person meeting,” says Grote. “We also transitioned more smoothly to small-group breakout sessions, avoiding the logistical hassle of finding separate rooms for each group. The result is that we accomplished in just two days what would’ve taken three or four days in person. And that means our salespeople had an extra day or two to get back on the road and start selling.”

An in-person sales meeting costs Grote Industries more than US\$50,000. By cutting those costs by more than 90 percent with WebEx, the company is able to redirect nearly all of its sales meeting funds and thus invest more aggressively in its marketing programs. Cost-effective online meetings

provide the added benefit of being a green way to work. “We’re proud of the environmentally friendly lighting products that we’ve developed in the past few years,” says Grote. “By using WebEx, we’ve found another way to be a more responsible corporate citizen.”

WebEx makes it possible for Grote Industries to execute more effective product launches, helping ensure that a consistent message is deployed to all salespeople in far less time. “In the past, our international sales meeting was our only opportunity to get everyone in agreement,” says Grote. “But with WebEx, we can achieve rapid deployment of critical knowledge throughout the enterprise. We can work better globally while keeping our overall communication costs low.” He points out that the company’s product launches went especially well in 2008, and that success was due in part to the real-time communication enabled by WebEx. “We had outstanding market penetration over the course of the year. At least part of the reason is that we had far more coordinated product launches, so our salespeople understood our new products more fully. And I give WebEx a lot of credit for helping us empower our employees with the information they needed to achieve great sales.”

Next Steps

WebEx has had a major impact on Grote Industries in less than two years, and Dominic Grote already sees it as a long-term solution. “In the future, this technology is going to be used throughout the organization on an even more consistent and widespread basis,” he says. “We’re still pretty new to it. But I think it’s safe to say that WebEx is here to stay.”

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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