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—Jelene Britten, Public Affairs Associate

Chapin Hall vastly expands its organizational reach with WebEx.



INDUSTRY

Higher education

WEBEX APPLICATIONS

WebEx Event Center

SUMMARY

Chapin Hall needed a way to make its research available to a nationwide community of experts and practitioners without overwhelming its budget. The organization now uses WebEx Event Center to deliver webinars on a wide range of topics, averaging 300 attendees per webinar. With an increase in newsletter subscriptions and Web traffic due to WebEx events, these webinars will remain a key outreach tool for the organization.

ABOUT CHAPIN HILL

- **Line of Business**
Applied research
- **Headquarters**
Chicago, IL
- **Number of Employees**
100
- **Target Market**
Government agencies, corporate and private funders, practitioners in the youth services field
- **WebEx Customer Since 2006**

Chapin Hall is an applied research center at the University of Chicago with a mission to disseminate knowledge that improves policies and programs for young people, their families, and their communities. Chapin Hall maintains an independent, multidisciplinary perspective and is committed to influencing change through research publications, strategic conversations with policymakers, the development of administrative planning tools, and many other initiatives.

The Challenge

Prior to using WebEx, Chapin Hall would hold biannual conferences in Chicago to discuss the organization's research projects with academics, policymakers, and practitioners in the field. However, these infrequent events drew a very limited and specialized audience. "We knew that our research would be valuable to people across the country, especially to those who didn't have the time or the resources for conference travel," explains Jelene Britten, Public Affairs Associate at Chapin Hall. "So we started looking for a way to make our research available to a nationwide audience without overwhelming our budget."

The Solution

Chapin Hall hosted two online events with a non-WebEx solution and encountered a discouraging number of technical problems. So the organization began investigating other options, finally landing upon WebEx. "When we looked into WebEx Event Center, it was very clear that this was the industry leader," Britten explains. "A lot of other organizations trust this technology. So we decided to give it a try, hoping that it would provide a more reliable experience for our attendees."

The experiment worked beautifully. Chapin Hall now uses WebEx Event Center to deliver three to four webinars per year on a wide range of topics—from responsible fatherhood initiatives to best practices for foster care—with an average of 300 attendees per webinar, many of whom attend more than one webinar per year. Each event features a completely different group of presenters: a Chapin Hall representative who presents the research, a speaker who discusses policy issues, and a panelist who is a practitioner working with the population in question. That revolving list of presenters might have created problems with a less intuitive technology—but according to Britten, a simple dry run is enough to make them comfortable with the WebEx interface.

Attendees find the experience user-friendly as well. Britten estimates that 75 percent of attendees access Chapin Hall's online events using WebEx integrated VoIP, and that number is rising. "The VoIP capability is really dependable, and it's good for us on the business end because it saves phone costs," she notes. "And people like using it. I think that in the future we'll be seeing an even higher number of attendees accessing the audio over the Internet. We're really pleased that the integrated

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VoIP is reliable enough to make that trend possible.” She points out that the chat function within WebEx Event Center provides an easy and cost-effective way for the audience to participate. Attendees can even submit questions when they register through WebEx, enabling the speakers to adapt their presentations according to audience needs.

Chapin Hall records each event, posts links to each recording on its site, and promotes the recorded version in the organization’s e-newsletter to raise awareness about this online resource. According to Britten, up to 600 people will listen to each Web conference recording, vastly expanding the organization’s reach. “Now we can build an online library of resources that lives well beyond the event,” she says. “That’s a significant service to the community, and this technology makes it possible.”

The Benefits

WebEx enables Chapin Hall to reach a national audience on an unprecedented scale. “The same people who would have had a difficult time attending our biannual conference in Chicago can now attend from their homes or office computers,” says Britten. “The Chicago conference would attract about 200 attendees. So obviously with this tool, we’ve really expanded our visibility and reach as an organization.” Many of the people who would have the most trouble clearing space in their schedules for a multi-day conference—for instance, government officials who are a critical part of Chapin Hall’s audience—find it much easier to attend or download online events from their desks. “Everyone seems to appreciate that we’re helping them stay informed without being an imposition on their schedules,” she notes.

Britten also points out that since all attendees are prompted to subscribe to Chapin Hall’s e-newsletter, subscriptions have increased significantly—and that will prove an advantage for the organization’s future marketing efforts. “People have been forwarding event invitations on to their colleagues and mailing lists, so these events have had a viral marketing effect,” she says. “We’re now reaching audiences that weren’t familiar with Chapin Hall but can use our research.” With an increase in subscriptions and an increase in Web traffic on the Chapin Hall site—both due in part to the increased exposure provided by WebEx events—Britten sees these online events as a key strategy for providing even more valuable public service in the future. “With WebEx, we can fulfill our role in the

applied research field more comprehensively than before,” she points out. “These events help us deliver critical information to dedicated people all over the country who can use it to benefit children, families, and communities.”

The Future

As Chapin Hall continues to offer online events to a growing audience, Britten hopes to begin using WebEx tools to track attendance figures more closely, with the goal of enhancing future marketing and outreach efforts. “Now that we’re broadening our reach, it’s important for me to really understand who these attendees are so that we can tell them about other research and events that would be of interest to them,” she says. “But that’s just refining what we’ve already achieved here. We’re really pleased.”

HIGHLIGHTS

- Chapin Hall now uses WebEx Event Center to deliver three to four webinars per year on a wide range of topics, with an average of 300 attendees per webinar.
- WebEx enables Chapin Hall to reach a national audience on an unprecedented scale, expanding the organization’s visibility and reach.
- With an increase in e-newsletter subscriptions and Web traffic due to WebEx events, these webinars will remain a key outreach tool for the organization.