With Polycom Telepresence, East Central Community College Helps Put Mississippi Residents Back to Work

Industry

- Education

Daily use

- E-learning
- Access to experts
- Professional development

Solution

- Eleven Polycom® HDX® 8000 room telepresence systems connect five community outreach centers across ECCC's 2,700-square-mile service area
- Fifteen Polycom® RMX® multimedia conference platforms, all shared by Mississippi community colleges, enable easy scheduling and call management
- Implementation, training and support by BT Conferencing, a Polycom partner

Results and benefits

- Expertise once limited to a specific learning center now can be shared across all ECCC campuses
- ECCC reduces the cost of delivering non-credit training, certification, apprenticeship and licensing classes, enabling displaced workers to learn new skills at little or no cost
- Reductions in travel lead to lower operating costs
- Even for-credit classes can be delivered for less money and to more students

Overview

When hard times came calling recently in the five Mississippi counties served by East Central Community College (ECCC), layoffs left thousands unemployed. But amid the hardship, administrators at ECCC's Workforce Education and Development program saw an opportunity to use existing facilities and faculty to help retrain workers so they would qualify for the jobs that hadn't been downsized. With limited teaching resources and a service area that spans 2,700 square miles, ECCC needed a cost-effective way to bring crucial training to out-of-work residents, no matter where they live.

Using a Community-Based Job Training Grant secured with help from the Polycom Grant Assistant Program, ECCC implemented a high-definition (HD) Polycom telepresence network that connects five learning centers and the college's Decatur headquarters. Deployed and supported by BT Conferencing, the network allows students to engage face to face with instructors, often at little or no cost to unemployed workers. Classes once offered exclusively at one center now are available at any of them. With Polycom telepresence and the Polycom®RealPresence® Platform, ECCC extends specialized workforce education programs to workers in more locations, saves money on travel, and drives down the cost of bringing non-credit and for-credit classes to more students.

Signaling to workers, 'We can get through this'

"When we fly the ECCC flag in a community, it's a signal to people that together we can get through this," says Roger Whitlock, dean of ECCC's Workforce Education and Development Program. Few places need reassurance more. Whitlock says the five-county area lost some 3,000 jobs during the downturn. In February of 2010, unemployment in Winston County reached a staggering 22.1 percent. And though some employers were hiring, most laid-off workers discovered they didn't have the training or credentials to qualify for advanced manufacturing jobs at sites like Raytheon or Weyerhaeuser, Pharmacy Technician and Certified Nursing Assistant positions in health care environments, and IT posts at businesses throughout the region. If their old jobs at lumber companies, resorts, and fabricators didn't come back, what were workers to do?

"We needed to take more of the college to the community," says Whitlock. "We needed to give those displaced workers the kind of training that would make them competitive again."

"With its standards-based approach, Polycom opens doors that would have been closed with other systems."

Roger Whitlock, Dean, Workforce Education and Development Program, East Central Community College

ECCC's workforce education program was already serving 18,000 residents a year when the downturn hit. It relied on five community outreach centers designed to serve a unique community of employers. For instance, the Integrated Technologies Training Center in Choctaw focuses on IT and industrial maintenance, while the Louisville Career Advancement Center and the Philadelphia Productivity Enhancement Lab emphasize truck driving, carpentry, plumbing, and other trades.

But with Polycom telepresence, ECCC could leverage that localized expertise across all five centers. Working with the Polycom Grant Assistance Program, ECCC applied for a Community-Based Job Training Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. "We're a small, rural college in an economically devastated area," says Matthew Riley, grant coordinator at ECCC. "But with Polycom's help, we managed to submit a splendidly composed proposal. If it weren't for the Polycom Grant Assistance Program, people in this area would never have access to these very innovative services."

'Multiple places at one time'

ECCC won the $1.8 million, three-year grant in June of 2010. BT Conferencing, a Polycom partner, designed, implemented, and supports the network of Polycom® HDX® 8000 room telepresence systems. The network connects all five community outreach centers, including two teaching auditoriums that accommodate up to 120 people. "With Polycom, a trainer located in one center can reach students in any of the other centers via this real-time, live, interactive format," Whitlock says. "Polycom allows EC offerings to be available in multiple places at one time, or recorded sessions to be viewed or reviewed at the learner's convenience."

By stretching resources and reducing travel, ECCC can bring certification and apprenticeship classes to more people at a lower cost. Some, such as M3 (modern, multi-skill manufacturing) certification classes, are frequently offered free to displaced workers. Telepresence also helps drive down the cost of traditional, for-credit classes—a significant benefit for ECCC, whose state funding is based on the number of credit hours delivered each year.

BT Conferencing

www.btconferencing.com

Telepresence and Video Conferencing

- 11 Polycom® HDX® 8000 room telepresence systems installed in five ECCC community outreach centers

Infrastructure

- Polycom® RMX® multimedia conference platforms to schedule and manage multi-point conferences and learning

EAST CENTRAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

"We're a small, rural college in an economically devastated area. But with Polycom's help, we managed to submit a splendidly composed proposal."

Matthew Riley, Grant Coordinator, Workforce Education and Development Program, East Central Community College

Engaging with businesses

Many centers also make their telepresence systems available to local businesses, with positive results. One Iowa manufacturer cited those capabilities in its decision to open a new plant in Philadelphia, home of the Neshoba Business Enterprise Center, an ECCC affiliate.

ECCC's network is served by the Polycom®RealPresence® Platform available to all of the state's community colleges. This allows colleges to use resources beyond their own campuses. Here, says Whitlock, Polycom's support for open standards is vital: "With its standards-based approach, Polycom opens doors that would have been closed with other systems."

In its first year, the network served roughly 300 students, though Whitlock expects participation to rise dramatically. "This is about more than just instruction," says Whitlock. "We're helping to rebuild and develop communities. We're preparing them to succeed."

About Polycom

Polycom is the global leader in open standards-based unified communications (UC) solutions for voice and video collaboration, trusted by more than 415,000 customers around the world. Polycom solutions are powered by the Polycom® RealPresence® Platform, comprehensive software infrastructure and rich APIs that interoperate with the broadest set of communication, business, mobile and cloud applications and devices to deliver secure face-to-face video collaboration in any environment. Polycom and its ecosystem of over 7,000 partners provide truly unified communications solutions that deliver the best user experience, highest multi-vendor interoperability, and lowest TCO. Visit *www.polycom.com* or connect with us on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn to learn how we're pushing the greatness of human collaboration forward.

Polycom, Inc.
1.800.POLYCOM
www.polycom.com

Polycom™

© 2012 Polycom, Inc. All rights reserved. Polycom®, the names and marks associated with Polycom's products are trademarks and/or service marks of Polycom, Inc. And are registered and/or common law marks in the United States and various other countries. All other trademarks are property of their respective owners. No portion hereof may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, for any purpose other than the recipient's personal use, without the express written permission of Polycom.