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Deakin University leads the way on global learning conference with Cisco Collaboration technology

Key points

Business need
Deakin University led a two-year project to collaborate with local and international thought leaders on Open Badges and broader issues around digital learning.

Solution
In 2014, Deakin University launched a two-year project named Curate, Credential and Carry Forward Digital Learning Evidence. The first year culminated in a national forum using Cisco WebEx Event Center to create a blended learning experience.

Benefits
The forum was a success and Deakin University achieved its goal of bringing together local and international experts to examine the potential of Open Badge learning in Australia.

Deakin University is leading the way in Australia on Open Badges, the online credentialing phenomenon started in 2012 by Mozilla. Open Badges are a new way of recognising skills and learning through an open framework. According to Mozilla, the free software community best known for producing the Firefox web browser, Open Badges allows you to demonstrate your skills, interests and achievements through credible organisations.

The Open Badge concept presents a real challenge to traditional education formats. Some observers believe that badging skills, experiences and knowledge can supplement or even replace traditional assessment methods involving exams and grades.

Open Badges: disrupting traditional learning

In 2013, Deakin University set itself the challenge of becoming a thought leader among Australian universities on Open Badges and broader issues around digital learning. It launched a two-year strategic commissioned Office for Learning and Teaching project called Curate, Credential and Carry Forward Digital Learning Evidence, led by Professor Beverley Oliver, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education).

Project Manager Kate Coleman, a lecturer at Deakin University, led a team of pedagogic experts whose goal was to spend the first year of the project 'connecting the dots' to examine the potential of Open Badge learning in Australia.

"Open Badges communities are quite well established in the US and the UK, but are still relatively new in Australia," she says. "The concept started in the US as a collaborative project between Mozilla, MacArthur Foundation and HASTAC, and is gaining traction around the world. Organisations such as NASA, the Smithsonian and many US universities are using Open Badges to recognise and verify skills they teach.

"We wanted to lead the discussion on what it means to curate evidence – in other words, what learning standards educators could put in place for awarding and receiving badges."

The culmination of the project's first year was a one-day national forum to bring together Open Badge experts in the US, UK and other Australian universities, including project partner Curtin University, and digital enablement partners University of Wollongong, Queensland University of Technology and University of South Australia.

Rather than fly in experts from around the world, Coleman and her team wanted to take advantage of the more cost-effective digital option of hosting the forum online, with support from project partners.

"It wasn't about bringing all the thought leaders to Melbourne, it was about connecting the country," says Coleman. "We wanted to give people a 'blended learning' option of attending in person or online. We also wanted to give our Australian colleagues the option of joining in, so we decided to host four satellite forum sites at universities in other states."

"Catering to an online and physical audience simultaneously was our biggest challenge," adds Fabrice Bernard, Digital Learning Developer at Deakin University. "We had to ensure we had excellent audio and video quality so online attendees felt involved, but not to the detriment of our physical audience."

Deakin University also wanted an event streaming platform that came with additional support.

"We were all so busy that we didn't want to have to personally manage the technology on the day," says Coleman. "We needed a site moderator who could take care of the technology so we could focus on running the forum."

Solution

On 13 November 2014, Deakin University hosted the Curate, Credential and Carry Forward Digital Learning Evidence: National Forum.

The university used Cisco WebEx as its streaming platform, linking national host sites at Curtin University, University of South Australia, Queensland University of Technology and Wollongong University with local and international guest speakers.

To ensure the forum ran smoothly throughout the day, Deakin took advantage of the Cisco WebEx Event Center. A Cisco event producer worked with Coleman and her team to provide coaching, event set-up and hands-on technical support from start to finish. This meant they were able to send invitations, confirmations and reminders to registered participants before the forum, and post-event surveys to gather feedback.

Cisco WebEx Event Center enabled online attendees in Australia to participate and watch the forum virtually. This allowed for a wider audience and ensured people who could not attend in person were not disadvantaged.

The screen displayed up to five panellists at a time, with one speaker in full-screen view, or the speaker side-by-side with his or her presentation.

Benefits

More than 150 people attended the forum in person at Deakin University, with countless more at satellite sites, and as individual virtual participants in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the US.

Blended learning with excellent audio and video

Deakin University's National Forum ran without a hitch, and Coleman and her team received exceptional feedback.

"Virtual and physical participants both positively rated the quality of the event and we were overwhelmed by the excellent feedback we received," says Coleman. "Online attendees had great audio and visuals the whole way through and felt like they were physically participating.

"In fact, one participant said it was the first time they'd attended a conference online, and were surprised by how engaged they were."

Content creation for continual learning

Cisco WebEx Event Center enabled Deakin University to record session content, including audio, video and slide presentations. Each speaker could also interact with their audience by conducting polls and annotating their whiteboard presentation, keeping everyone fully engaged.

"We knew we wanted to create good, edited content from recorded video and audio that we could use later," says Bernard. "We didn't want the event to just happen and nothing come from it."

Participants can replay recorded content, and Deakin's project team were able to repurpose or 'flip' content and use it to enhance marketing campaigns and educational courses.

Feedback on supporting content produced by Coleman and her team was positive, with one virtual participant saying, "The flipped content provided was great and most of the presentations were of great interest to me and my work."

Accompanied by expert support and advice

Premium support from a Cisco WebEx Event Center producer ensured the forum ran smoothly throughout the day. In the weeks leading up to the event, Coleman and her team appreciated the planning assistance they received from Cisco.

"We were freaked out because we'd never used WebEx before," says Coleman. "Our first training session took 45 minutes and was conducted in WebEx itself, and it was really intuitive and easy to learn. We were well supported by our producer and other Cisco contacts, who were always available and happy to answer our questions."

During the forum, Bernard used WebEx to control each speaker's presentation. "I could play and pause slides, open up video to display all the panel members, and ensure virtual participants didn't miss a thing," he says.

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> – Kate Coleman,
> Lecturer and Project Manager, Deakin University

For more information

For more information about Cisco WebEx, visit www.webex.com.au.

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Cisco WebEx
Cisco WebEx Event Center

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