ADPH Case Study

Summary

The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) has had a robust and successful satellite broadcasting capability for a number of years. As the audience for its programs increased in both numbers and locations, ADPH chose Real®products to develop an Internet streaming capability as a vehicle for sharing information and providing educational Webcasts both live and on demand via the department's Web site.

Introduction

ADPH needed tools that — in terms of quality, functionality & reliability — would allow the department to deliver its programs flawlessly. Real answered those needs.

ADPH is the largest producer of public health programs via satellite conferencing in the United States and is an affiliate of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) National Public Health Training Network. In the early 1990's, ADPH developed an in-house capability — basically a fully equipped television studio — to provide distance learning via video production and satellite conferencing. The goal was to educate and train the department's 5,000 employees, which are scattered over 100 different locations within Alabama, as well as public health workers located throughout the country.

With satellite uplinks in nearly every county health department statewide, ADPH employees need only "walk down the hall" to a conference room to participate. This reduced travel and per diem expenses, increased the time available to clients, and improved the overall quality of the training programs.

The Need

In the evaluations of its initial streaming projects, ADPH saw a huge advantage in working with the easy-to-use Real software.

Today, as ADPH and other organizations (including governments, communities and businesses) grapple with issues such as terrorism, homeland security, war and more, the need for rapid, robust and secure communications has increased dramatically. In addition, the audience for ADPH's well-respected programs has grown beyond those in public health departments to include hospital employees, first responders, pharmacists, other state and Federal agencies, and many more. With the addition of so many participants located throughout the country, the ability to deliver programs using a variety of methods became paramount.

By adding Real Webcasting to its successful satellite broadcasting capability, ADPH's programs are more accessible to more people.

ADPH continues to embrace and expand its satellite technology for training and educational needs. However, the department realized a need for people to be able to view content direct from their desktops rather than having to travel to a satellite downlink center. ADPH also needed to provide on-demand access to pre-recorded programs as a more immediate way to get broadcasts to those who couldn't watch the live event. (Previously, those who missed the live event would have to request and wait for a VHS copy.)

The Solution

Recently, ADPH collaborated with the Schools of Public Health at Tulane University and the

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University of Alabama at Birmingham to produce streaming educational content available through the department's and the universities' Web sites. As bandwidth increased and as people became accustomed to using their computers for education and training, the department decided that the time was right to develop an in-house capability to produce content that could be streamed live and on demand. In short, ADPH needed to evolve from just a satellite broadcaster to a fully staffed, fully equipped Webcaster with tools that — in terms of quality, functionality and reliability — would allow the department to deliver its programs flawlessly. Real answered those needs.

Quality: Because RealVideo®is VHS quality at everyday broadband rates (starting at 160 Kbps), and with dramatically improved compression capabilities over previous generation technologies, ADPH can reduce its bandwidth costs while delivering high-quality, rich media experiences.

Functionality: With its diverse and growing audience, ADPH wanted to avoid compatibility issues. Real server software runs on 11 operating systems, including Linux and Windows, and serves all major media formats including RealVideo, Windows Media®and MPEG. Also, Web-based administration tools make Real software easy to use.

Reliability: As with any organization, ADPH can't afford downtime. From encoder to server, server to server or server to player, the Real system can be configured redundantly to provide a fail-over feed in the event of a network or equipment outage.

In addition, ADPH chose the Real platform because most of the people accessing the department's numerous programs, both inside and outside the agency, were already familiar with Real creation, delivery and playback software. In the evaluations of its initial streaming projects, ADPH saw a huge advantage in working with the easy-to-use Real software to which its audience members had grown accustomed. Ongoing support was also a deciding factor including quick response times from Real and the ability to connect ADPH with the right people to deal with specific concerns.

With national security concerns now occupying a huge part of its planning and resource development, ADPH is utilizing funding from federal agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop its in-house live and on-demand Webcasting. By adding Real Webcasting to its successful satellite broadcasting capability, ADPH's programs are more accessible to more people and deliver more control to the end-user.

- Programs are readily available both live and on demand via the Web, which allows participants to view programs when and where they want.
- "Chaptering" allows viewers to jump to a specific section of a program without having to watch the whole program.
- Simultaneous access to other materials and resources such as text, images, charts and graphs, Web-based information, and more is available via the end-user's computer.
- Participants can select the appropriate bandwidth for their Internet connection.
- The encoding process is completely adjustable to insure that the highest quality products are available to the widest array of people.
- Travel time and costs are further reduced with Webcasting because participants no longer have to travel to a satellite downlink center to view programs.

As the audience for streaming content grows, ADPH understands that there may be a need to provide content in formats such as QuickTime®, Windows Media and more, in addition to the Real format. Helix®Universal Server will allow ADPH to deliver all major formats from the same server, which will increase the department's reach and efficiency.

Mission Accomplished

The addition of Webcasting to ADPH's satellite broadcasting capability means that, in addition to traditional content delivery

methods, participants can watch a program live on their desktops or watch it on demand according to their individual needs. This increases the availability of programs to people located throughout the country and beyond.

According to ADPH, the initial response from end-users has been fantastic, especially in terms of easy access to programs from the department's Web site. Support from its administration is also widespread, and people are beginning to approach ADPH with ideas for developing programs in various languages and more. Two such programs are already in discussion: One

would target health statistics personnel and provide information about which forms need to be completed after the birth of a baby. This program would be available on demand via VHS tape or, more quickly, as streaming media at a desktop. Another program would be a Web-based educational tool directed at department employees who may need help with their timesheets and the department's cost accounting process.

Looking to the future, ADPH's goals include developing a full-blown portal through which its hundreds of programs will be available to nearly anyone with a properly equipped computer and a reasonable Internet connection. The portal will have a searchable database, a registration screen for tracking participation, and a robust online management system to encompass the department's traditional satellite conferencing as well as emerging Real technology.

About Real

Real is the global leader in Internet media delivery. It develops and markets software products and services designed to enable users of personal computers and other consumer electronic devices to send and receive audio, video and other multimedia services using the Web.

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