

ideas

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CENTRE FOR INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY'S
EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

In this issue...

As eLearning Week approaches for the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, CIT looks back at the previous eLearning Week at NUS Business School to share Dr Lee Hon Sing's experience with web conferencing using WebEx.

The Seminar Goes On(line)

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR LEE HON SING

We have glimpsed the future. In the Star Wars movies, we see people communicating over interstellar distances using holographic representations and projections without any lag.

While that is a long way off, our present technology can bridge more earthly distances. These are various forms of conferencing - audio, video and web - which provide for different needs.

Web conferencing

Of those, web conferencing is one way to conduct a class online. It has been used in previous eLearning Weeks and in the Master of Science in Financial Engineering (Distance Learning Mode) at the Risk Management Institute in NUS.

The basic premise is that you use your computer to make a group phone call to your class. In addition to this audio capability, you can also show a presentation, document or computer application to other participants in the call.

The situation

During the AY 2009-10 Sem 2 eLearning Week, Dr Lee Hon Sing, Senior Lecturer at the NUS Business School, used

WebEx to conduct online seminars for FIN3102B Investment Analysis and Portfolio Management.

The three-hour seminars, normally conducted in a 55-seat room, consist of student presentations based on the previous week's topic, followed by a lecture of the current week's topic. There are four seminars for this module every week.

Dr Lee said he saw little alternative but to use WebEx, if the student presentations were to go on during eLearning Week.

Preparation

In order to prepare the students for the web conference, Dr Lee set up rehearsal sessions on three nights for an hour each. This way, they could simulate joining the online class and get used to the user interface.

His students were confident. Dr Lee explained, "Only ten or so of the 153 students logged in during the rehearsals. So, for most of them, the first time logging in was during the seminar itself. In fact, none of those who logged in were students who were presenting!"

The experience

According to Dr Lee, there were no real difficulties. While there were slight problems with students passing the microphone from presenter to presenter, Dr Lee felt that these were not a hindrance to the flow of the web conference.

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Web Conferencing FAQs

1. What is web conferencing?

- Web conferencing allows you to communicate with others using your computer. Typically, you can talk to others while showing or sharing a document or computer application. In NUS, we use WebEx for web conferencing.

2. What can I do with WebEx?

- You can conduct a two-way class online. Besides this, WebEx can also be used for meetings and interviews where the person you want to talk to cannot be present.

3. How do I start using WebEx?

- Contact the WebEx administrator at citbox7@nus.edu.sg, and we will help get you started.

4. Are there any special computer requirements for WebEx?

- You will need a computer (Windows or Mac) connected to the internet, preferably broadband. You will also need a headset with microphone for the audio conversation.

5. How many people can a WebEx session support?

- A WebEx session can support up to **50 people**, inclusive of the host (most likely the teaching staff).

Contact

Web Conferencing Administrators

Ms Lilian LIM &
Mr Jum'main WAHID
citbox7@nus.edu.sg

CIT Website

<http://cit.nus.edu.sg/>

Dr Lee's Web Conferencing Tips

1. Lower your screen resolution before starting a web conference

- If your computer has a relatively high screen resolution - more than 1024 x 768 - and you conduct a web conference session where you display presentations or other materials to attendees, your participants may not be able to see the entire picture.
- Before your web conference, set your screen resolution to **1024 x 768** pixels.
- In Windows, right click on anywhere on your desktop wallpaper and click **Screen Resolution** (or **Display Preferences**), then change the screen resolution from the drop-down list.
- In Mac, click **System Preferences**, then **Displays** and select the screen resolution.
- 1024 x 768 may not appear sharp on your screen, but it will help attendees see the whole picture of the item you are sharing.

2. Create an introductory administration slide.

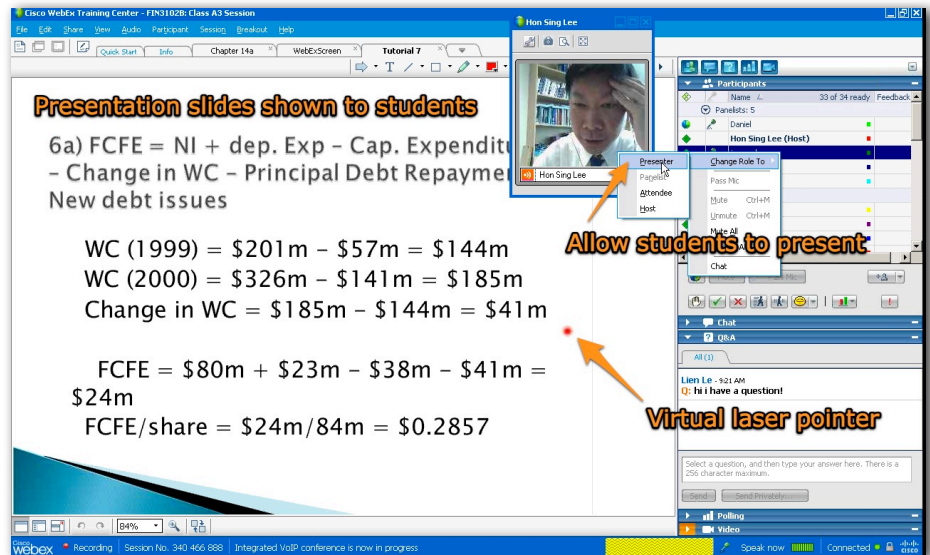
- An admin slide can detail instructions to the students regarding the web conference session. They can read this while everyone is waiting to log in.
- For example, you can place friendly reminders about web conference etiquette, what to do if they cannot hear you, how to raise their hands to ask a question etc.

3. Use polls to keep students engaged.

- Your attendees can raise their hands virtually to ask a question. They can also vote yes or no to questions that you ask. Make use of this feature to make sure that students understand what you have said.

4. Enable text chat.

- Enable text chat for all participants. If you limit text chat to hosts and presenters, you may not know that your attendees are not able to hear you as they have no means of informing you about this. (Attendees do not have control of the microphone. You have to pass the microphone to them so that they can speak.)



Web conferencing session screenshot

From a poll conducted after the sessions, at least 70% of his students found the web conference seminars an overall positive experience. How did Dr Lee achieve this?

"The most important thing when conducting web conferences is that your students must be able to hear you," opines Dr Lee, "So you must enable [text] chat for all participants. Otherwise they may not be able to tell you that they have audio issues."

✓ Read more of Dr Lee's tips on the sidebar.

Another useful item is the virtual laser pointer. Dr Lee used it to draw attention to specific points on his slides.

Dr Lee is happy with his web conference experience. "In general, I am impressed by the technology. Since [eLearning Week] is only one week, I didn't mind trying something new."

Resources

Web conferencing information page

<http://cit.nus.edu.sg/web-conferencing/>

WebEx

<http://nus.webex.com/>

WebEx - How it works (videos)

<http://www.webex.com/how-it-works/>

WebEx - How do I...?

<http://support.webex.com/support/howdoi.html>

WebEx Best Practices - Staff

<http://cit.nus.edu.sg/docs/webex-best-practices-teaching-staff.pdf>

WebEx Best Practices - Students

<http://cit.nus.edu.sg/docs/webex-best-practices-students.pdf>