



INHolland opens doors of learning with Polycom videoconferencing solutions

Polycom videoconferencing solutions assist INHolland Hogeschool to expand their educational reach to students across geographical boundaries.

The Challenge

To facilitate academic communication across geographical and cultural boundaries throughout Europe and the world in real time in order to gain maximum advantage from human interaction for the sake of academic excellence.

The Solution

An international educational video conferencing system (Polycom HDX), desktop video integration with CMA including video network management and scheduling installed in INHolland's ICTO-lab in Haarlem and six principal conferencing facilities in the west of the Netherlands.

Results and Benefits

Polycom solutions have greatly improved the connection and interactivity of remote student groups and academics, raising standards of collaborative communication, increasing student/lecturer satisfaction and facilitating easier and affordable networking amongst lecturers globally.

Hogeschool INHolland, one of the largest universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands, serves more than 32.000 students and 2.800 employees across 6 campuses and 10 cities in the western part of the Netherlands and one is Suriname. Representing 110 different nationalities, INHolland has a truly multicultural identity. One of its objectives is to strengthen its international academic competitive edge.

To achieve this objective, they need the technology to cost-effectively facilitate communication across geographical and cultural boundaries. Such a solution would open doors of learning, allowing study groups to collaborate on projects, facilitating real time interaction between academics across the globe and empowering lecturers to teach to students in different locations simultaneously.

INHolland previously used the videoconferencing facilities of SURFNet, the national ICT-expertise centre for higher education in the Netherlands, on loan. All the equipment they used carried the familiar Polycom brand. Their experience soon persuaded them to acquire their own videoconferencing facilities. In 2004 this decision was formally taken and they approached SURFNet to assist them to find the right providers. They were put in touch with Qconferencing, an important business partner of Polycom, who had previously also assisted SURFNet.

Qconferencing listened to their needs and advised them on the right equipment. They also installed it and provided the training in the use of it. Where required, they also provided additional support. The result can now be seen in Hogeschool INHolland's ICTO-lab in Haarlem and the hi-tech videoconferencing areas in their six principal locations. Standing for Information Communication Technology in Education, this facility is a special computer room, fully equipped with Polycom videoconferencing equipment, video screens, a digital school board and PCs, all supplied and installed by Qconferencing.

Students are allowed to install and run their own programmes on the PCs. The equipment was set up in line with the ICTO objectives, one of which is to provide synchronised collaborative learning capabilities for application in higher education.

Polycom took care of the provision of the full range of products required for the project, suitably adapted to meet the specific needs and requirements of INHolland.

"Providing international competencies is one of the driving forces of higher education and videoconferencing is an ideal resource for this"

Pieter van Parreeren, Project Manager Hogeschool INHolland

INHolland uses today H.323 equipment. (H.323 is an international standard for conferencing, which includes voice, video and data conferencing, for use on packet switched networks. With the help of these standards, systems from different suppliers- which comply with those standards- can communicate together).

INHolland installed High Definition videoconferencing systems (Polycom HDX), as well as desktop video integration with CMA including video network management and scheduling, which still needs to be integrated. The Ultimate HD functionality of Polycom's High Definition videoconferencing systems offers HD image quality, audio and content sharing capabilities, in combination with superior service comfort, making it an ideal solution for extended meetings.

Onferencing, the Dutch specialists in videoconferencing, have been counselling, delivering, installing and maintaining superior videoconferencing solutions since 2001 and have provided such solutions to more than 250 organisations in the Netherlands. They are an important member of Polycom's Global Reach network, an international network of videoconferencing specialists who all value and support the Polycom range of products.

The Global Reach network allows them to deliver Polycom products world wide and ensures Polycom support at local level wherever this is required.

Discovering the Future

The new technology has changed the face of higher education delivery at Hogeschool INHolland. It has already been used extensively to facilitate group collaboration of students on academic projects that span across international borders. This not only creates real-time teamwork with HD visual and audio interaction, but it assists substantially in building cross-cultural bridges and allowing the cultural diversity of participants to positively influence the quality of academic outcomes.

As most of the students have already embraced communication technology such as e-mailing, using MSNs and blogging in various other aspects of their lives, they took to the ICTO-lab and to videoconferencing like ducks to water. It provides a non-threatening environment where video screens and audio speakers are not experienced as physical barriers, but purely as another form of interpersonal contact, bringing voices, minds and faces together in real time.

Pieter van Parreeren, Project Manager of Teaching & Learning Technology of Hogeschool INHolland in Haarlem enthuses: "The effective application of the technology is perhaps best illustrated when looking at how students in Social Work have established multiple academic contacts across geographical boundaries. We have, for example, compiled one working group with two students from Haarlem and Alkmaar, two from Norway and two from Germany. At distance they work collaboratively on one assignment for ten weeks, meeting weekly by videoconference through our ICTO-lab."

The interpersonal bonding and the development of team cohesion that is achieved through videoconferencing is very similar to face to face experiences, although some of the participants may never meet physically. Students are exposed to other cultures and learn from them, while also gaining the benefits of collaboration in a cost effective and accessible manner.

The students experience these sessions as real meetings, something which is vividly demonstrated in the behaviour of participants. Their collaboration allows them to form personal friendships and even to have conflicts and to resolve them – all in videoconference. In the case of the study group mentioned earlier, the student from Haarlem during one session immediately noticed the new hair style of her Norwegian colleague, prompting her to respond with: 'Hello Norway, your new hair looks great!'

On a more poignant level they had an autistic student having the benefit of conducting an interview on videoconference; something he would not have been able to do in a face to face situation which he would have experienced as too imposing or threatening.

Academic Excellence through Interaction

Hogeschool INHolland has experimented with distance lecturing across twelve colleges, with a lecturer physically in one lecture room and the other locations being linked through videoconferencing. They soon found that some of the students in the remote locations seemed to lose interest during the lecture. It was clear from this experience that much more active participation of the lecturer is required with videoconferencing to keep all the students actively involved and participating. The medium calls for more interaction than is the case with face to face meetings.

INHolland is already collaborating with academic institutions and organisations in more than 35 countries, albeit not all on videoconferencing yet, but the application of the technology in this field is endless. Via videoconferencing they already communicate with colleagues in Canada, Germany, England, Finland, Indonesia, Jordan, Norway, Scotland, the USA and Sweden. They want to extend their reach even further in their quest for internationalisation.

Pieter van Parreeren reflects on the future: "The Polycom technology has become an integral part of our future. We recently held an induction meeting for Chinese students via videoconferencing. The possibilities are endless. We also want to get it sold with more commitment internally in our organization."

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