

case study

South Australian Department of Education & Children's Services

Saba Centra Live Connects Teachers with Students Across South Australia

Overview

Industry — Education

Business Challenge

- Enhance the curriculum and reduce the travel burden for teachers serving South Australia's 180,000 K-12 students, who are spread across the state's nearly 1 million square kilometers

Business Benefits

- Creates an interactive virtual classroom environment for geographically and medically isolated students or those who can't attend school due to special needs
- Provides for more effective collaboration and social interaction
- Reduces travel time for teachers serving remote schools with local delivery of curriculum
- Decreases travel for teachers in rural and isolated areas who in the past had to take professional learning courses in major centers
- Offers an ideal way to deliver specialized enrichment curriculum or events
- Simplifies recording and editing to make classes or events available to those who can't attend live

Solution

Saba Centra Live

In April 2007, students from across South Australia — and in fact, around the world — were able to participate in a unique learning opportunity. Lloyd Godson, an Australian marine biologist, spent two weeks on the bottom of a large lake living in the world's first self-sufficient underwater habitat. In the BioSUB project (<http://www.biosub.com.au>), Godson generated his own oxygen through photosynthesis, grew plants for food, obtained fresh water, produced power and managed waste.

“Imagine a student working in isolation, who never gets the chance to share his or her work with classmates or see a teacher face-to-face. From the moment we deployed Centra Live, we saw immediate improvements in the way students collaborated with one another.”

— Roger Edmonds
 Manager of E-Schooling Services
 South Australian Department of Education & Children's Services

Using nothing more than a computer and Saba Centra Live software, thousands of students were able to see, hear and interact with Godson during innovative live BioSUB events that took the students far beyond the realm of their day-to-day classroom.

“Students got firsthand information from him and applied it to their own projects on ecology and sustainability,” said Roger Edmonds, manager of e-schooling services for the South Australian Department of Education & Children's Services (DECS). “It was a truly fantastic learning opportunity.”

Reaching Out to the Outback

DECS is tasked with serving schools and preschools across South Australia's nearly 1 million square kilometers, extending from the coastal capital city of Adelaide well into the Australian outback. South Australia's size would rank it just below the top 30 countries in the world, and is approximately twice the area of Spain, for example.

Guaranteeing ample curriculum choices to students who reside in the state's remote towns and rural areas, or who can't attend regular classes because they have special needs or long-term illnesses, has not been easy. In the past, one way to serve geographically distant

students was via the Royal Flying Doctor Service Network's static-prone, high-frequency radio. Not only was the quality unsatisfactory, but also the network was designed for one-way broadcasts, so collaboration was difficult.

In 2002, DECS began using Centra Live to reach out to South Australia's K-12 students with Web-based distance learning.

"Imagine a student working in isolation, who never gets the chance to share his or her work with classmates or see a teacher face-to-face," commented Edmonds. "From the moment we deployed Centra Live, we saw immediate improvements in the way students collaborated with one another."

Centra Live has dramatically reduced the travel burden on teachers by enabling them to reach students with truly interactive learning—without ever having to leave their classrooms. This not only meets the needs of distance education students in outlying towns, but it is also ideal for special-needs students or those facing extended absences due to illness or family travel.

In addition, it has proven to be an excellent way to conveniently share guest speakers or curriculum specialists with a wider group of students—whether the students attend school in Adelaide or live in small communities hundreds of miles away. Further, teachers in remote areas are using Centra Live to meet their ongoing requirements for professional learning without time-consuming travel.

Encouraging Collaboration and Social Interaction

Centra Live's high-quality audio and video conferencing, yes/no polling, public or private chat capabilities, group laughter and applause and integrated white board functionality allow for wide-open collaboration between teachers and students. Teachers are now able to show students how to work long-division problems, can admire a class' art projects, or receive valuable feedback from their students.

"For the first time, our School of the Air students have been able to hold up a picture they drew or a model they made for other class members to see," explained Edmonds. "It's like pinning up a student's work in the classroom."

The distance education students are also encouraged to use Centra Live at designated times purely for socializing. The free time is a lot like recess for these students who would otherwise never get to play with one another, according to Edmonds. "They can draw on the white board and do other things together — they just have a ball," Edmonds remarked.

One of the key qualities of the Saba Centra solution in a K-12 education environment is its ease of use. Busy teachers don't have a lot of time to learn complex technology, and students need a system that isn't intimidating. Centra Live readily makes the grade.

"The intuitive design of the product has made it very, very easy for everyone — students and teachers — to pick up," said Edmonds. "Even preschoolers can hold the control key down by themselves to talk."

Front Row Seats for Field Trips

Some of the best learning takes place outside of the classroom, and DECS — with the help of Centra Live — regularly puts students in the front row. In addition to the live broadcasts from the BioSUB, over the past several years students from all over South Australia have enjoyed webcasts from visitors such as a Nobel prize winner in chemistry, a scientist studying dolphins in their natural environment (using a video camera and underwater hydrophone), and a captain on the bridge of his ship as he piloted it into the Port Adelaide harbor — with all the physics and mathematics involved in the maneuvers.

"Basically, anywhere we can take a laptop with wireless connectivity and a video camera, we can capture special content to deliver to students," Edmonds explained.

The latest release of Centra Live has an especially powerful set of recording capabilities. This will make it easier to package special events, such as the BioSUB webcasts, for wider audiences, or offer students the chance to easily make up missed classes or review lectures for tests.

"You don't get access to these specialists every day of the week," noted Edmonds. "If you can create an archive to use in other educational activities in the future, that's a big plus."