The Computerworld Honors Program

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Final Copy of Case Study

Status:
Laureate

Year:
2013

Organization Name:
The Hershey Company

Organization URL:
www.hersheys.com

Project Name:
Hershey's Learn to Grow: Ghana Distance Learning Program

Please select the category in which you are submitting your entry:
Philanthropy

Please provide an overview of the nominated project. Describe the problem it was intended to solve, the technology or approach used, how it was innovative and any technical or other challenges that had to be overcome for successful implementation and adoption. (In 300 words or less.)

The Hershey Company has long been a leader in community development and education has been a focus of those efforts. The Milton Hershey School, established in 1909, has provided education, housing, and medical care at no cost to thousands of children in the U.S., and now the company is extending educational support to farming communities around the world. In 2012, an exciting new pilot program started in one of those communities. The Hershey Company, working with Cisco Systems, has brought broadband Internet and high-definition video conferencing to a remote elementary school in the Assin Foso region of Ghana. While the initial goal was to establish joint classes between that school and the Milton Hershey School in Pennsylvania, the

technology is standards-based and open so the school and community can use it for many purposes. Expanding the program to include adult education, Hershey hopes to help rural families learn about sustainable farming, occupational safety, child labor and health issues. Over the next five years, Hershey will expand and accelerate this program to help improve cocoa communities throughout West Africa. Although telepresence is an established technology, there were challenges in implementing it at the school in Ghana. The first was to establish broadband connectivity in an area where even landlines have been unreliable. This was ultimately accomplished with a microwave "last mile" from a fiber-optic line in the closest town. Next, the video system had to be designed to deliver clear two-way audio and video in a large room with limited light and power, no climate control (important for electronics), and noisy adjoining spaces. But even beyond the technical challenges, the project represents an international effort that required the approval of government agencies, feet on the ground at remote sites, and multi-cultural cooperation.

When was this project implemented or last updated? (Please specify month and year.) Has it incorporated new technologies and/or other innovations since its initial deployment? (In 300 words or less.)

The system went live and classes began in September 2012. While there have been no changes required to the basic system design, a gas-powered generator was added to compensate for periodic power outages in the Assin Foso region. When a power failure disrupted communications in the middle of one class, the generator enabled the connection to be restored in less than 5 minutes so the class could be completed as scheduled.

Is implementation of the project complete? If no, please describe the project's phases and which phase the project is now in. (In 300 words or less.)

The initial system installation and first formal school program have been completed with great success. The technology, however, remains in place for future classes and other community purposes. A curriculum for older students has been planned and classes are being scheduled, and upcoming uses will include evening classes to help the adults of this cocoa community learn sustainable farming methods and business best practices. Another exciting development is that the technology was demonstrated for doctors at the Hershey Medical Center and they are now investigating ways to use the high-definition video to deliver basic health care services. Perhaps the most exciting thing, though, is that this first implementation proved that we can coordinate government, corporate, non-governmental organizations and community interests to deliver technology that opens remote areas to the world. Plans are now being

developed to replicate this effort in other villages and countries throughout West Africa.

Please provide at least one example of how the technology project has benefited a specific individual or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work. (In 300 words or less.)

To date, the project has benefited teachers and students at two schools on opposite sides of the world. One of the stated objectives of the Milton Hershey School is to teach students that they are part of a global community. This project exposed them to a significantly different culture than their own, yet also highlighted the similarities between children everywhere. Several of the connected lessons focused on culture more than pure academics, with the groups sharing songs and games and telling one another about their lives. That familiarity fostered friendships which have continued even after the lessons were completed. Eric Gyekye, headmaster of the Foso School, reports, "Our children are delighted by the relationships they are forming with the Milton Hershey School students...happy that they can now stay in their school and communicate with their friends and see them at the same time in America." That happiness is not limited to the students, he adds. "In Ghana, we are focused on bringing the highest quality education to our rural schools and I believe this is a major step forward. Parents are happy about the new technology that their wards are now using to learn. Indeed the whole community is happy." By providing broadband video conferencing, we have given this remote village a window to the entire world. The possible benefits are limited only by the imagination of those who use it...and the imagination of children is boundless.

Would this project be considered an innovation, a best practice or other notable advancement that could be adopted by or tailored for other organizations and uses? If yes, please describe that here. (In 300 words or less.)

Hershey's "Learn to Grow" program represents a best practice on multiple levels. First, of course, is the use of telepresence for distance learning. While it may be a challenge to deploy in remote, relatively unconnected locations, it's a simple, effective solution for locations with a stable power grid and available broadband. At a deeper level, though, there's also the best practice of helping to develop partner communities. By investing in the development of our farming communities, we are helping ensure they will flourish and be around to provide us with raw materials for a long time. Helping others and growing a business need not be mutually exclusive efforts. And finally, of course, there is the best practice of promoting sustainability and social responsibility anywhere and everywhere.

If there are any other details that the judges should know about this project, please note them here: (In 300 words or less.)

It's impressive to note that this project grew from a concept sketched on a scrap of paper to a finished solution in just nine months. Nine months total to investigate the viability of the idea, get approval from our sponsors, present the idea to ambassadors from West Africa, identify a suitable location in Ghana, develop a curriculum reflecting the needs of both schools and having it approved by all required educational authorities, coordinating the installation and testing of broadband in Foso, designing and installing customized telepresence endpoints both in Foso and in Hershey, testing the entire solution and holding a go-live celebration in both countries. We accomplished this despite the practical difficulties of working in different time zones and in different languages, and despite the challenge of communicating with key players in a region where (before broadband was provided) not even landline telephone connections were reliable. We were only able to accomplish this because of the project team's remarkable diversity, not just in language and nationality, but in focus. Governmental and non-governmental, corporate, social and educational, the participants in this effort established a cooperative model for accomplishing great things anyplace in the world.