The Computerworld Honors Program

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Final Copy of Case Study

YEAR:
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STATUS:
Laureate

Organization name:
University of Illinois at Chicago

Organization URL:
http://www.uic.edu/uic/

Project Name:
University of Illinois at Chicago demystifies financial aid with GoToWebinar

What social/humanitarian issue was the project designed to address? What specific metrics did you use to measure the project's success?

With 85 percent of students in the Chicago public school system under the poverty level, the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) recognized the need to be more proactive and creative in informing prospective students and their families about resources, qualification requirements and the application process for financial aid. In today's tough economic climate, the availability of financial aid is one of the top considerations for students who are applying or thinking about applying to colleges and universities. UIC has been recognized as one of the most diverse universities in the United States, and to support its ongoing diversity goals, UIC wanted to reach more minority and low-income students with information about financial aid. The traditional approach of visiting high schools across the state or talking to prospective students on campus tours is expensive and no longer the most efficient or effective way to educate students on financial aid. Also, because of the format of these types of group sessions, they didn't allow for attendees to participate in in-depth discussions and ask personal questions. The goal of this project was to reach this target audience, who they normally wouldn't get a chance to talk to -- students and families who couldn't afford to visit UIC's campus and students across the state who went to high schools that UIC employees were not able to visit in a new way. Snow or inclement weather has also impaired turnout of past events. The university decided a webinar was the best way to facilitate a financial aid conversation with students and parents. The metrics used to measure the success of this project were having low-income and diverse students and their families watch, listen, engage and ask questions during the webinar.

Please describe the technologies used and how those technologies were deployed in an innovative way. Also, please include any technical or other challenges that were overcome for the successful implementation of the project.

One of UIC's challenges was finding the best way to deliver the webinar. They had several requirements, starting with cost-effectiveness. Their objective was to reach the largest number of people with the greatest efficiency and the lowest cost. The university decided to use Citrix GoToWebinar from Citrix Systems, an easy-to-use, do-it-yourself online webinar solution, allowing organizations to increase market reach and effectively present online to geographically dispersed audiences. UIC used the full capabilities of GoToWebinar to ensure a professional event with wide accessibility and value beyond the live presentation, including recording the webinar and posting it on the UIC website so people could view it on demand. This was the first time a university had used conference technology to present financial aid information to a broad, public market. Additionally, the privacy and security provided by GoToWebinar allowed attendees to feel comfortable asking questions about their personal financial situation, anonymously. Several students asked sensitive questions about nonresident status that would not have arisen in a traditional seminar.

Please list the specific humanitarian benefits the project has yielded so far.

UIC partnered with Chicago Public Schools as well as the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, The Boys & Girls Clubs of Chicago, Instituto del Progresso Latino and other community organizations to raise awareness of its virtual event and ensure minority and low-income student participation. To overcome technology barriers like the lack of Internet access at students' homes, the university worked with the Chicago Public Library to make terminals available, where students could participate in the webinar. The webinar featured presentations by financial aid experts from UIC and Chicago Public Schools and about 40 minutes of live Q&A. The panel went flawlessly and has been posted to the UIC website and YouTube, with closed captioning for people with disabilities. Approximately 300 students and parents attended the GoToWebinar, 190 were in remote groups watching on large-screen TVs, 87 people participated in the webinar and 975 people have watched it through a link on the UIC website or their YouTube channel in the eight months it has been available. It has also been captioned for those with disabilities.

Please provide the best example of how the project has benefited a specific individual, enterprise or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work.

Using GoToWebinar to educate low-income and minority students about financial aid, the university met a strategic goal set by UIC's president: to be as innovative as possible in broadening their reach. "The financial aid webinar was a great success, and we have been asked to do more of them, including an event in Spanish," said Kevin B. Tynan, Executive Director for Marketing & Communications at UIC. "We're now considering an event focused on admissions. The Citrix web collaboration technology provided a new and creative way to build community goodwill, reach prospective students and strengthen our diversity efforts."