

case study

Wyndham International, Inc.

Wyndham Deploys Strategic Applications and Frequent Guest Program Using Centra® Online Collaboration

Solution Overview

Industry — Hospitality

Challenge

Quickly and cost-effectively launch three strategic initiatives with high-quality employee training and timely updates to participants

Benefits

- Lowered cost of training by more than \$1 million in travel-related and telecommunications costs
- Increased operational efficiencies, delivering information faster with fewer resources
- Compressed training by as much as 40%, so employees can be more productive

Solution

Centra® Live for Virtual Classes

Wyndham International, Inc., based in Dallas, offers upscale and luxury hotel and resort accommodations through a proprietary lodging brand and a management services division. With approximately 200 properties across the United States, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Europe, Wyndham sees developing a consistent, personalized experience as key to creating a differentiated, high-quality brand that will keep guests coming back.

“Centra is always looked at first when considering how to deliver any training or corporatewide communications. Employees don’t expect the trainers to visit their location anymore. They know they’ll be getting information online. That is how entrenched Centra is at Wyndham.”

Mark Eggers, Manager of Online Learning
Wyndham International, Inc.

Wyndham had several initiatives that required more effective solutions to reduce expenses and facilitate employee training and communications:

- Launching a guest recognition program: Vying for the same customer dollars, guest recognition programs have emerged as a popular method for building brand loyalty and driving revenue. Four years ago, Wyndham International was ready to launch its own frequent guest program to the public.
- Implementing a new property management system (PMS): All guest historical information, financial and reservation details required to check in and out of the hotel are maintained by the PMS. Wyndham made a strategic decision to centralize its new PMS so that all guest information could be accessed from one central location. The goal of centralization was to reduce errors, increase customer satisfaction and ensure a seamless, consistent experience for guests across all its properties.
- Providing SAP training: Wyndham uses financial applications from SAP and needed to provide training to each of its properties.

Wyndham identified three important considerations that would affect the success of these strategic initiatives: How would Wyndham management ensure fast delivery of high-quality, consistent training to employees in an industry known for its high turnover rates? Following deployment, how would they quickly disseminate ongoing updates and changes to all the properties? And finally, how could they do this quickly and cost-effectively?

Instead of relying on traditional training methods, which included flying trainers out to property locations, holding conference calls and drafting lengthy memos for e-mail or fax distribution, Wyndham investigated how online collaboration technology could provide a competitive edge.

According to Mark Eggers, manager of online learning at Wyndham, this research led them to Centra's real-time online collaboration software. "Centra met our criteria for delivering interactive, real-time training to employees. By bringing Centra into Wyndham's network, we were introducing an entirely new way of doing business and communicating globally," Eggers said.

In developing its own guest-recognition program, Wyndham researched the success of popular points-driven programs and discovered that most travelers do not make hotel decisions based on points. The research team concluded that Wyndham could have higher occupancy levels if it provided a highly personalized guest experience. The research resulted in the creation of Wyndham ByRequest®, which focuses on personalizing customer service by customizing each stay to the individual tastes and preferences of the guest, at no additional cost.

Today, Wyndham ByRequest is pushing the envelope for how hospitality companies can deliver higher value to customers and represents the company's philosophy on doing business through superior service. When Wyndham announced the program in 2001, it was a calculated risk. The success of Wyndham ByRequest depended on getting every employee to embrace the program, from new hires to senior management.

Night-and-Day Difference with Centra

"I can't imagine having to do ByRequest training on conference calls and memos anymore," said Kathi Kulesza, vice president of Wyndham ByRequest. When Kulesza was appointed to head up the program three years ago, training was conducted over conference calls that cost \$10,000 a month.

"Conference calls and memos are passive ways to reach our audience," Kulesza said. "We just muted out people and took questions at the end. With Centra, I discovered that the delivery of information can be interactive, on demand and completely free of charge by using Centra's voice-over-IP capabilities. The training experience is night and day with Centra, which translates into making Wyndham ByRequest a success."

When Wyndham rolled out a free long-distance component to Wyndham ByRequest in 2002, training took place entirely over Centra within 45 days. "I don't know how we could have done it any other way," Kulesza said. "We can show pictures and deliver rich multimedia over Centra. We can also record all the online sessions, which helps employees who have missed a session or just want a review. We didn't have to do any road shows, catch flights or drive cars."

ByRequest information is delivered over Centra through monthly online meetings with dedicated ByRequest managers at each property and quarterly meetings with Wyndham's general managers. Kulesza also uses Centra to reach guest-services managers, the sales force and other parts of the organization for program-specific training.

The success of Wyndham ByRequest has been enormous. From 2001 to 2002, Wyndham doubled the number of customers who stayed more than two times annually. Today, Wyndham ByRequest is 1.8 million-members strong and growing.

In implementing the new PMS system, Holly Valenti, manager of distribution technology training at Wyndham, said, "The real benefit in using Centra is that we have been able to bring all the PMS training in-house, instead of contracting it out to the vendor."

“It costs a tremendous amount of money for the PMS vendor to come in and install a full implementation into each hotel — anywhere between \$60,000 and \$70,000 per hotel,” Valenti says. “With Centra, we were able to form an inside team of PMS experts to deliver all the training online, which has saved us more than \$800,000 to date, and will result in approximately \$4 million in savings by the time we finish the rollout.”

Compressing overall training time is another benefit Wyndham has experienced. For the SAP training, a Centra session combines several groups of dispersed employees at once. Online classes can be tailored to meet the specific needs of the attendees, making the events shorter and more focused. Participants can pick and choose topics, rather than attend classes that cover material they already know. “Training time has been compressed by 40%, and that adds up to significant employee time savings,” Eggers said. Wyndham has also realized a high return on investment by using Centra, saving hundreds of thousands of dollars in travel-related training costs.