



Online-Learning Leader Projects 5 Percent Revenue Gain with Communications Upgrade

Customer: QuickStart Intelligence

Website: www.quickstart.com

Customer Size: 85 employees

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Professional services

Partner Profile

QuickStart Intelligence, a member of the Microsoft Partner Network with a Gold competency in Learning, provides expert instruction in widely used IT products and technologies. QuickStart Intelligence was founded in 1988, is headquartered in Irvine, California, and earned 2011 revenues of US\$15 million.

Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Windows Server 2008 R2 Enterprise
 - Microsoft Lync Server 2010
 - Microsoft SQL Server 2008 R2 Standard
- Microsoft Office
 - Microsoft Lync 2010
- Technologies
 - Hyper-V
- Hardware
 - AudioCodes Mediant 1000 VOIP gateway
 - Phoenix Audio MT-301, MT-302, MT-304 conference phones
 - Shure PGX-D14/93 Lavalier conference phones

For more information about other Microsoft customer successes, please visit: www.microsoft.com/casestudies

“When it came to audio quality, Lync Server 2010 was the clear winner. It far surpassed every other product we evaluated.”

Kelly Black, Vice President, Finance and Operations, QuickStart Intelligence

QuickStart Intelligence has provided expert instruction to IT professionals for more than 20 years and has earned multiple accolades for it. To make its audio delivery as excellent as its course content, QuickStart Intelligence upgraded QSLive, the firm’s remote-learning solution, to Microsoft Lync Server 2010. Since then, students report greater customer satisfaction and the firm anticipates a rise in enrollment, revenue, and profit.

Business Needs

Since 1988, more than 200,000 developers and IT professionals have acquired new skills and perfected existing ones with the help of QuickStart Intelligence. A three-time winner of Microsoft Worldwide Partner of the Year in Learning, QuickStart Intelligence provides in-classroom and remote instruction in software products and technologies from Microsoft and other major vendors. Since first introducing its remote offering in 2006, the firm has doubled in size and today is one of the five largest privately held Microsoft Gold Learning Partners in the United States.

The people at QuickStart Intelligence have made their company successful through a commitment not only to quality—first-rate instructors and materials, timely and comprehensive course content,

guaranteed scheduling—but also to continuous improvement. Not long ago, they saw room for improvement in the quality of audio delivery in QSLive, the firm’s proprietary online-learning platform in use since 2006.

“Consider the typical student accessing a course online, which can run eight or nine hours a day, several days in a row,” explains Kelly Black, Vice President of Finance and Operations at QuickStart Intelligence. “Unless the audio is crystal clear, 100 percent of the time, it can be hard for that student to understand everything the instructor is saying.”

Uneven audio quality posed a still tougher challenge for students whose native language is not English. “Our remote courses have been especially popular with



students who use English as a second language, because they find it easier to address questions to the instructor through instant messaging," Black says. "But remote learning loses its appeal for those students if they have to struggle to understand the answers or the lecture in general."

Solution

In early 2011, executives at QuickStart Intelligence decided to address the audio-quality challenge with an upgrade of QSLive, which at the time ran on Microsoft Office Live Meeting 2007 and Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2. The executives evaluated Microsoft Lync Server 2010 in addition to a number of products designed expressly for remote learning.

"Because QSLive drives our business, we wanted the best of breed, and to find it we scoured the marketplace for five months," Black says. "We found products with phenomenal tools for classroom management, but when it came to audio quality, Lync Server 2010 was the clear winner. It far surpassed every other product we evaluated."

Black and his colleagues also liked the enhanced bandwidth management provided by Lync Server 2010, for reinforcing the stability of QSLive. "In 2011, we were the fifth-largest user worldwide of Live Meeting 2007 minutes," Black says. "The more that QSLive is up, the more money we make. So anything that can make QSLive more stable is a plus."

In addition, Black and his team appreciated the flexible access options in Lync Server 2010 that simplify participation for students without the Lync 2010 client installed on their PCs. "We liked knowing that those students could use Lync 2010 Attendee to

participate just as fully, and that students whose firewall restricts or blocks access to VoIP could use Lync Web App," Black says.

With a team of two internal staffers, QuickStart Intelligence began the upgrade of QSLive to Lync Server 2010 in May 2011 and finished it 12 weeks later. Today, the solution runs on three servers, installed at QuickStart Intelligence headquarters to avoid the latency problems that stymied audio quality in the prior, offsite-hosted solution. Those servers also run Windows Server 2008 R2 Enterprise with Hyper-V, and Microsoft SQL Server 2008 R2 Standard database management software.

Since the upgrade, QuickStart Intelligence has run QSLive virtually nonstop. "In the six months following the upgrade, we've logged a monthly average of 250,000 instructor minutes on QSLive, a 24 percent increase over our 2010 run rate," reports Nick Couraud, Tech Supervisor at QuickStart Intelligence. "That's a heavy load on our servers, but in those six months we've experienced no downtime whatsoever."

Benefits

Running QSLive on Lync Server 2010 gives QuickStart Intelligence a "night and day" difference, as Black says, in terms of audio quality. As a result, the company anticipates a rise in repeat and new business, higher revenues and profits, and a stronger position as an industry leader.

Higher Customer Satisfaction

According to Hicham Semaan, President and Chief Executive Officer at QuickStart Intelligence, students are reporting greater satisfaction with their overall learning experience since the upgrade. "The number of students who report being 'very satisfied' is up and the number who report

any dissatisfaction is down by half," Semaan says. "Based on our experience, those numbers translate into a 15 percent rise in customer retention."

A Better Bottom Line

With the higher-quality audio and more flexible remote-access options, QuickStart Intelligence is also increasing its maximum class size with no loss of effectiveness.

"Clearer audio inside the physical classroom enables the instructor to communicate effectively with a larger number of students, and easier remote access means that some students who in the past could not enroll, now can," Semaan says. "As a result, we're instructing up to 18 students in a class instead of 16, at no additional cost to us. This will help us grow both revenues and profits."

As Semaan explains, "Taken together, the increase in customer satisfaction and retention and our support for a larger class size is projected to add \$800,000 to our coffers. That's a 5 percent gain in overall revenue that we can attribute to the move to Lync Server 2010."

Enhanced Leadership

The improvements in the audio quality and stability of QSLive also make it easier for instructors to introduce more complex course material into the lessons or present those lessons in more innovative ways.

"When students comprehend what they hear without difficulty and when instructors and students alike enjoy a stable and smooth-running classroom experience, there's greater opportunity to enhance the learning itself," Semaan says. "This gives us one more way of reinforcing our position as an industry leader."