

NetApp Leverages Altus Collaborative Knowledge Sharing Technology to Educate and Energize Its Direct Sales Force and Channel Partners

Collaborative Knowledge Sharing, Anywhere, Any Time

NetApp is an engineering-focused company with 900 directly employed system engineers (SEs) and several hundred partner companies that employ another 4,000 to 5,000 technical sales engineers. To help those professionals become better informed, stay proficient, and sell more effectively, NetApp historically has held several major worldwide technical sales enablement events in the United States and abroad.

The evolution of business practices and increasing costs of travel, lodging, and meeting venues required NetApp to downsize its live meeting schedule without reducing the technical proficiency and sales effectiveness of its global Systems Engineering workforce.

In 2001, NetApp discovered the suite of collaborative knowledge sharing solutions, on-demand media tools, and digital postproduction services from Altus.

"It's all about enabling our SEs to become more knowledgeable and more productive so they can deliver the best presales guidance humanly possible," says Jim Coleman, System Engineering project manager at NetApp. "Our traditional way of educating and reeducating the SEs meant flying them anywhere from 600 to 6,000 miles for a live, annual three-day sales conference or technical event with more than 90 sessions led by subject matter experts imparting knowledge on 200 products. These events are substantial investments, and the return on investment is closely watched."

Live events archived on the Altus video portal (vPortal) deliver the best of both worlds: all the inherent advantages of a live experience along with the virtual benefits of fully searchable, referenceable, reusable media files, presenta-

tions, and expert-based knowledge that can be archived and reused for months or years after the event.

Educating and Supporting the Channel

How do you manage an organization that needs to be continuously updated with the latest technical product knowledge, and how do you keep presales engineers proficient year round without having them spend too much time in classes, away from their customers?

NetApp's answer to that is Altus Collaborative Knowledge Sharing.

"Several years ago, we were developing new programs to substantially increase our sales and profitability," Coleman explains. "We determined that the most efficient way to achieve this was through distribution, resellers, and OEM partners to put more feet on the street: more educated and motivated technical sales professionals. Due to the powerful capabilities of our products, we knew we had to empower our partners' employees with the same product knowledge and ongoing support that we gave our own direct people. Altus provided us the knowledge technology, accountability, measurability, security, and control to do that. Without Altus, we wouldn't be able to support our resellers and partners as aggressively and successfully as we do."

NetApp's sales event also created some challenges about how to best manage the attendees' available time

"Each one of our divisions understandably wants mind share from all of the SEs, and sometimes this becomes a balancing act because their time is at a premium. We always prioritize and schedule the live presentations as fairly and equitably as possible, but you always wish you had more time," Coleman adds.



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The Company

Founded in 1992, NetApp (NASDAQ: NTAP) creates innovative storage and data management solutions that help its customers accelerate business breakthroughs and achieve outstanding cost efficiency. Dedication to principles of simplicity, innovation, and customer success has made NetApp one of the fastest-growing storage and data management providers. The company has 60,000 customers, with approximately 8,000 employees in 130+ offices, and it posted FY2008 revenues of \$3.3 billion. NetApp is a member of the NASDAQ 100, the S&P 500, the Fortune 1000, and the Fortune e-50.

"Altus has the ability to search on a single word or phrase in a recorded video, audio file, PowerPoint, or transcribed text. When we need to find information on a specific technical topic or product discussed at a sales conference or training event, we can now recall with a quick search to find and download exactly what we need. This is critical to our business because Sales sells what Sales knows, and Altus technology helps our sales channels quickly learn what they need to know."

— Jim Coleman, System Engineering Project Manager NetApp



It's difficult for engineers to keep information and be proficient on 200 products from six company divisions in their heads, but, with Altus, it's easy to have many hundreds of products profiled online with up-to-date, detailed presentations that are fully searchable, referenceable, and continuously reusable.

"We accomplish a lot at our live events, and the people who fly in from around the world love the opportunity to put their heads together, learn, and network with headquarters personnel. But we've discovered that more people watch the postproduced content on the Altus vPortal than actually attend the live sessions. The fully transcribed video files created by Altus remain available for months and years afterward."

Sales engineers at one major global reseller adopted Altus as their primary NetApp® product knowledge resource and beat their stretch goal by 30%. Senior managers at that company credit the easy accessibility, searchability, and usability of the Altus vPortal for motivating their engineers to learn NetApp's products more thoroughly and maintain the confidence to promote them more readily to their customers.

Cost Savings of Up to 90%

The cost difference between large, live product events and Altus-based content is substantial. NetApp achieved significant cost savings at its midyear conference by leveraging the power of the Altus vPortal and replaced a planned multimillion-dollar

live event with a smaller virtual event that cost the company 90% * less, but was just as effective in sharing knowledge and product information with SEs worldwide.

"I calculated that we saved over \$1.5 million* on that event by using Altus to share knowledge and information with people who didn't attend in person. When you consider airfare savings within the United States and from overseas, along with the cost of hotel rooms and meals at the venue, the savings really add up fast," Coleman says.

NetApp's Asia Pacific sales group found an innovative way to make product knowledge conveniently available to its staff and partners.

"Some of our employees and many of our resellers in the Asia Pacific region were unable to travel to the States for our technical conference, so our manager down there loaded all of the videos and presentations onto iPods and gave them out to our top performers. This was such a great success that our U.S.-based SEs started doing the same, and now they use portable devices to search through and study expert presentations and product videos when they're preparing for a sales call."

New SEs in the company's most remote outposts can sit down on their first week on the job, access Altus Collaborative Knowledge Sharing, and absorb the collective knowledge of experts from all over the company to rapidly become produc-

tive contributors to the team. Within a relatively short time frame, they possess knowledge and business acumen that only longer-term employees ordinarily would have.

Weathering the Times

"In 2009, we're living through economic conditions that are unprecedented in the history of our company. And yet we're lucky to have an amazing tool called Altus vPortal that enables our SE organization to continue sharing knowledge, stay sharp, increase efficiency, and keep sales momentum going while reducing expenses at the same time," Coleman observes.

Coleman's advice to his upper management and colleagues in other companies is to take advantage of more virtual events using technologies such as Altus Collaborative Knowledge Sharing to maintain maximum sales enablement, field efficiency, and cost effectiveness.

"And I've told our partners candidly, if you're going to be a NetApp reseller and you want to maintain your knowledge, confidence, and efficiency, the best way to do that today is to invest the hours to learn our solutions, virtually, on your own time, using Altus."

Enterprise Benefits of Altus Collaborative Knowledge Sharing

- ▶ NetApp is able to continuously educate and reeducate 900 directly employed systems engineers and over 4,000 partner personnel around the world for a small fraction of the cost of live events and associated expenses.
- ▶ All knowledge content, including video, audio, PowerPoint, and documents, is fully searchable down to the spoken word and is accessible, referenceable, and reusable until deleted from the Altus vPortal.
- ▶ When leveraged in parallel with live events, Altus helps reduce overall expenses, shortens event durations, and avoids pulling salespeople out of the field and into classrooms where they're not being productive. This keeps more feet on the street, enables more effective sales activity, and drives greater revenues.
- ▶ Altus protects the company's investment in training and live events; leverages expert knowledge and intellectual property; and makes key information easy to access, search, and reuse.
- ▶ Event attendees can later search and review files from the collaborative knowledge sharing archive to refresh their memory with information that could otherwise be forgotten.