

Senior Learning Network Offers Enriching Virtual Programs to Encourage Lifelong Learning

Through the use of LifeSize video technology, Senior Learning Network is able to offer a host of educational programs to the elderly

Organization

Senior Learning Network, Kansas City, Missouri

The initial idea for Senior Learning Network came about during a personal experience of co-founder, Ellen Ervin. When Ervin brought her aging father to the National World I Museum in Kansas City, she found it incredibly difficult to navigate the galleries with her father's limited mobility. This experience was not unique to Ervin, as her partner Lynne Beachner had dealt with the very same issues in her own family. With 7,000 baby boomers turning 65 years old every day and life expectancy presently at 85, the senior citizen population is indeed on the rise. Ervin and Beachner realized the need to provide engaging, lifelong learning experiences, like that of the National World War I Museum tour, to aging individuals who are unable to travel.



Challenge

Because Ervin and Beachner previously worked in the field of education, both were familiar with video conferencing technology. In fact, Ervin last served as a director for a video conferencing consortium that provided high school classes to rural schools.

“I have really watched the video conferencing industry evolve from a dedicated T1 line to the sophisticated systems we have today,” said Ervin. “In my previous position, we used Polycom which presented us with all kinds of issues related to bandwidth, speed and networking. I knew that, for Senior Learning Network, we needed a reliable, high quality video solution that could grow with us over time.”

Solution

The two founders teamed up with a valued LifeSize channel partner, Scott Christianson to begin looking for the right HD video collaboration solution to share with senior community centers and experience providers. After looking at various vendors' solutions, Senior Learning Network settled on LifeSize ClearSea, a mobile video conferencing product that interoperates with all standards-based video endpoints, as well as iOS and Android mobile platforms, PCs and Macs.

“What I like most about LifeSize ClearSea is that it’s perfect for anyone who is ‘technophobic’ – it’s just so simple to use,” said Ervin. “All you need is an Internet connection and webcam, and you can use video conferencing. It’s really allowed us to expand our reach and offer more programs to more seniors in more locations.”

In order to jump start the success of the company, Ervin and Beachner invested in a server for the solution, their first major purchase. After some testing of LifeSize ClearSea to make sure it was ready to share with constituents, Ervin and Beachner started posting their ideas on Internet forums for senior communities, asking for feedback.

“We simply asked if anyone would be interested in a pilot program for lifelong learning over video conferencing,” explained Ervin. “The feedback was astounding. We received 25 responses from a single post from senior center directors all over the country. At that moment, we knew we had an incredible idea on our hands.”

Results

Once Senior Learning Network had a number of senior community centers and residential living facilities on board, the founders then worked closely with their LifeSize partner to develop the program further.

“Through LifeSize ClearSea, we are able to set up a username and password for each senior center, and simply send the director the software download link,” said Ervin. “In turn, we manage a calendar of lifelong learning events through a network of providers, including museums, zoos, libraries, churches and more. Directors can simply choose the program they’d like to share with their seniors, and they are up and running.”

Even though Senior Learning Network is a relatively new venture for Ervin and Beachner, they have already been able to offer a wealth of enriching programs to the senior community, including a visit to NASA, Smithsonian Museum, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Hallmark Card Visitors’ Center, Kansas City Zoo and of course, the World War I Museum.

“We are just so excited about the possibilities of this program,” said Ervin. “We can envision everything from virtual book clubs for seniors to Jeopardy and Wii bowling tournaments. The sky is the limit and we have really only scratched the surface.”

In fact, the seniors have even offered program ideas themselves. For example, one 80-year-old man specializes in energy medicine, chakras and pressure points for maintaining health, and shared his knowledge with other seniors over video conferencing. Another senior shared her experiences as the first black principal after desegregation at a school in South Carolina.

With the help of their LifeSize partner, Senior Learning Network is now able to live-stream events, so even more participants can join. Eventually, Ervin and Beachner would love to stream events from universities, such as musical performances and guest lectures.

“LifeSize ClearSea really is the engine that runs this program,” said Ervin. “Without such intuitive, easy-to-use technology, there’s no way we could provide the enriching programs that we do. We really appreciate the support of LifeSize and the interactive video experiences they provide.”

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Ellen Ervin and Lynne Beachner envisioned a program that offered lifelong learning opportunities for our aging population, but they needed a reliable, HD video collaboration solution to get the program off of the ground.

Solution: *Through their past experiences with video conferencing, Senior Learning Network worked with a channel partner to find an ideal solution. Eventually, the team chose LifeSize ClearSea for its simplicity and interoperability with endpoints, smartphones, tablets, PCs and Macs.*

Results: *With the help of LifeSize video technology, Senior Learning Network is able to provide a wealth of enriching educational programs to seniors including virtual trips to NASA and The Smithsonian, and are working to plan even more collaborative events in the future.*







