



Global players in virtual auditions

“Using the TelePresence auditions, we recruited people from New Zealand, from Spain, and from Scotland. In the process we saved 20 tonnes of carbon; we didn’t fly 55,000 miles; and we saved thousands of pounds.”

Simon Over
Director of Music
Southbank Sinfonia

No need to travel as Southbank Sinfonia recruits artists around the world using a Cisco TelePresence solution from BT

Client

The inspiration of its founder and Director of Music, Simon Over, Southbank Sinfonia exists to support a group of outstanding musicians at a critical point in their careers. Simon explains where the idea came from: “While conducting a group of young conservatoire students, I was struck not only by their dedication and outstanding talent, but also by the uncertainty they faced in beginning their professional careers. Our aim is to provide an ensemble that will offer its members a springboard into the music profession.”

Every year a new orchestra of 32 music graduates, each supported by bursary, is selected for a full-time programme of public performance and professional development. By broadening their skills, exposing them to a wide range of performing experiences, and giving them a perspective beyond the solely technical aspects of musical execution, those artists emerge better equipped to succeed in their vocations. The Southbank Sinfonia ethos also encourages them to engender their own passion for music in others throughout their careers.

Challenge

Southbank auditions and selects musicians from around the globe. The fact that in 2008 a candidate flew the Atlantic from Boston to audition for only 15 minutes provides an idea of the scale of competition for entry.

Simon Over observes: “While that level of commitment is highly commendable, it’s not very green. Nor is it very inclusive, as not everyone can afford to fly to London, even for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

BT and Cisco are both enthusiastic sponsors of Southbank Sinfonia. The problem of international auditions was raised during a conversation between Simon Over and Aaron McCormack, CEO of BT Conferencing, when the latter attended one of its concerts.

Solution

BT runs a Cisco TelePresence™ global videoconferencing network. That technology brings together high-definition visual technology with hi-fi audio technology, which means that the sound is both crystal clear and spatial.

The BT differentiators

- In-depth understanding of the business and technical aspects of conferencing and collaboration technologies
- The simplicity of operation of Cisco TelePresence, together with its market leading video image and spatial sound quality

Case study

Southbank Sinfonia

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Aaron McCormack
CEO
BT Conferencing

Aaron McCormack recalls: “It was one of those eureka moments.” The global network that underpins the BT Cisco TelePresence platform enables it to be operated between multiple points virtually anywhere on the planet. Aaron continues: “We saw that TelePresence would enable a musical audition to take place as if the parties were face-to-face – even though they might be continents apart. That was absolutely ideal for the Southbank Sinfonia recruitment programme.”

Southbank Sinfonia worked with BT and Cisco to schedule a series of global auditions. Then, without any fuss, the Southbank Sinfonia selection panel took their seats in the BT Centre TelePresence suite near St Paul’s Cathedral.

Simon Over brings the virtual tour to life: “At three o’clock in the afternoon we were in Madrid and heard a trumpeter and violinist there. At five o’clock we were in Glasgow and heard more players there. At seven o’clock we shifted to New York; and then at nine o’clock to Auckland, New Zealand.”

Logistically the exercise was hassle-free and seamless, but what was Simon Over’s experience of the technology? “We could observe very clearly how everyone was performing,” he says, “for example, looking at what their bowing hands were doing, and how they were moving around the instrument. Most importantly, in terms of sound quality, it really was as though they were in the same room with us.”

Value

To select the thirty-two players for its 2009 ensemble, Southbank Sinfonia heard over 140 candidates during the course of one week, including the TelePresence-enabled global auditions.

Simon Over says: “Using the TelePresence auditions, we recruited people from New Zealand, from Spain, and from Scotland. In the process we saved 20 tonnes of carbon; we didn’t fly 55,000 miles; and we saved thousands of pounds.” On the basis of that sound success, another virtual recruitment round is planned for the 2010 ensemble.

The Southbank Sinfonia example shows that in evaluating whether a candidate is fit for purpose, whether for an orchestra or for a business setting, auditions and interviews carried out over TelePresence are highly effective. In some cases recruitment decisions can be made there and then, or the field can be rapidly narrowed down to the “must see” short list for a second round of assessments. In either case, there are hugely significant time, cost, and environmental savings.

Aaron McCormack concludes: “As TelePresence becomes more widely deployed, in public as well as in business settings, I believe more and more organisations will use virtual auditions and interviews to find the best candidates anywhere on the planet.”

Core BT services

- BT-supplied Cisco TelePresence videoconferencing technology running over the BT global MPLS network platform

Offices worldwide

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