

Conference Plus, Inc.

2005 AWARD WINNER



History

ConferencePlus, a subsidiary of Westell Technologies, entered the market in 1988 as a premier retail and private label provider of audio conferencing services. Recognizing the opportunity for growth and expansion in the conferencing sector, ConferencePlus added web and multipoint videoconferencing in 1996, and two years later established its first international subsidiary in Dublin, Ireland. In 2001, ConferencePlus moved into new custom-designed headquarters in Schaumburg, IL. These new facilities take full advantage of the latest in fiber optic network and digital switching technology. Today, ConferencePlus provides audio, web, and videoconferencing solutions that are utilized by organizations for collaboration, virtual meetings, third-party facilitation and webinars. *CEO Tim Reedy explains, "Our success, in large part, is due to our efforts to shift from traditional career pathing to offering increased training and development*

opportunities and implementing new business models for learning. All of our employees are experts in their respective areas of work, not only from a technological standpoint but in problem solving and critical thinking on behalf of our clients. As a customer focused organization, ConferencePlus employees have a significant impact on our bottom line and are key to the growth of our business."

Cultivating Experts by Providing a Mix of Formal and Informal Training

The story of ConferencePlus is one of providing exceptional customer service and a consultative approach to conferencing. This approach is made possible through the progressive training and development of its labor force, creating subject matter experts at all levels of the organization. ConferencePlus focuses on employee training and development to drive the results that continuously improve the customer's experience.

conferenceplus™

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Name	Conference Plus, Inc., a subsidiary of Westell Technologies
Industry	Professional Services
2004 Employees	257
2004 Employees ChicagoLand	220
Location	Schaumburg, IL and Dublin, Ireland
Revenues	\$45 million
Year Founded	1988
Web Address	www.conferenceplus.com

All ConferencePlus employees, regardless of tenure, position, or prior education, are guided through a highly structured learning process that enables them to become both expert users of cutting-edge technological tools and responsive customer advocates. The ConferencePlus Training and Development process, a mix of formal and informal learning activities, is made up of six pillars:

1. The Everyone's a Leader at ConferencePlus Curriculum:

A great leader does more than just do a job well; they inspire and develop others to do a job exceptionally. These courses target new and future leaders in preparing them for additional responsibilities such as basic tools for leading and building a team, career self-reliance, coaching, continuous performance review, building trust, decision-making, conflict resolution, financial skills and concepts, business writing, critical thinking, presentations, and managing employee relations.

2. The ConferencePlus Essential Skills Curriculum:

Designed to train skills necessary to perform the essential functions of working at ConferencePlus — operations training, company specific training, product training, handbook training and more.

3. Real-time Mentoring Program:

Some skills are learned best by spending time with people who do the job day-in and day-out. This program is designed to provide structured mentoring opportunities to both new and not so new employees and may be part of cross-training, learning skills for the first time, or just to provide perspective on different activities going on in the organization.

4. New Hire Orientation Training:

Key to joining any new organization, this training is designed to provide new employees with the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful on the job. *“The goal is that every new employee will step on the floor and know exactly what they are doing,” says ConferencePlus Training Manager Dave Barnett.*

5. Just-in-Time Department Specific Intervention Strategies:

Training or development intervention strategies that specifically target one department to meet a skill-based or relational need that is unique to a department. These activities can range from a department specific training need, to teambuilding, to facilitation for process improvement.

6. Relationship Building and Knowledge Sharing Activities:

These activities are geared at breaking down barriers between departments and/or individuals and can take on many forms such as teambuilding activities, conflict mediation, role clarification and many others.

Combined, these six pillars form the backbone of this “expert cultivation” through the development of both business and personal skills.

In addition, ConferencePlus offers full-time employees up to \$10,000 per year for formal education activities from an accredited and approved university, college or technical school. Upon management approval, reimbursement is offered for any coursework related to ConferencePlus activities. Part-time employees similarly are offered tuition assistance; those

working at least 25 hours have \$3,000 per year for coursework, and those under 20 hours, \$2,000.

“My supervisor was very supportive of my taking classes that allowed me to assume more responsibility and move forward within the organization. Even though he knew it might lead me to move to another area of the company, he was still extremely encouraging and allowed me the flexibility to meet class schedules.” Alison Shirley, Account Manager



Participants in “Capitalizing on Individual Difference in the Workplace” learn in a fun way!

Strategic Use of Technology & Cross Training

Because ConferencePlus is in the business of understanding and utilizing the potential of web-based technology, it is not surprising that a hallmark of its learning activities is its strategic use of the company’s core technologies in the delivery of training. Large group meetings and learning opportunities happen in live and virtual space, utilizing high-end technology to continuously increase everyone’s familiarity with the tools of the trade. Self-paced on-line learning modules are available 24 hours per day to all employees, a system that has an extremely effective impact on the “dead time” that employees have between conferences or customer consultations. Self-paced modules include “Providing Exceptional Customer Service,” as well as more technical modules like “Audio Matrix Phase I.”

All employees are welcomed and encouraged to explore other departments of ConferencePlus that may interest them. For example, a Meeting

Consultant might have an interest in the Human Resources department, or a Multimedia Specialist might want to explore consulting with customers. An employee involved in “cross-training” may regularly spend as many as one day a week in a department other than their own over an extended period of time. *“The benefits are huge,” said Paul Madej, ConferencePlus Director of Human Resources. “With a truly flexible workforce, employees can step confidently and competently into another department when needed.”* Employees are kept interested, departmental teams get the benefits of another point of view, and managers know who they can pull into their departments for special projects or to fill staffing gaps.

Leadership and Vision

Tim Reedy, President and CEO, has been at the helm of ConferencePlus since 2002. Bringing with him an extensive background in managing high technology, high-growth businesses, Reedy joined ConferencePlus from MCI Conferencing, where he served as Vice President of Marketing, Finance and

Information Technology, and before that, had a distinguished career with tenures at Darome Teleconferencing and Ameritech Mobile Communications. Reedy believes that lifelong learning is crucial, from early childhood through late adulthood, and he is proud to have ConferencePlus be a part of providing the ongoing learning his employees receive. ***“Educating the workforce has benefits for everyone. At ConferencePlus, it helps us retain good employees by teaching people how to do their jobs better and by creating the loyalty that comes from the investment”, says Reedy.***

Although a firm believer in traditional chain-of-command management structure, Reedy believes education empowers employees to make decisions at the point of service delivery. The entire management at ConferencePlus professes a strong belief that ownership is transferred through knowledge. This, in turn, gives its employees the self-confidence and power to efficiently resolve all types of customer issues.

Reedy’s leadership style requires visibility and involvement in learning and development and he meets and discusses its importance with employees through group “Lunch and Learns” and quarterly “All Hands Calls.” Throughout a two year cycle of the “Lunch and Learn” program, Reedy has the opportunity to speak with each and every employee in a small group

of 10 to 15 employees. The “All Hands Call” functions like a stockholders meeting for the entire ConferencePlus workforce, providing the opportunity for every employee to be informed and heard in the organization. Through these activities employees learn about the company’s performance firsthand from the CEO. Also, Reedy is able to communicate the value he places on training and development and how they individually impact the business.

What’s the payoff for a company making such a large investment in its employees? In addition to retaining good talent, senior leadership at ConferencePlus believes that learning and development improves business efficiency and saves time and money. Their experience has been that employee retention increases with educational investment and training, and decreases hiring costs in the long run. In the last year ConferencePlus has experienced a 40 percent reduction in turnover in the sales organization. ConferencePlus believes that invested and engaged employees care more about the quality of the company’s work and services which ultimately will have a positive impact on the bottom line. ***Says CEO Tim Reedy, “We strive to be an Employer of Choice. The value of ConferencePlus is based on people, technology and processes. A customer can buy the technology elsewhere, but it’s our people and processes that make the difference in our success.”***