

ON24 launching virtual briefing centers

June 29 2010, by Glenn Chapman



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In about a month, the San Francisco-based firm will roll out "always on" Internet venues that companies can use for anything from showcasing products to training employees or briefing workers on health plan coverage.

"This is a complete turn-key application," ON24 chief marketing officer Denise Persson told AFP on Monday. "It is where things are moving, into the cloud."

ON24 Centers allow visitors to slip into "theaters" for presentations; access documents or other data, and chat by [instant messaging](#) with others attending virtual briefings.

An animated figure serves as "avatar host" to answer questions or guide visitors about the [virtual environment](#).

A worker could go to a company's virtual human resources department at any time to get questions answered, while stockholders could connect with a virtual investor relations office.

"You will have someone staffing it 24-seven in the background, greeting you by name when you arrive then helping you and following up with you," Persson said.

"We believe this product is the next step in the evolution of the website."

Virtual briefing centers allow real-time conversations between organizations and their audiences, whether they are workers, partners or customers.

Virtual briefing centers are tailored to the tastes of each company and content is delivered in local languages.

ON24 said it will charge a monthly fee of 2,500 dollars to access virtual briefing centers after about 9,000 dollars in set-up costs.

Earlier this month, ON24 opened new offices in Paris and Hamburg in an increased focus on Europe, where it already had operations in London.

"Global expansion is a key component of our value proposition and growth strategy," ON24 chief executive Sharan Sharat said in a release.

He touted the company's recently released Virtual Show event and webcast technology that supports seven languages including French, Spanish, German and Portuguese.

"The result is that ON24 can now provide a completely localized user experience, all across Europe," Sharat said of Virtual Show.

During the recent financial meltdown, virtual conferences grew in popularity as ways to cut travel, lodging and other costs involved with attending distant meetings, trade shows or other such gatherings.

Virtual meetings also have environmental appeal since they eliminate burning fuel driving or flying to meeting places.

Pioneering online world Second Life has been re-creating itself as a virtual venue for conventions, meetings and other gatherings.

Second Life requires users to download its application to computers and then learn how to maneuver in its online realm. ON24 billed its briefing centers as "effortless" with no software to learn or download.

Technology powerhouse Hewlett Packard introduced Halo collaboration studios nearly five years ago, outfitting rooms in businesses to serve as virtual conferencing centers.

ON24 was launched in 1999 as an online financial news operation but shifted to specializing in virtual events after the legendary dot-com bust a year later forced it to reinvent itself, according to executives.

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Citation: ON24 launching virtual briefing centers (2010, June 29) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-06-on24-virtual-centers.html>

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