

One Social and Technical Networker for Development

CATC Highlight, 10 March, 2008

Sub-Saharan Africa, part of the world's largest continent, includes 42 countries and 770 million people. It is comprised of 11.5 million square miles or 19% of the earth's land surface. Welcome to the territory of the Sub-Saharan African CATC or SSACATC. For the past eight years this CATC has experienced growth like nowhere else on earth. This continuing growth can be attributed to partnerships for development, entrepreneurship, and the expansion of Africa's Internet economy.

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With a diverse mix of countries, peoples, and economies, the SSACATC must be flexible and well-versed in all things technological. Formed in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, the SSACATC has been a part of the Cisco Networking Academy for seven years. Because South Africa's technology revolution ballooned at a much faster rate than many of its sub-Saharan neighbors,

CATC managers like Renaldo Rheeder, who manages the SSACATC, face the challenge of working with instructors whose technology backgrounds run the gamut and who deal with a wide range of bandwidth issues.

To meet the needs of this diverse group, Rheeder focuses on two things: communication and the "Robin Hood" approach of having those who can afford to pay help support those who cannot.

Communication from the SSACATC encompasses all forms: phone calls, text messaging, in-person training, Web sites, e-mail, and plenty of travel. Because of bandwidth and background challenges, Rheeder constantly travels for face-to-face training and retooling sessions with instructors. Not only does he communicate with the main contacts at his "Regional Academies" (a term used to refer to the second tier of the three-tiered model), but with all instructors, curriculum leads, main contacts, and staff members at each of the 296 institution under his Academy tree.

Once a year, Rheeder packs his bags for a full Africa Academy Safari. He spends most of his time teaching and retooling new instructor content. There's little time for leisure. During 2008 he will attend at least six Academy conferences scattered across sub-Saharan Africa. This face-to-face training is essential, Rheeder says, and provides instructors with a synchronous component to their online-based coursework.

Regional instructors praise Rheeder's commitment to their development and to the program. A distinctive South African sense of humor and determination facilitates trust and respect as he works to accommodate everyone's personal style and financial needs.

Rheeder says he finds that the "Robin Hood" - essentially distributing costs and fees amongst the diverse academy community based on what each one can afford - serves everyone in the best way. He can conduct his CATC this way because he has established the SSACATC as a sustainable separate not-for-profit unit within the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. This allows Rheeder to distribute discounts and exceptions on a "come as you are" basis. He networks with a vast array of instructors and institutions to understand what they can and cannot commit to financially to make the Academy successful.

The inventive methods by which Rheeder brings technology and technology education to sub-Saharan Africa are crucial to the support of these developing economies. Rheeder, and others like him, are changing the face of the continent one Academy at a time.

For More Information:

Least Developed Countries Initiative:

http://www.cisco.com/web/learning/netacad/digital_divide/ldc/index.html

Cisco Network Academy:

<http://www.cisco.com/web/learning/netacad/index.html>