



Media Firm Boosts Revenues 30 Percent with Enterprise Project Management Solution

Overview

Country or Region: United States
Industry: Media and entertainment

Customer Profile

Media Loft, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is a film, video, and events-coordination company whose clients include Porsche, BMW, Staples, Target Stores, Northwest Airlines, and Google. It has 38 employees.

Business Situation

Media Loft wanted a project-oriented document management and collaboration solution that would support its continued growth.

Solution

Milestone Consulting Group created for Media Loft a custom enterprise project management solution based on Microsoft® technologies.

Benefits

- Revenues up 30 percent
- Productivity up 8 percent
- Key workflow processes cut from hours to seconds
- Client projects completed faster
- Tighter financial control of projects

“The bottom line is that clients are more demanding today than ever, and Microsoft and Milestone Consulting Group have enabled us to respond to those demands.”

Gene Di Lorenzo, CEO, Media Loft

Minneapolis-based Media Loft, a film, video, and meeting-coordination company with an A-list clientele, needed a better way to manage project documents and processes in order to support its continued growth. The company turned to Milestone Consulting Group, which developed a custom enterprise project management solution based on Microsoft® technologies. Media Loft executives credit the solution with boosting revenues by 30 percent, speeding key job functions from hours to seconds, boosting productivity by 8 percent, and enhancing project turnaround and responsiveness to clients.



“Over the past couple of years, we had to turn down projects because we didn’t have the structure in place to support our growth. That hasn’t happened since implementing this solution.”

David Kelsey, President, Media Loft

Situation

If you’re known by the company you keep, 32-year-old Media Loft must be very well-known indeed. The film, video, graphics, and meeting-coordination company has an A-list clientele of top companies, including Porsche, BMW, Staples, Target Stores, Northwest Airlines, and Google.

Media Loft has managed to consistently grow its business while keeping its staff relatively lean. Although revenues are rising (the employee-held company does not release revenue figures), the employee roster numbers just 38. The company’s secret: building a stable of independent contractors, not only in and around company headquarters in Minneapolis, Minnesota, but also from Los Angeles to New York City. That staffing model allows Media Loft to assemble an ideal virtual team for practically any project. It also enables Media Loft to accommodate the seasonality of its business by maintaining its core staff throughout the year and adding independent contractor talent during the times that justify the additional resources.

However, that staffing model also comes with challenges. The use of far-flung resources means that documentation—from creative briefs, technical drawings, and scripts, to project estimates and invoices—can be equally far-flung, stored on the local hard disks of independent contractors.

“We have a tremendous need to go back and pull out old data when we start the latest version of an annual project,” says Media Loft Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Gene Di Lorenzo. “We could always find the data we need, but it could cost the company significantly in time and money. We were always on the phone asking for old files, or digging through servers.”

Much of the data and documentation that Media Loft required would get passed back to

the company from its independent contractors, to be stored on the company’s server computers. But as the company focused on client service and experienced rapid growth, its data storage grew in an unplanned way. As a result, documents could be stored on any of four computers, making them time-consuming and expensive to locate even when they were at the company. And the ad hoc data storage system did not include a comprehensive, consistent data backup and recovery system. Although Media Loft didn’t lose crucial documentation, Di Lorenzo and Media Loft President David Kelsey knew that it was time for the company to pay as much attention to its documentation system as it had always paid to client service.

That also required paying attention to a related concern: the company’s aging accounting system. Media Loft had outgrown the basic accounting package it had used for years. A new accounting solution—ideally, one integrated with the documentation solution—was needed to facilitate the company’s continued growth.

Solution

In 2003, Di Lorenzo and Kelsey attended a Microsoft® conference at the invitation of Milestone Consulting Group, a Minneapolis-based consultancy that provides solutions for enterprise project management (EPM). Milestone had invited Media Loft’s top executives to hear its presentation on the integration of Microsoft Business Solutions software—now Microsoft Dynamics™ software—with EPM solutions, which was exactly what Media Loft was looking for.

By November 2005, Media Loft had its own EPM solution, developed by Milestone Consulting Group. That solution, called Media Loft Central, is a single, comprehensive Web portal that allows Media Loft’s people to create, find, track, and share the full range of documents needed to support client

Figure 1. Media Loft Central is a portal-based enterprise management solution that gives Media Loft employees and contractors a single place in which to create, find, track, and share project documentation.

projects—and to import relevant data into the financial accounting system (see Figure 1).

The Media Loft EPM solution is based on Microsoft software including Microsoft Office Project Server 2003, Microsoft Office Project Web Access, and Windows® SharePoint® Services, running on the Microsoft Windows Server® 2003 operating system. The EPM solution integrates with Media Loft's new accounting solution, which is based on Microsoft Dynamics SL, formerly Microsoft Business Solutions—Solomon.

When a Media Loft sales manager receives a new job from a client, he or she clicks a

desktop icon to initiate the project in Media Loft Central. The solution takes the manager to a project initiation form Web page, which is prepopulated automatically with a new job number. The manager enters basic information about the job, including its relationship to other work that Media Loft is doing for the customer. Behind the scenes, Project Server automatically creates a new Windows SharePoint Services site that includes folders appropriate for that type of job. Project Server also sends an e-mail alert to relevant managers, so they can begin to assign staff and assemble other resources as quickly as possible.

Project Name	Client	Project Type	Status	Creation Date	Structure	Master Proj #
62766 Monolith Cocoonery	A. Detum Corporation	3 - Video	Active	08/01/2006	3 - Sub Project	62536
62765 Footage of Tracy Research Culinary Council	Tracy Research	4 - Dub Order	Active	08/01/2006	1 - Standalone	
62764 Audio Clips	A. Detum Corporation	3 - Video	Active	07/31/2006	3 - Sub Project	62536
62763 Pub-Coverer Science Images	A. Detum Corporation	3 - Video	Active	07/31/2006	3 - Sub Project	62536
62762 HIL Animation	A. Detum Corporation	3 - Video	Active	07/31/2006	3 - Sub Project	62536
62761 Logo Animation	A. Detum Corporation	3 - Video	Active	07/31/2006	3 - Sub Project	62536
62760 Opening Video	A. Detum Corporation	3 - Video	Active	07/31/2006	3 - Sub Project	62536
62758 Transnational Video Clips	A. Detum Corporation	3 - Video	Active	07/31/2006	3 - Sub Project	62536
62758 John Smith DVD of presentations	Blue Yonder Airlines	3 - Video	Active	07/31/2006	1 - Standalone	
62757 Conference website	Contoso	Other	Active	07/31/2006	1 - Standalone	
62756 Food Live Talent	Blue Yonder Airlines	1 - Meeting	Active	07/27/2006	3 - Sub Project	55676
62755 Post Audio Production	Blue Yonder Airlines	3 - Video	Active	07/27/2006	3 - Sub Project	55676

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Gene Di Lorenzo, CEO, Media Loft

The SharePoint site automatically includes a project plan template, as well as other document templates that are relevant to the project type. The account manager completes the project plan so that other managers can see relevant details when they visit the site in response to the e-mail alert. A creative director clicks on the creative brief template and writes the creative brief. A technical director uses that information as input for the cost-estimate template, a customized Microsoft Office Excel® spreadsheet residing in the Web site’s financials folder.

As the team continues to collaborate and different options are considered, 10 or more estimates may be created and all of them can be reviewed by team members at the project site. Each version can be categorized as “ready for review,” “ready for client,” and so on.

The account manager reviews and approves the final estimate and uses another desktop tool to convert the Excel data into one of nine client-ready proposal forms. The account manager can customize the proposal format without fear of accidentally changing the data—the tool ensures that the underlying financial data remains unchanged. A Portable Document Format (PDF) version of the proposal is created for forwarding to the client by e-mail, fax, or hard copy, and the solution automatically stores the proposal in the project site’s client-communications folder. When the client approves the proposal, the account manager marks the file as accepted. Final versions of all project documentation are automatically copied to a central archive site.

Meanwhile, in Media Loft’s accounting department, an employee uses a Web-based, customized, Excel-based tool twice daily to search all the SharePoint sites for newly approved proposals. The tool searches the client-communications folders automatically

and generates a report on its findings. The accounting department then uses another tool to pass the data to the Microsoft Dynamics SL–based accounting system. That system in turn can generate reports on spending relative to approved budgets for all of the company’s projects.

Benefits

Thanks to the Microsoft-based EPM solution from Milestone Consulting Group, Media Loft has seen a 30 percent increase in revenues, faster workflows, a greater ability to deliver great customer service, and a projected return on investment of 115 percent.

Increases Revenues 30 Percent

Di Lorenzo and Kelsey wanted a solution that would support Media Loft’s continued growth. That’s what they got with the new solution: Revenues are up 30 percent this year over last year.

“We could not have achieved our revenue growth without the EPM solution,” says Kelsey. “Over the past couple of years, we had to turn down projects because we didn’t have the structure in place to support our growth. That hasn’t happened since implementing this solution. It’s a prime contributor to our continued growth.”

“The bottom line is that clients are more demanding today than ever, and Microsoft and Milestone Consulting Group have enabled us to respond to those demands,” says Di Lorenzo. “That’s why we’re more successful than ever.”

Boosts Productivity 8 Percent

With five months’ experience with the new solution, the company reports that Media Loft Central has helped to boost productivity—as measured by labor count—by 8 percent, and to cut project costs by 3 percent. Part of the savings comes from the faster workflows that Media Loft Central makes possible. For example, creating a customer proposal

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from a final internal project estimate used to take hours; now, the task is completed in 30 seconds.

Savings also come from being able to track actual spending against budgets in real time for any project, and catching small discrepancies before they can turn into large ones. “By integrating project data and financial data, we can see how well we’re doing against budget in real time, any time,” says Di Lorenzo. “We have better visibility into what was sold. That can raise a red flag when there’s a problem, so we can address it. Now we can hold people accountable for addressing budget issues in ways we couldn’t when we didn’t have the data.”

Thanks to the increased revenues and productivity enabled by the EPM solution, Media Loft projects a 115 percent return on investment for the solution, with payback in 10 months.

Expands Ability to Deliver High-Quality Customer Service

Media Loft has long been known for its customer service. The Microsoft-based EPM solution from Milestone Consulting Group has enabled the company to deliver high-quality service to more clients more cost-effectively, which in turn has supported the company’s continued growth.

“Thanks to the portal, we take on new clients and immediately give them a level of service and attention that wasn’t possible before,” says Di Lorenzo. “We respond to client requests more quickly. We even executed the largest project in our history three months after launching the portal, and it went off without a problem.”

That faster response comes, in part, from the Web-based nature of the EPM solution, which allows Media Loft employees to access it not just from their offices, but also from client

offices, event sites, location shoots, or anywhere else with Internet access. It also comes in part from the e-mail notifications that accompany new projects: Because all relevant managers are notified instantly when a project is initiated and because all relevant data is contained in the online project documents they see when they go to the Web site, managers can begin the project work immediately. In the past, it took about six hours for managers to be notified of new projects and to receive the information they needed to begin assembling their teams and resources.

The enhancements to customer service extend to every phase of Media Loft’s relationship with its clients—even to invoicing. “Clients want fast turnaround on final billing so they can close out their books more promptly,” says Di Lorenzo. “With the integration between the EPM solution and the accounting system, we can deliver final invoices to clients up to 75 percent faster. The clients love it—and we get paid that much faster, so we love it, too.”

For More Information

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For more information about Milestone Consulting Group, Inc., products and services, call (952) 400-7850 or visit the Web site at: www.milestoneconsultinggroup.com

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