

Case Study – Waste management and business leads for coffee prices in Canada going offshore

Back in 2009 Igor Kotenko became managing partner in www.dumpsterrentals.ca for the Canadian market and www.disposalbinrentals.com for the US market. Igor had been successful in old school project managements for banking in the Seattle area. The business plan for the new enterprises was to facilitate the engagement of customers and local waste management business owners. These were mostly small and medium sized businesses with websites, search engines and lead-generating activities. The goal was to have two systems, twins, targeting each geographic market. The waste management market is nationwide where suppliers service clients within a 50 kilometer radius.

In order to create the solution, Igor set up distributed teams. Management and some of the business analysts were located in Vancouver, Canada. The web designers were located in Ukraine. The software developers were in Russia, Saint Petersburg and Volgograd. The project started out with the waterfall approach where all requirements were analyzed and designed in great detail over a period of five to six months. Afterwards, they successfully developed and deployed the system. It was running smoothly. Only the clients were missing.

The business model was based upon a small membership fee which might have worked. However, after engaging local business owners, they discovered that the key stakeholders did not see the benefits of being listed on the website. The business model and functionality of the solution had to change in order to become successful.

They changed the membership-based business model to one based on referrals at costs close to a cup of coffee. The collaboration with the local business owners was very positive but required significant changes to the solution. Igor did not

have time for a new six month development cycle. He initiated an iterative approach with shorter cycles of developments that resulted in a constant stream of changes and development to the sites. The changes were received very well by the local business owners and the market turned the solution into a well-running lead-generating solution servicing the waste market in Canada and the United States.

Offshore development with distributed teams in several time zones is not without challenge. The team members were fluent in Russian and English, which worked out well. The struggle came with time zones. The team was split into three time zones. Management and stakeholders were in Canada. The designers and developers worked in two other time zones on the other side of the globe: Ukraine and Russia. This made online presence and meetings tricky to coordinate.

Geographical distribution is demanding, but still possible to manage. Another issue for distributed teams working offshore is motivation. Code reviews were conducted by developers who did not know one another. This resulted in very little finger pointing and high level of clean code. The project manager handled other aspects of motivation with close contact and information distribution. Feedback from happy clients was shared. Success sharing in the form of spring bonuses to positive feedback also worked well.

Today the solution is running well, but new challenges have emerged. When it is daytime in Canada, it is late in Russia, where the offshore development teams work. When immediate attention is required, especially in worst case scenarios, minor downtime may result.

Currently this is being solved with the addition of developers in the Canada. The two teams in Ukraine and Russia have merged into one to reduce the number of time zones and and increase quality assurance. Business analysts and designers are

all in Canada for close collaboration with their many clients on a daily basis.

The change from a waterfall to a more iterative Agile approach has resulted in much better collaboration. This has sped up decision making, shortened development time, reduced the redo time, significantly decreased development costs, and made both teams are happier and clients happier. Now the solution fits the needs of the stakeholders.

Exercise 7.5.1

- What would you recommend in order to reduce the hinderances of working with staff in many time zones?
- Leading and motivating distributed teams differs from leading and motivating collocated teams – What would you do differently as team member, product owner or project Manager?
- Is the success of Igor only due to a more iterative approach of the software development and change of business model? Or, were there other factors involved?

Exercise 7.5.2

- Is collocating the team a different thing for different projects?

Section 7.6

Daily standups

Daily standup

The daily standup is a daily team meeting of 15 minutes where the members gives an update on the work. There are three questions to ask and answer in the daily stand-up. Though it may not be practical to limit all discussion to these three questions, the goal is to stick as closely as possible to these questions.

- What did I accomplish yesterday?
- What will I do today?
- What obstacles are impeding my progress?