

OPRE 6398.001 Prescriptive Analytics

Reading 16*

Thomas Brothers Maps, Inc., based in Irvine, California, is one of the country's premier makers of road maps. The firm supplies street guides and maps that cover many West Coast cities and counties. They have 230 workers and annual revenues exceeding \$20 million. Bob Foster, the president of the firm, always found it difficult to determine the staffing level needed to produce the following year's stock of new maps. Then late last year, he began using client-server project management software to plan a schedule for hiring and training cartographers. Foster chose PlanView, a Windows-based package, from the company with the same name based in Austin, Texas. The software handles planning for the 250 projects the company undertook in 1995 and allows the president to track exactly how each worker is deployed.

One of the features of PlanView that attracted Foster and other personnel at Thomas Brothers was the ability of the software to track resources as well as schedules. PlanView looks at the labor pool in terms of resource overload rather than as a succession of tasks and potential bottlenecks. The firm can monitor its progress on a large number of multiple projects by maintaining a running schedule of the workload for each cartographer. According to Foster, "We've never been able to see so far ahead so clearly."

Another feature of PlanView is that the package uses a standard SQL database and can interface easily with other database products including Oracle 7. The project management information supplied by the system can be used to keep track of other business functions as well, such as the cost of sales and payroll.

Other key project management products than PlanView include Microsoft's Project, Computer Associates' Super Project, and Scitor's PS2. It was estimated that the worldwide project management software market rose by 45% between 1992 and 1994. Two years ago, Dataquest, Inc., a market research company in San Jose, California, pegged the PC project management market at \$232 million.

* Adapted from Wood, L. Perfect harmony. *Informationweek*, 1995, May 8, 42-54.