CLIENT CASE STUDY

DYONYX

Client Profile

The General Services Administration (GSA), is the federal government's premier acquisition agency. GSA's mission is to help other agencies better serve the public by meeting – at best value, their needs for products and services, and to simplify citizen access to government information and services. The goal, which exceeds GSA's traditional mission, is to move beyond saving agencies money, and to provide them with innovative solutions, and the right services at the right time, and at the right price so that they are free to concentrate on their missions. This goal aligns with President Bush's challenge for all federal agencies to find new and smarter ways to do business.

Challenge

DYONYX was tasked by the Government to perform a variety of services in support of the GSA WITS 2001 program. Support is provided to the Business Management Center (BMC) and Customer Account Management Centers (CAMC) specifically to the Network Oversight & Quality Assurance, Price and Other Support Systems Management, and Billing Management teams. The suite of services being delivered by DYONYX include: day-today operational, technical, and administrative support and oversight of GSA WITS2001 services; preparation and submission of annual rate package data; development and maintenance of Standard Operating Procedures; diagnosis and resolution of TOPS billing problems, responding to customer inquiries and reconciling vendor invoices and billed customer accounts; interacting with ITSS and Pegasys to give GSA associates pertinent information in a timely manner; the customized development and ongoing support of information and databases pertaining to the WITS2001/FTS2001 Programs.

A Custom Solution For A Unique Problem

In the past, GSA NCR/FTS managed a large portfolio of task orders without appropriate controls and mechanisms in place to adequately handle their workload. Ultimately, the inability to effectively scale the management of their portfolio of tasks created an unprofitable situation for the agency, inhibited the division from providing timely, accurate significantly increasing their workload and attributed to many discrepancies identified by various audits. During this time, GSA personnel had to rely on ITSS and Pegasys almost exclusively to make decisions and share information about tasks. Both systems provide the capabilities to manage a particular task, but neither provided an efficient way to manage a portfolio of tasks and proved to be cumbersome in use. Additionally, GSA Management had no convenient way to track progress, changes or issues for a task or set of tasks nor could they measure job performance by associates. Because of these deficiencies, the task orders quickly became difficult to manage.

DYONYX was tasked with streamlining the agency's key business processes and then for developing a set of support tools that would allow GSA management and associates to more effectively perform their duties. Among the support tools we developed, the Task Order Management tool has become central to enhancing the overall process.

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The tool's core modules allow GSA associates to easily retrieve key information from their business systems (Pegasys, ITSS, ITOMS, etc.) through a single interface, and then augment that data with additional information. It further eliminates the need for manually researching task information in the different systems by providing an automated, intuitive interface that simplifies the process of managing task orders. The tool's reporting engine allows associates to create a list of tasks based on specific criteria to help identify and prioritize issues.

Key Benefits

The tool itself had to be tightly integrated with the operational practices of each center. Because GSA was implementing a structural re-organization during the development of the tool, many of these practices and operational processes have yet to be fully developed. Thus, the tool was modeled interactively, which led to a highly customized product that will address current requirements and anticipate numerous foreseeable scenarios, including:

- Facilitates communication between functional centers
- Provides an intuitive and unified interface to access key data in core systems
- Provides the ability to easily manage multiple task orders
- Augments data in core business systems
- Provides extensive reporting capabilities combining data from all systems

Facilitate Communication between Functional Centers

Previously, associates lacked the ability to have a measured, coordinated means of communication between the various functional centers. This inability to account for communicated needs led to a large number of tasks becoming unmanaged as each party thought that the responsibility for those tasks laid elsewhere. The tool addresses this deficiency by providing a fully automated notification mechanism that informs the respective associates of when a task becomes their responsibility. Associates have the ability to add their own comments before forwarding on the task to further help reduce confusion. All correspondence is saved so that a "paper trail" can be created which yields the added flexibility of being able to easily transfer task management responsibility from one associate to another.

Provide an intuitive and unified interface to access key data in core systems

The task of researching data in multiple business systems can be quite daunting for even the most seasoned of associates. Great care has been taken to ensure that this is no longer the case. The interface provides the most recent information relevant to each task whenever an associate accesses it. This allows associates to manage their own set of data while seamlessly viewing the information contained in GSA's core business systems. In most cases an associate can make informed decisions on the status of a task simply by viewing this snapshot of data and circumvent the need for laborious manual research.

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Provide associates the ability to easily manage multiple task orders

ITSS manages a high level of detail but provides no mechanism for associates to simultaneously manage multiple task orders. To address this shortcoming, the tool provides a complete list of all tasks currently in its repository on the main page of each module. Associates can then use one of several filters to condense the list to just those that are relevant to them. This allows the associates to quickly access any number of tasks that they are specifically responsible for.

Augment data in core business systems

Since the core systems are designed for functional purposes other than managing task orders, the Task Order Management Tool provides a means for collecting ancillary data relevant to the that process. This includes key deliverable dates, base and option year information, current status of a task as relevant to the center that is currently handling it and other related facts. By combining this information with what is available in the other core systems, upper management can quickly determine that associates are taking appropriate action and ensure that the process is moving smoothly.

Provide extensive reporting capabilities between all systems

The ability to quickly and easily summarize and analyze performance data is critical to ensuring that the process is running efficiently. The tool addresses this need by providing a simple interface to request ad hoc reports as well as a graphical representation of workflow level data. This gives both associates and management the ability to access information relevant to achieving their goals.

Simplify Training and Personnel Requirements

Due to the absence of a centralized management system that automates the workflow processes involved with maintaining the task orders, associates began developing their own techniques to manage them. This ultimately led to an inconsistent environment and made it difficult to transition associates from their current duties to other assignments. Because of this difficulty, GSA's ability to react quickly to business demands was severely impeded. The Task Order Management Tool significantly reduces the ability of an associate to work out of process by eliminating manual intervention where possible. This rigidity limits the variation among techniques employed by task managers and helps GSA maintain consistency among its task order management group. In addition, the tool leverages an intuitive web based interface that requires minimal technical knowledge and increases the speed in which a new associate can learn the workflow process. In turn, GSA can train new associates quickly and transfer the workload without having to incur the costs and hardships experienced in the past. To make the interface accessible, authentication is handled automatically in the background. If a user has been authenticated on the network, then no further authentication is necessary for that user to access the tool. This helps to eliminate keeping a redundant, non-integrated list of user ids and passwords as well as keeps user intervention to a minimum.

Provide a means of measurability and performance metrics for leadership

Previously NCR/FTS management lacked the capability to measure the performance and efficiency of its task management team. This absence of measurability ultimately resulted in an inability to manage the entire process which, in turn costs GSA large sums of money. The tool tracks all movement within and produces reports containing information such as an active task listing, number of tasks in each center, status of tasks and the number of tasks per associate. This feature gives management the ability to better manage workload demands for each associate, analyze the amount of time spends in each center, gauge and prepare for future workload based on forecasted trends and direct the overall workflow of a task as it advances through the process. Because of the extensive monitoring, GSA should realize a significant cost savings and can better utilize its associates to further enhance its business.

Increase Maintenance Efficiency and Reduce Enhancement Costs

The tool is designed to keep the cost of both day to day maintenance and future enhancements to a minimum. Change requests not affecting business processes can be implemented very quickly and typically do not require changes in compiled code which allows maintainers of the application to remain agile in responding to GSA's needs. Following industry best practices, the code itself has been partitioned in a manner that completely separates the user interface from the data access and business logic. This helps to reduce the impact of changes speeds up the regression testing process to ensure that new changes do not adversely impact the existing system.

Information & Data Access Security

As a government entity, GSA has as high of demands as any agency to ensure that its data is adequately protected. Due to the confidential nature of their data, several measures have been taken. First and foremost, only defined database users have access to the tool, reports and databases. Any individual that tries to access the tool will be forced to authenticate unless already logged on the network. Even once a user has logged on to the network, his privileges are limited to only what he has been granted specific permission to access. All security implementations are based on guidelines set forth by Microsoft, SANS and other security industry experts to ensure that the tool and data does not become vulnerable as new technologies evolve. One key advantage of this approach is that the users have no need to re-authenticate to the tool since they have already logged into the network. This eliminates the need for users to maintain multiple password lists and expedites their usage of the tool by eliminating unnecessary authentication layers.