



Upside Research

Implementation Brief SpectraSite

Business Problem

SpectraSite is in the business of making wireless and broadcast communications pervasive. The 500-employee company owns and operates wireless antennae sites on towers and rooftops across the country. Located in Cary, North Carolina, SpectraSite has revenues of \$350 million. Clients include Nextel, Cingular, Sprint PCS, AT&T Wireless, Verizon Wireless, and Clear Channel Communications. Chances are, if you own a cellular phone and you've made a call inside a shopping mall, you've used SpectraSite's services.

Because such a large portion of SpectraSite's business is managing towers and antennae, the company is essentially in real estate management. "We have to track all of these assets, assess rent or charges, manage and perform maintenance, and look for ways to upgrade and expand our business," said Chuck Schroeder, IS Director for SpectraSite. As such, there is a significant amount of paperwork and routing of forms necessary to complete business, and as a result, Schroeder believed that the organization could save time and money if there were ways to streamline processes.

One example of the type of business process that SpectraSite was looking to improve was its in-building antenna approval. The process required two letters of interest from the carriers, a site review, information collection, and then sending the proposal to the Leasing Division President and COO for approval based on the amount of the contract.

"This process was taking anywhere from 60-90 days, given that they had to have an original signature on the documentation," Schroeder said. Switching to faxing reduced the cycle to 60 days, but it was still too long, and multiple faxing can deplete the readability of the documents. The company was looking for a better way to complete this process.

Solution Details

Schroeder had some previous exposure to business process management and content management systems, so he recommended that the company take a closer look at BPM solutions to help streamline a number of internal processes. Initially, the company looked at several solutions, including Workpoint, Live Link, JD Edwards/BEA, and Ultimus. The review process narrowed it down to Ultimus and Live Link.

"We chose Ultimus because we didn't need programmers to write the code," said Schroeder. The fact that the company was local (also in North Carolina), well funded, and used Microsoft infrastructure extensively were also considerations.

Ultimus fit right into SpectraSite's existing architecture, making implementation easier. In addition, the graphical designer, org chart components, process-modeler, integrated forms designer, and role-based routing were features that particularly impressed SpectraSite.

"We had users provide rankings on their experience with the prototypes of the final two vendors," said Schroeder. "Ultimus clearly won."

Company SpectraSite

Industry

Owns, leases, and manages wireless and broadcast signal towers and infrastructure

Challenges

SpectraSite was looking for a way to reduce its existing RFP process from 60 days. The current process was time consuming and the faxing technology was inadequate for the company's needs.

Product Solution Components Ultimus BPM Suite

Results

- Dramatically reduced process cycle from almost 60 days down to 4-10 days.
- Reduced co-location process from months down to 14 days, putting SpectraSite ahead of the competition.
- Automation of SOX processes has enabled company to meet important SOX deadlines and put it ahead of many other companies.
- More than 30 processes being used now, and another 50 pieces are in development. 70% of the company is using the product to help them streamline business.
- Simulation capabilities have provided SpectraSite with an edge over delivering more efficient processes to its users.

SpectraSite was pleased with the pricing of the Ultimus BPM Suite as well. "It was simplistic and made sense. Other products were server or process-based, but this model was pay for use, and we've been able to increase our clients from 100 to 250 but maintain our licensing because of our process throughput."

As part of the licensing package, SpectraSite had three weeks of consulting and six training courses. The developers that came in from Ultimus helped lay the groundwork, and then when they came on-site, they were able to take specific pieces of the process and guide SpectraSite's developers to make it work.

"The consultants were very flexible," Schroeder said. "We were able to use the hours over three months, which really helped our productivity. The training courses were also valuable, and had the right content." Schroeder believes that the real value, however, came from having a consultant on hand to guide SpectraSite through the initial process roll out.

The pilot application was created in February 2003, and results were immediate, because the pilot turned out to be a useable application. "The process we chose went from 45-60 days down to 10-14 days, primarily because we can capture a signature and notify the different people involved in the process of the status, dramatically shortening the overall times," said Schroeder.

Schroeder was impressed with the visibility that installing a BPM solution provided: "Ultimus makes the process so visible; it identifies areas that are no longer needed, or where the process was going wrong." In fact, SpectraSite found that a significant benefit of installing a BPM solution was the way that the process highlighted outdated steps or redundant and unnecessary tasks.

As a result, some of the gains made in SpectraSite's BPM processes are through this streamlining, and therefore, it sometimes has taken them longer to roll out a process than anticipated because it has to be streamlined before it can be automated and captured in a BPM system. Ultimus has greatly aided in this streamlining through its simulation capabilities.

Using Ultimus, the development team at SpectraSite can see the entire process, and through analysis sessions can collect their existing view of the process, do a mock up of the flow, make modifications to it, and once the team agrees on the design, generate the workflow, run tests and modify as necessary.

"The process is extremely iterative in nature which provides an easy way to show people what you're trying to accomplish," Schroeder said.

Since the initial process automation, SpectraSite has done an additional 30 process pieces, and they're working on another 50. "We also have SOX requirements," added Schroeder, "and the Ultimus BPM Suite should prove to be very useful for this."

Business Benefits

SpectraSite has seen measurable return on its investment from the Ultimus BPM Suite. By reducing the cycle of tenant implementation from almost 60 days down to 14 or less, the resulting earlier income is considerable. "This product has paid for itself in about six months," stated Schroeder.

Other benefits include:

- The Contract Clause Retrieval process has been reduced from twelve steps down to eight.
- For one of SpectraSite's processes—collocation, which involves the addition of an antenna to an existing site—the process has been reduced from as long as three months down to as little as 14 days from the carrier's call into SpectraSite. This involves escalation after three days, which helps move the process along. "This has put us a few steps ahead of our competition," stated Schroeder. "Now we can turn a collocation around faster than our competition."
- The fact that SpectraSite will be using Ultimus for SOX compliance has provided an added benefit of using the product. SpectraSite believes it will be able to meet SOX deadlines much better than other companies, and the resulting processes will be improved as well.

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SpectraSite Learnings

One of the most interesting things that SpectraSite has learned from its implementation of a business process management solution is that not everything needs to be automated.

As Schroeder explains, "If you set a kid free in a candy store, he wants everything and then later on he gets sick." The initial response to the Ultimus BPM Suite was so positive, that Schroeder's team has been very rigid about defining the criteria for new projects.

"It needs to be critical to the business," said Schroeder. "There are some things that just don't warrant automation, such as two-person processes. There's such a thing as workflow envy."

From experience, SpectraSite has learned that the definition of the process is never what the participants initially think it will be. "This is where simulation comes in handy," Schroeder said. "It gives users a visual representation of what they told you, and it becomes very clear what is missing. Nothing beats a picture."

Ultimus makes all of the data from the business processes available for reporting. Sometimes, however, too much information is a bad thing. "I would do a better job of limiting the data available. We are willing to provide what is requested for reporting, and sometimes there are too many requests from business users for too much detail." Schroeder and his team are striving to find the right balance between providing business-critical performance information without being overburdened trying to produce reports for the sake of reporting.

SpectraSite also advocates that companies anticipate the potential success and demand of the product. The company now has four full-time IT staff handling workflow requests. By next year, SpectraSite hopes to have a super user trained in each department to make minor modifications to processes and manage their day-to-day operation.

Upside Analysis

SpectraSite is pleased with the results from its implementation of business process management. The company is very happy with its decision to partner with Ultimus, and the resulting business improvements are impressive and measurable. Using the product has been fairly easy, and with more than 80 process pieces developed or currently in development, the company has quickly ramped up to become a BPM power house. The fact that the product has paid for itself in six months is a solid indication of its value to the organization. And, the resulting competitive gains will continue to bode well for SpectraSite in the future. Overall, success with Ultimus has been "greater than I could have imagined," Schroeder said. The COO of SpectraSite is even using the product, and this visibility has proven the capability of the product and the resulting process gains to the highest levels at SpectraSite.

About Upside Research

Upside Research is a research and consulting firm focused on helping clients put application development, Web services, business process management, integration, and enterprise infrastructure challenges in perspective. Upside Research helps organizations find practical ways to achieve their IT goals and profit from the diversity of a changing technology landscape.

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