



Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Public Education

Customer Profile

With 1.1 million students spread across more than 1,200 schools spanning all five NYC boroughs, the NYC Dept. of Education is by far the largest public school system in the US, if not the world.

Business Situation

The Department needed a technology solution to help better coordinate the large number of IT initiatives it manages.

Solution

The Henson Group custom configured an existing Microsoft Project Server deployment to provide a highly customized project management tool to accommodate up to 400 IT professionals in the field executing initiatives managed by about a dozen project managers under 10 senior executives all reporting to a Chief Information Officer.

Solution

Facing intense deadline pressure, The Henson Group was able to achieve the Department's expectations.

LARGEST PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE WORLD TURNS TO MICROSOFT PROJECT TO HELP MANAGE IT-RELATED ACTIVITIES

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Microsoft Project Server Custom Configuration

"It is rare you get to work on a project that is as rewarding as this project was. Because the emphasis on spending needs to be in the classroom and not in the back-office, this use of Microsoft technology produced an indirect, though very profound, effect on an important public institution."

Greg Henson, THG President, CEO, and Architectural Consultant

Microsoft Gold Certified Partner The Henson Group, Inc. (THG) custom configured an existing Microsoft Project Server deployment to enable the New York City Department of Education to more effectively manage its massive slate of IT initiatives.

BUSINESS SITUATION

Following a broad school district reorganization in 2003, the New York City Board of Education was rechristened the Department of Education. With approximately 1.1 million students spread across more than 1,200 schools spanning all five New York City boroughs, the Department of Education is by far the largest public school system in the US, if not the world.

Because of its immense size - there are more students in the system than people in eight U.S. states - the New York City public school system is the most influential and most closely watched in the US. Essentially, new processes in teaching and administration often must be proven in New York to be viable in the rest of the country.

In recent years, especially those under Mayor Michael Bloomberg — who made improving the education system in New York City a focal point of his administration and shepherded the 2003 restructuring, while wresting control from local community boards and centralizing more authority with the Department for better systemic management— operational efficiency has been a priority.

While IT initiatives hold great potential for helping achieve these goals, a mandate to spend more taxpayer dollars inside the classroom has made the message clear that IT administrators at the NYC Department of Education simply have to do more with less.

It was Bloomberg who appointed Joel I. Klein as Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education. Prior to his appointment, Klein was Counsel to Bertelsmann and served as Assistant Attorney General of the United States in charge of the Antitrust Division. *(Ironically for the purposes of this Case Study, Klein may be best remembered for prosecuting the US DOJ's landmark anti-trust case against Microsoft.)*

While the appointment of Klein as chancellor drew fire from the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the labor union representing most New York City teachers, because he lacked education experience, he brought to the position a keen eye for creating operational efficiencies, which echoed the Mayor's own style of administration.

Sweeping reforms in education and management implemented under this new regime have produced striking results, substantially improving the quality of education for New York City public school students. However, often not so widely publicized is the behind the scenes tinkering with administrative processes and operational systems to increase productivity and reduce costs.

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That does mean the large number of IT initiatives ongoing, planned, and needed will be reduced. Therefore, the Department needed a technology solution to help shore up shortfalls and get things done. Considering the sheer size of operations, though, the challenge to prioritize, schedule, assign resources, monitor and project manage as many initiatives as possible, has been frustrating, to say the least.

To tackle this problem, the Department made an investment in Microsoft Project Server technology.

"This Microsoft technology offered the potential of affording the Department's IT operations with the much needed automation of key project management activities to help alleviate the intense strain on resources," says THG President Greg Henson.

Out of the box, Microsoft Project Server and Microsoft Project Professional offer a powerful tandem for project management. However, considering the complexity of the Department's needs, it required more robust functionality than its IT professionals could configure. Therefore, the Department approached Microsoft to recommend a solution provider that could provide the enhanced functionality it required.

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Microsoft Consulting Services (MCS), a unit of Microsoft Services, the consulting, technical support, and customer service arm of Microsoft, recruited The Henson Group for this engagement.

The Henson Group offers a dedicated Information Worker Practice specializing in both small- and large-scale Microsoft Project Server and Project Professional deployments, providing a comprehensive array of services including logical and physical site architecture, customization, advanced configuration, process consulting, accredited training, custom application development, and much more.

The Henson Group is also consistently highly ranked on Microsoft’s official Resource Directory (<http://directory.microsoft.com>) for Project engagements and achieved Microsoft’s official Information Worker Solutions Competency by demonstrating our expert-level Microsoft Project-related abilities, maintaining a roster of Microsoft Certified Consultants with applicable experience, and producing numerous client references to objectively testify to our abilities.

What this meant for the Department was that The Henson Group had the resources, project experience, and proven technical ability to achieve its objectives.

SOLUTION

Microsoft Project (or MSP) is a project management software program developed and sold by Microsoft which is designed to assist project managers in developing plans, assigning resources to tasks, tracking progress, managing budgets and analyzing workloads. *(The first version, Microsoft Project for Windows 95, was released in 1995. Further editions were released in 1998, 2000, and 2003.)*

The application creates critical path schedules, although critical chain third-party add-ons are available from Advanced-Projects, ProChain and Spherical Angle. Schedules can be resource leveled, and chains are visualized in a gantt chart.

Additionally, Project can recognize different classes of users. These different classes of users can have differing access levels to projects, views, and other data. Custom objects such as calendars, views, tables, filters and fields are stored in an enterprise global which is shared by all users.

Microsoft extends the capabilities of Microsoft Project with Project Server and Web Access. Microsoft Project Server stores project information in a central database, protected from unauthorized access and corruption. A Project Administrator can control security defining users and access rights.

The Project Center supports reporting across an organization at project level. Managers can drill down into project details.

The Department needed to provide a customized project management tool to accommodate up to 400 IT professionals in the field executing initiatives managed by about a dozen project managers under 10 senior executives all reporting to a Chief Information Officer.

As you need to communicate project plans and to distribute task assignments to team members, assignment of tasks can be distributed to team member home pages in Web Access. They need to communicate status and changes to keep you up to date, so Project Server supports electronic communication over the web via Web Access.

Resource workloads can be analyzed by project and by resource with the Resource center allowing organizations to forecast future resource requirements and make more efficient use of resources.

View definition is easier to understand and more robust with Web Access than with Microsoft Project. Views can be protected to assist standardization. PS stores custom calendars, views, tables, filters, fields, in an Enterprise global where users have access to latest version ever time they restart Microsoft Project. Custom enterprise fields stored in a central repository simplifying consistent use of custom fields between programs.

The New York City Department of Education needed to provide a highly customized project management tool to accommodate up to 400 IT professionals in the field executing initiatives managed by about a dozen project managers under 10 senior executives all reporting to a Chief Information Officer.

The Department wanted to categorize all projects into six categories (Cornerstone, Foundation, Mandate, Instructional Technology, DIIT Discretionary, Other Division Discretionary), and the top level view needed to be grouped by "bucket" (rather than Division, as it was displaying).

Also the Department wanted a so-called Skills Matrix that basically itemized all technology abilities of this workforce, information that had to be easily navigated by executives for proper resource planning.

RESULTS & BENEFITS

Facing intense deadline pressure, The Henson Group was able to achieve the Department's expectations.

Today at the Department, Project Server 2003 is hosted on Windows Server 2003. SQL server provides data storage for all project information created in Microsoft Project Professional, and is displayed through Internet Explorer 5.5 through Project Web Access, making project information accessible to all members surrounding a project.

As a customized Microsoft Office Enterprise Project Management (EPM) Solution, Project Server acts as the hub for all project information and is ideal for organizations that need strong coordination and standardization between projects



About The Henson Group

Founded by former Microsoft engineers in 2000, The Henson Group is an award-winning Microsoft Gold Certified Partner specializing exclusively in deploying Microsoft technologies, official product training, and strategic consulting for overcoming today's business challenges.

The preferred solution provider for many major US and international corporations, The Henson Group is designated an official "Go To" partner for most major products, consistently ranked within the top three consultancies in Microsoft's partner directory (found at: <http://directory.microsoft.com>), holds a seat on the national Microsoft Partner Advisory Council, has direct ties to the product groups, and offers a price guarantee that assures the highest quality service at an unbeatable value.

and project managers, centralized resource management, or higher-level reporting about projects and resources.

Through the integration of Microsoft Outlook, team members can report task progress directly through their calendars and notify their Project Managers of their progress. Project schedules are updated automatically by Project Managers and can be view by project stakeholders without the need for face to face meetings.

Administrators and executives can more effectively manage the Department's project portfolio by continually identifying, prioritizing, and investing in projects that align with overall operational strategy. (This is made easier through the Portfolio Analyzer features in Project Server.)

Custom views can be created according to Business needs, giving project stakeholders the ability to compare data from different divisions or business units, types of projects, schedules, budgets, or whatever metric makes sense to your business. The customization features of the Views are extensive and flexible.

Lastly, The Henson Group provided extensive knowledge transfer and custom training to ensure Project Professional users at the department fully leveraged the features and functionality of the technology.

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