



CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY

Benefit Highlights

- Customer support efficiency increased by 60%
- 30% improvement in managing application releases
- Direct, day-to-day issue management cut in half across development and support
- Development and Support staff headcount doubled with no increase in project management time

Company Profile

- BetweenMarkets, Inc.
- Partner Performance and Compliance Software
- Retail, Manufacturing Verticals
- On-Demand, Managed Solutions

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TechExcel CRM, DevTrack Cut Product Management Chores, Create Happier, More Involved Customers At BetweenMarkets

Business Challenge

Upgrade the issue tracking, process management and customer support environment from an antiquated open source tool and email. Provide a new, integrated platform offering a Web portal-based customer interface, direct developer involvement, real-time issue tracking, easy integration with existing development processes, and quick adoption.

Overview

Like many executives responsible for software support and development, Dave Raring felt caught in the middle. Among his daily tasks at BetweenMarkets, a growing B2B software company, was fielding customer emails relating to product development issues, then interpreting, transmitting and delegating the necessary work assignments to BetweenMarkets software engineering staff, located at corporate headquarters as well as in India.

Because Raring often had to respond to hundreds of emails a day, he began looking for a better solution—one that would minimize his direct involvement in the communication process while improving issue visibility for both customers and the development staff.

After finding that open source solutions didn't meet his company's needs, Raring turned to two TechExcel products—DevTrack, the company's issue tracking and process management platform, and TechExcel CRM, a complete customer relationship and support management application. Soon the company experienced a huge increase in customer support efficiency—while Raring's customer management time was cut in half.

Situation

In today's world, data is a product. It can be sold, it can be bartered and, especially in the case of business partners, it can be traded. Like most products, data also suffers from quality control issues—inconsistent standards, unclear or incompatible business rules, and data entry or transmission errors can severely hamper the performance of supply chains, distribution systems, and financial networks.

BetweenMarkets, based in Austin, Texas, exists to solve these problems. The company, which counts some of the world's largest and most influential corporations among its clients, creates on-demand and managed applications that eliminate quality issues raised when business partners integrate their data systems. Retailers and manufacturers all depend on BetweenMarkets to help enforce industry best practices and streamline their information trading processes.

Because BetweenMarkets' on-demand applications are both complex and mission-critical, a great deal of time and effort is expended on their creation. BetweenMarkets software developers, working closely with their corporate customers, customize the company's exclusive bAssured Platform™ to meet the needs of a particular client, its industry, and its trading protocols.

Email Inadequate

Dave Raring, Director of Professional Services for Between Markets, is the traffic manager in this involved process. As the point man covering both client feedback and developer response, Raring is responsible for making sure customer issues are addressed in the individualized BetweenMarkets bAssured Platform they purchase.

Until recently, BetweenMarkets' issue-to-resolution procedures were handled via email—a practice that often led to hundreds of emails per day for Raring. “BetweenMarkets uses development teams here in Austin as well as in India,” he noted. “My job at the time involved fielding customer issues, writing up responses and then delegating the appropriate work to our offshore team. Trouble was, our workload was so great that issues were piling up and developers were becoming ‘issue blind,’ missing or ignoring important input from our customers.”

Not long after Raring was hired in late 2004, he began looking for a more efficient solution. He tried an open source issue tracking product but found it deficient—the poor user interface and lack of customer support meant that workflows weren't nearly tight enough.

“We needed a better solution, and we needed it quickly,” he stated. “It became evident our company had to have an end-to-end product tracking and customer service platform. We needed a customer portal interface, the ability to fully integrate with our existing development system, and a level of product support that an open source product doesn't offer.”

Integrated Solution

Realizing a commercial solution was the best way to go, Raring evaluated a number of products. Through webinars and online demos he became thoroughly familiar with the plusses and minuses of various products. His search eventually led him to TechExcel.

“TechExcel's DevTrack and CRM products could do everything I wanted,” he said. “They could be rolled in with virtually no disruption to our ongoing processes; what's more, DevTrack could be customized to our particular development style. And TechExcel CRM would allow our customers to interface directly with their evolving application, if needed, without changing our workflows in any way.”

DevTrack, both a standalone solution and part of TechExcel's DevSuite Application Lifecycle Management (ALM) suite, is a market-leading issue tracking and process management product. As a knowledge-centric solution, DevTrack focuses on teamwork and knowledge sharing between different users, teams and customers, enabling development teams to comprehensively track and manage product defects, change requests, and other items relevant to product development.

When combined with TechExcel CRM, TechExcel's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) product, DevTrack becomes the basis of a uniquely powerful platform that brings the customer directly into the product development regimen. TechExcel CRM is a complete marketing, sales, support and tracking product; however, it excels in customer support during product development via ServiceWise, a module that incorporates incident tracking and resolution, a customer-focused knowledge base, integrated workflow, reporting/analysis and much more.

Jeff Johnstone, Senior Director of Sales for TechExcel, noted that DevTrack and TechExcel CRM were a well-suited combination for BetweenMarkets. “The BMI bAssured Platform holds great appeal for BetweenMarkets customers because it can be tailored specifically to each client's needs. This process requires a close relationship with the customer,” he said. “DevTrack and CRM create a living, breathing system for the sharing of information. Everyone is up to date, everyone is working from common data—yet BetweenMarkets still controls exactly how much they want the customer to be involved in the process.”

According to Raring, TechExcel's two product development support applications gave him a great deal of flexibility. “I could see that this solution would allow me to manage, rather than be a part of the work stream. My goal was to, in essence, get myself replicated so I could focus on management. DevTrack and TechExcel CRM are intuitive enough, yet also powerful enough, so my time isn't taken up with tools and processes.”

Implementation

Due to budget concerns, BetweenMarkets delayed the acquisition of DevTrack and CRM until early 2006. However, once the software was finally in-house, installation was quick. DevTrack's import feature helped BetweenMarkets port information over to the new system, allowing Raring to write a minimum of data translators. “TechExcel was very open and helpful throughout the process. Including configuration and customization, we were up and running in a week or so,” he said.



Raring noted that DevTrack was able to overcome many of the challenges posed by software development management applications. “Developers just don’t like to use issue systems,” he said. “When a new customer comes into the picture, there are often hundreds of changes. DevTrack allows me to quickly delegate tasks to our offshore team in such a way that they aren’t overwhelmed.” He also stated that DevTrack’s ability to customize to all major development approaches including Scrum, RUP, Agile and Extreme Programming, allowed him to tailor DevTrack to his company’s particular work format and establish appropriate workflow rules.

As for customer contact, TechExcel CRM’s integration with DevTrack gives Raring and his team a seamless channel for fielding issues. “As each issue is resolved, it automatically received a digital ‘stamp’ with the resolution date,” he stated. Once code freeze day is achieved and a product goes to QA testing, each issue is closed out as warranted; in addition, DevTrack’s custom metadata feature supports the creation of quick, ad hoc reports that allow hundreds of issues to be confirmed and closed out at once.

The Results

In the months since the rollout of DevTrack and TechExcel CRM, BetweenMarkets has seen a significant increase in development efficiency and staff utilization. “This year we’ve doubled our account load and more than tripled our number of development and support staff both here and in India—yet with DevTrack we’re able to handle the load. I estimate we’ve experienced a 75% improvement in customer support and a 30-40% improvement in deployment quality.

Raring also sees a real change in developer involvement in issue reconciliation. “Our developers actually look at their whole queue, not just the latest issues. We’re catching every issue that comes through. Nothing is missed.”

Because clients are given exposure to workflows and reminders, along with the ability to offer quick feedback, customer satisfaction has increased. Via their personalized Web portal, customers now can not only submit issues, but also see view real-time updates and sign off on issues as they are resolved.

“Before I was constantly communicating via email with both customers and development staff,” Raring said. “There was no way for anyone to view issue status, no way to close issues. Now the customer is a direct part of the process. As for me, I have cut my project management time in half, making me twice as efficient in what I do. For us, the impact of DevTrack and TechExcel has been huge.”

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