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Case Study

RxLaser

RxLaser Implements DevTrack for Internal Development and Work Order System

Located in Brea, California, RxLaser develops advanced electronic forms software that enable printing, faxing, e-mailing, EDI, and data archiving, all fully customized for each individual client's needs. RxLaser's software integrates through a server platform with other software company's products for their own client base.

Over the past ten years, companies have been replacing their dot matrix pre-printed forms with white paper, realizing a huge cost savings. Instead of sending a printed copy of an invoice that costs 56 cents, they send a fax that costs 7 cents, or they e-mail it for nothing. RxLaser has been the industry leader in enabling this move to electronic forms, but their success and rapid growth introduced many new challenges that had to be overcome in order to remain in business.

DevTrack has helped RxLaser continue to grow, produce quality products, and retain thousands satisfied customers by automating and controlling both the Software Development and Client Customization processes.

RxLaser had used an internally developed system to track all development and customization projects, but rapid growth made it impossible to keep up with the workload. RxLaser's client base had grown from about 700 clients in 1995, to over 6000 in 1998, and without a dependable tracking solution their business was in jeopardy.

"We simply could not keep up with what was going on, on a day-to-day basis", said Robert Lachner, President of RxLaser. "Things were getting lost, and when we did have the file we didn't know how long the request had been in place, or what the process was we were trying implement. We were forced to look at many tracking systems or go out of business. We just grew too fast, and we were upsetting too many people."

RxLaser's development team immediately evaluated and compared many of the tracking products on the market, and after about two weeks, Robert discovered that his entire staff was using DevTrack exclusively. "Everybody loved it because of its ability to quickly and easily address all of their needs," said

Lachner," and frankly my staff forced me to buy it. They basically told me that if I didn't do this, they were not doing the work. We were able to set up much more quickly with DevTrack. Installation and setup time was minimal, and we were able to set up our first issue-tracking project in less than 30 minutes."

RxLaser now uses DevTrack in two areas of the company: Software Development, and Customization Programming. The Development team is responsible for implementing and maintaining the primary software system that manages the electronic forms process. The customization team programs specific forms for each client based on their detailed requirements. DevTrack improves Software Development efficiency

According to Lachner, the key to efficiency in any software development project is to avoid duplication of effort by closely tracking each piece of the project. When you separate your software into many fragments that create one whole, and then assign each fragment to a different developer, there is a tendency to start overlapping each person's job. DevTrack makes it easy for each developer to know exactly what everyone else is working on at any given time.

When someone completes a sub-project, they can easily see how it ties in with the other sub-projects, and then they can start linking up the pieces without overlap or duplication of effort. In addition, supervisors can see all the functions that are being worked on by each one of his programmers, which allows them to more easily manage and track the overall project.

"Duplication of effort in writing code means you lose time and money," said Lachner, "and you can't send out the finished product on time. Duplication is the biggest nemesis of R&D. We are trying to get a product put together by many people, completed by a target date, and if we don't hit the schedules we are

missing out on a tremendous amount of money and opportunity. It really comes down to a time management issue, and DevTrack addresses this issue for us very well."

Many development teams assign each developer a function instead of a portion of a project, and, Lachner believes, that is when the project can get out of control. Everyone is working on the same portion, but different pieces of it. It gets so confusing that pretty soon they have a meeting and the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. Instead of running in circles, DevTrack coordinates the team's efforts, and any time you can coordinate an effort in programming everybody is better off for it.

When RxLaser introduced their new server product, there were many completely new modules to implement, such as fax modem support, e-mail and Internet integration, and even a complete re-write of the sub-system of NT. Each one of their programmers had to setup and implement each one of these modules by themselves. "Without DevTrack to coordinate the issues," said Lachner, "the server product would never have been completed. It took nearly two years to complete the project even with all of DevTrack's benefits."

Now DevTrack is being used to schedule and coordinate all of the additional features, fixes, and enhancements to RxLaser's Server product. For example, to fax an RxLaser form from a UNIX network, it has to go from the UNIX base down to NT. The development team is now re-routing it back through NT to UNIX, so that the fax confirmation can go over the network to the person who sent it. According to Lachner, this entire modification effort is much easier to manage and coordinate using DevTrack. He has one developer working extensively on making this project work, and with DevTrack his supervisor knows exactly what he is working on, knows what his time constraints are, and everybody else also knows what he's working on, and they can see his progress each day.

RxLaser first purchased DevTrack to be their issue-tracking system, but because of its ease-of-use, people in different departments wanted to use it to track other items, so now DevTrack is also used as a work-order tracking system.

RxLaser's client setup process is fairly intense. Once they log in a new client, they send out the form standards for the client to modify based on their unique needs. The line person then does design modifications, and resends it to the client for authorization. Once approved, it is sent on to the customization programming department where the programmers take the revised standards and integrate the changes with the custom forms. Finally the package is sent out to the client for final approval and installation.

This entire client setup process utilizes DevTrack to manage and track the workflow and status. The programmers know exactly what has been going on the last 3-4 months, and he picks it up right where it was left off.

According to Mr. Lachner, "the primary benefit of using DevTrack has been keeping RxLaser in business. It has helped us not lose track of customer priorities, and customer's needs. We use DevTrack to manage the day-to-day interaction amongst our designers, programmers, and customers, and it keeps a log of all these interactions so anybody can pick up the file at any time and move forward with it. We can have people sick or in another division come pick up a DevTrack note and know exactly what he has to do for that customer next and when they are expecting it.

"DevTrack is very intuitive and easy-to-use," continued Lachner. "Administration is minimal, and changes are easy to implement. Even the administration is in a GUI interface...graphical, not programming scripts. DevTrack has been a solid product. We have not come up with any bugs in it,

and we have never had to deal with technical issues with the DevTrack application. It has been very dependable."

Standard DevTrack features include a scalable client/server architecture, universal ODBC support for industry-leading databases – including Microsoft SQL Server, Sybase and Oracle – and presentation-quality reports and graphics. DevTrack is an enterprise tool designed specifically for Windows 95/98 and Windows NT environments.

In its first year of commercial availability, DevTrack has been embraced by some of the top companies and software development teams in North America. Clients using DevTrack now include EDS, Hewlett Packard, Honeywell DMC, Eastman Kodak, GeoGraphix, and Fujitsu Software. Internationally, teams using DevTrack include Cochlear Ltd. (Australia), Ericsson (Sweden), Orion (Norway), LionBridge Technologies (Ireland), Software Kinetics Ltd. (Canada) and Mosaic Software (South Africa).

A leader in producing electronic laser forms, more information concerning RxLaser can be obtained from the World Wide Web at www.rxlaser.com. RxLaser may be reached at (800) 347-9527.

TechExcel also provides a fully functioning 60-day evaluation copy of DevTrack that can be downloaded from the Internet at www.techexcel.com. TechExcel may be reached by calling (800) 439-7782 or (925) 871-3900.