



As the Web's leading shopping search engine, Shopzilla keeps customers happy by responding rapidly to their needs and to new opportunities. With the rapid growth of consumer e-commerce and the

competition for these dollars heating up, Shopzilla distinguishes itself by offering shoppers an index of more than 30 million products from over 75,000 stores. Its proprietary algorithms help shoppers instantly find virtually anything on sale from anyone, anywhere on the Web at the best price.

Overview

The founding principles of the company, which are to deliver often, drive technology through business issues and support integrated development disciplines, helped make it easy for Shopzilla to support the roll out of a formal Agile process (XP and Scrum) in early 2005. But as the company grew and continues to grow, implicit processes and homegrown spreadsheets and wikis began to tax the system - they simply didn't deliver project visibility or allow teams to scale.

Company Challenges

As Shopzilla continued to add new personnel, the ramp-up time to employee productivity got worse. New hires were spending too much time on the basics of "how do I do this?" or "where do I go to get this?"

"The incredible pace of our industry coupled with the tremendous growth we are experiencing means we need to assimilate our people very fast to help them get up and running. We know that our success is absolutely dependent on tying the right processes with the best tools to keep up with our growth and momentum."

Christophe Louvion,
VP of Engineering, Shopzilla

Choosing the Right Agile Partner

The team researched various solutions for formalizing its Agile processes and increasing project visibility and collaboration throughout the organization. It started by establishing key criteria that would help meet its goals. The initial "needs" list included:

1. A lightweight and flexible Web application that mirrors how Shopzilla operates.
2. The ability to start small and then quickly scale organically to the larger organization (an expensive pilot program and a lengthy, large-scale, million-dollar implementation weren't practical).
3. Easy adoption to deploy a new application without engaging significant professional services.
4. A partner who is a recognized leader in the use of Agile methods to support the company in the long-term and provide the additional expertise that might be needed throughout the implementation.
5. Support for coordinating multiple teams distributed on a global basis.



Company and Industry

- The industry's largest shopping search engine, with more than 30 million products from 75,000 stores
- Operates Web sites serving consumers and retailers in the U.S., U.K., French and German markets
- Acquired by E.W. Scripps in 2005

Development Environment

- Multiple development teams, business owners and locations
- Rapid, frequent delivery of new features and updates to a hosted Linux platform, C/C++/Java/Perl, Sybase/Oracle

Challenges

- Implicit processes and homegrown spreadsheets and wikis began to tax the system in the face of rapid growth
- New employee ramp-up was taking too long to keep pace with growth
- Management losing visibility into service delivery
- Company needed to release faster to meet competitive demands of business

Solution

- Implemented a pilot program with Rally Program application
- Rapidly rolled out to additional teams within two months
- Engaged Rally Coaches to educate new teams on Agile practices

Results

- Productivity savings of 20%
- Release cycle time decreased 50%
- Business people able to work on customer issues and roadmap
- Engineers have clear alignment with company goals
- Improved project and program visibility
- New personnel productive by their second day of employment

Scaling Software Agility

After completing its evaluation, Shopzilla determined that Rally was the best integrated tool for its needs.



“Rally is a full web application that is very economical. It let us start small and scaled up easily without needing a lot of professional services. Within a month the first team was using 80% of Rally’s available functionality and we have been able to quickly repeat our implementation with other teams.”

Christophe Louvion

Reving the Business–Technology Engine with Rally

To support its goal of scaling Agile practices and reducing ramp-up time for hundreds of engineers, Shopzilla’s next challenge was to define a consistent team structure and collaboration process that strengthened the relationships and communications between its three primary roles of business people, development, and quality assurance personnel, while enforcing SOX compliance. Louvion’s pilot team of twelve people had members from all three departments and were chosen for their “Agile readiness.” This team had good business and technical relationships in place, and they were able to talk openly and honestly about company impediments they found during the pilot project. Rally played an important part in helping the team formalize their best practices without getting in the way.

“The entire Rally approach makes so much sense. Requirements definition flows logically to scheduling, implementation and defect tracking. It is incredibly intuitive.”

Christophe Louvion

Hitting Their Stride

As news spread on the success of the Agile pilot program, other teams wanted to be included in the rollout. Within 60 days, Shopzilla launched two more teams and is now expanding Agile practices and tooling at a rapid pace throughout the entire organization.

The company is now seeing faster release cycles and quick ramp-up of new personnel so that it is making a positive impact by an employee's second day of employment. This unique form of collaborative, lightweight and integrated tooling has helped promote the needed process changes, so it can scale its staff and output to keep up with rapid growth. “Having an explicit Agile framework has improved our productivity and given us more visibility in all directions,” adds Louvion.

Shopzilla continues to identify and add Agile-ready teams. Next up, the company plans to leverage Rally’s coaching services to fine-tune its Agile management processes and help new personnel rapidly adopt core development practices to maintain its position as the Web’s leading shopping search engine.

“Rally has really helped us shorten the time needed to synchronize business needs with technology. With the time we save, our business people now focus more on the needs of our customers and our company’s strategic roadmap. Engineering understands what they need to do and why, even as our priorities continually change and evolve. Globally, we are accelerating, and the tooling and training we received from Rally has been the catalyst to improving our agility.”

Christophe Louvion
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Scaling Software Agility