# Gazillion

## Case Study

RALLY SOFTWARE

Enterprise-Proven Agility

> If your goal is to allow your team the quickest and easiest way in and out of Agile tracking, use Rally.
>
> Christin Overton, LIVE Producer
> The Amazing Society
> a division of Gazillion, Inc.

In the fickle realm of online gaming, timing and features that players want are everything. The ability to deliver a full-featured game on schedule translates into immediate revenue for the owners, and for game-builder The Amazing Society, means ongoing business. Using Agile, Gazillion's The Amazing Society studio streamlined its processes, accommodated tripling its development team, built an unscheduled website/account system and still delivered a new game on time.

Gazillion's The Amazing Society develops online video games for kids and less directly, their parents. Building in myriad elements like activities, creative virtual spaces and engaging missions, the game developers create an immersive experience featuring some of the world's best-known super heroes and characters. It's a varied development environment at The Amazing Society, encompassing character artists, product owners, graphic artists, environment artists, animators, client engineers, user interface (UI) engineers, as well as external resources and the owners of the licensed characters. In short, very few team members are fungible – most contribute differently to the overall effort, leveraging their own unique specialization.

The highly iterative and time-sensitive nature of online game development is a natural fit for Agile, but applying the practice across distributed teams presented an initial challenge. The sticky-note system could not scale to multiple geographies, leaving team members out of the process, and limited visibility into progress. Soon, the team began to investigate tools options. Christin Overton, current Live Producer and former project product owner and Scrum Master explains the Rally selection, "When we were looking at

### Gazillion

### Industry

Online Gaming

### Development Environment

100+ cross-discipline staff (art, design, engineers) and quality assurance members located in multiple locations

### Solution

Rally Enterprise Edition

### Challenges

- Reduce time-to-market
- Increase development efficiency
- Adapt to new requirements without process loss

### Results

- Accelerated time to market by 50%
- Delivered on-time, on-budget release while accommodating expanded scope and 300% team growth
- 40% productivity savings for Scrum masters

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Agile tool providers, we looked at Rally, VersionOne, and quite a few others. Ease of use is a huge factor for us – we need all team members to be able to quickly get in and out of the application, so they can focus on building games, not wrestling with a tool or learning a complex UI. VersionOne did not meet our ease-of-use standard. The functionality and simplicity of Rally made it the best choice."

The Rally tool was implemented quickly as it reflects the ways teams work at The Amazing Society. Team members see a complete overview of the development effort while also able to better structure their workflow based on the needs of the area of the game they are focused on.

Within Rally, The Amazing Society creates epics for each feature area of the project, with each user story parented to an epic or theme. This allows for a quick overview on the status of all features. In addition, it lets the team capture large epics as they are defined and enables them to go back and break down the epics into stories at a later date.

The Amazing Society also set up a workflow epic to capture a group of stories that are always the same; these template stories capture a list of tasks and estimates that are performed over and over throughout the project, as is often the case with the art team's character animation and modeling, object creation and even audio. This system also allows for third-party reviews and edits as required for licensed characters.

Overton says, "By using Rally for workflow epics, stories that once took artists at least an hour to create each time now take less than ten minutes as the artist only needs to focus on edits, rather than creating the story from scratch. That makes our artists very happy. They get to do more art."

## Teams' Agile Adoption: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

The process of adopting Agile was not without challenges. Some teams adopted Agile practices wholeheartedly, transforming their process and delivery. This meant everything from instituting daily stand-ups and providing complete transparency via Rally to scoping project elements via story points. At The Amazing Society, the teams

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that embraced Agile could consistently deliver more predicable numbers of story points each two-week iteration, providing a baseline for capacity planning as well as a way to communicate throughput velocity to the larger team. Interpreting Agile for the teams, Overton says, "We break up user stories to enable teams to meet their deadlines. We also use Kanban for specific areas like tools, metrics, characters and audio work because it is easier to do handoffs and keep everyone on the same page."

Another set of teams applied Agile, but not always consistently, and struggled to achieve success. This led to a lack of team cohesion and some hiccups in delivery.

The third category of teams used the Agile terminology, but still followed waterfall practices. This team was the only group that was unable to predict what it could get done and when, often leading to the randomization of other teams as it forced them to react to requests rather than plan for them. As Overton explains, "We saw the good, the bad, and the ugly across the different teams. We knew Agile was the right path, but each team needed to discover this themselves. They had to touch the hot stove."

A complicating factor was the late addition of the platform infrastructure to the overall project. Fifteen months into the project, completing a backend infrastructure and website design and development were added to the project, including billing, account management and game tools. Some elements in this addition were already three months behind, significantly expanding the project's scope. "We knew then that with the addition of the platform, the only way we could deliver on time was by using Agile and Rally.

Our teams also stepped up to own more – one sprint in particular totaling three times our usual story points," says Overton. "Through this effort, we determined that we needed an escape hatch for iterations that 'go wrong,' so we invented the 'Sprint Reboot.' Only a scrum team can request this complete stop which includes time to re-plan, readjust and re-engage. It's a way to empower the team with the ability to manage their workflow when priorities are changing and work is being redefined, and allow them to say 'stop the insanity.' We've only used this a few times, but it's a powerful tool for our teams."

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The Amazing Society teams created their own unique flavor of Rally to mirror existing workflows and online gaming development requirements. Fortunately, Rally's flexibility allows teams to reflect the way they actually work, and provides complete visibility into the process as well as changing with the needs of each phase of development. Says Overton, "I can look at five lines in Rally and know exactly where we are with a project. This visibility also keeps us honest, for example, we can all see the cascading effects of a poorly written story. It's a solid tool for complete transparency, and in the long-run, not only helps us deliver, but continually improve our project and our process."

Once The Amazing Society implemented Rally, other Gazillion studios saw the benefits of complete visibility across varied teams. This success led additional teams in Issaquah, WA, Denver, CO, and San Mateo, CA to adopt and use Rally on a daily basis.

## Agile Super Heroes

With 59 sprints under their belt, The Amazing Society's teams continue their Agile success and have earned their bumps and bruises. Overton shares a few lessons learned, "Agile was an easy sell initially, but it takes dedication. We had to be willing to throw it out to test the process, make changes, and if the changes did not help, throw those out too. Through that, we found there was a dramatic difference between the teams really using Agile and those who were not, so we knew there was something to it."

Bringing the customer voice into the development process earlier is a key benefit of the frequent iterations promoted by Agile. Says Overton, "In online gaming, the biggest challenge is projecting what gamers want. With Agile we were able to get the game in front of players to test within four months, a process that can take a year or more. We were able to integrate user feedback as well as direct feedback from the IP license holder, and react quickly, which in turn helped us create a better game."

## About Rally

Rally inspires companies to deliver the right software faster with Agile and Lean practices. Our SaaS platform connects strategy and execution to steer businesses through chaotic, fiercely competitive markets. Rally drives over a hundred thousand users in countries around the world.

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