



Microsoft Advertiser and Publisher Solutions provide digital media technologies for agencies, advertisers and publishers. For agencies and advertisers, Microsoft Advertiser Solutions enable the unified management of digital marketing campaigns across display banners, rich media, search, video, and Web sites. Microsoft Publisher Solutions maximize advertising revenue across all available and developing digital media platforms. With industry-leading tools and close collaboration, the company helps their clients achieve dramatic, measurable results.



Overview

Driven by a need to simplify what were becoming mammoth development projects with thousands of pages of related documentation, the development teams and executives at Microsoft Advertiser and Publisher Solutions eagerly transitioned from waterfall methodology and embraced Agile principles a few years ago. Although they were much more productive than when using waterfall, they found themselves running each sprint as a mini waterfall project. They then incorporated XP as a way to have a set of development practices which all reinforced each other. Where they once had one massive project, Microsoft Advertiser and Publishing Solutions now has 11 separate teams, releasing incrementally across the year.

For the search development team, getting their solution to market fast and with as few communication snags as possible is a critical part of their release process. They had used Agile practices for several years, but with homegrown spreadsheets to track and manage iterations and planning. Although spreadsheets worked well when the team was relatively small and contained, the process became increasingly unwieldy and unmanageable as the team grew. An offshore team only added to the complexity of a process that that was beginning to block effective development management. They knew there had to be a better way.

Company Challenges

Prior to implementing Rally, days at Microsoft Advertiser and Publisher Solutions often began with frustration. Emails from the offshore team came in overnight to let the onsite team in Seattle know what development tasks had been completed. The onsite team then had to then spend time deciphering the different terminology used by the various developers to figure out what had actually been done.

John Keane, Principal Development Manager, explained “We’d have these cards that would say ‘A user should be able to search for their campaign by date by clicking on the heading of the column in their campaign overview report.’ Someone would refer to it as ‘campaign searching cards,’ someone else thought it meant ‘campaign overview report cards,’ and others would call it the ‘day sorting card.’ No one knew what anyone else was talking about.”

Discussions that should have taken no more than 30 seconds took three to five minutes, which meant lost time that the team wasn’t focusing on development. The various spreadsheets that the team employed to track their progress just ended up making it more difficult to get things done as the team grew.

“Thirty to forty percent of our development team is offshore,” explained Keane. “Without an electronic solution to drive consistency in our processes and terminology, development was very difficult to manage.”

Company and Industry

- A leading provider of digital media technologies for agencies, advertisers and publishers

Development Environment

- Team develops applications for end-to-end online campaign management
- Mix of both onsite and offshore development teams

Challenges

- Difficulty in effectively managing offshore development teams
- Lacked the ability to get a “bird’s eye view” of the development processes and related objectives

Solution

- Rally’s Agile lifecycle management solution enables better management of offshore and globally dispersed teams
- Software-as-a-Service application provides immediate access across geographies and full visibility on development efforts

Results

- 26 releases in one year
- Lets managers see the burn down rate, specifically how long it will take to get to the end of user stories – from backlog through to the end of the iteration
- Dramatically improves communication between dispersed teams, increasing the entire team’s effectiveness and productivity
- Robust reporting provides a complete snapshot of all activities and projects and enables better planning and estimating

Scaling Software Agility®



The organization needed a solution that supported their development practices and reinforced Agile behaviors in order to more effectively manage their releases and iterations without undue complexity. They also needed to break down high-level requirements and track their implementation across multiple teams and releases. Finally, the multiple, dispersed teams required a continuous flow of information that gave everyone visibility in order to see what was happening in a given project and best support each project's success.

Choosing the Right Agile Tool

After a thorough evaluation of other development tools on the market, the development team found that Rally's Agile lifecycle management tool was the "best intersection of everything we needed," said Keane.

"As a manager, it is critical for me to be able to have an educated conversation about status with my teams. The Rally solution lets me go to my team and have a meaningful discussion with them about their activities, so I can better manage my team, our projects and releases. The other tools I evaluated were either too difficult for my team to consistently use or did not provide enough information about what I needed to see."

One of the key benefits of using Rally has been the ability to better collaborate with offshore teams. Keane explains, "Rally makes a tremendous difference in helping effectively communicate and manage remote teams. This was a near impossible task before Rally."

The Solution: Agile and Rally

Thanks to Rally's solution, time that was formerly spent on communication issues and manual processes is now focused on the development itself. The onsite team reviews the progress of the offshore team daily within Rally and holds a daily standup meeting to review their backlog, burn down tasks and release metrics. Using Rally's drag-and-drop planning, they can easily prioritize items in their backlog and balance workload across the team.

"People now talk in terms of task numbers, ID's and stories, so everyone knows exactly what everyone else is talking about.," says Keane. "This enables us to have really specific, focused conversations with both offshore and onsite development teams."

Specifically, the benefits the company has seen from using Rally are:

- Seeing the burn down rate, specifically how long it will take to get to the end of user stories – from backlog through to the end of the iteration
- Dramatically improving communication between distributed teams, increasing the entire team's effectiveness and productivity
- Enabling better planning and estimating through robust reporting that provides a complete snapshot of all activities and projects

"For us, the Rally solution is an absolute necessity" explains Keane. "Rally is the central point for everything we do – burn down tasks, review release metrics and work product status. Our backlog is entirely kept in Rally and as we work each day, we update for each iteration and plan off of items in the backlog based on items in priority."

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John Keane
Principal Development
Manager
**Microsoft Advertiser &
Publisher Solutions**

Since implementing Rally, the development team has completed 26 releases in the last year, 17 of which were related to the core product.

“The Rally solution not only helps to manage day-to-day activities and defects, it covers it all, including product pipeline.” says Keane. He further explains, “I can’t imagine having done what we’ve done over the past two years without Rally. It helps our communication and we are so productive with it, I just don’t understand why everyone doesn’t use it.”

About Rally

Rally is the leader in Agile application lifecycle management (ALM) dedicated to making leaner development organizations that respond faster to changing customer needs. According to a study by QSM Associates, teams that rely on Rally’s Agile lifecycle management products and services are 50% faster to market and 25% more productive than industry averages. Rally’s products were honored with four consecutive Jolt Awards (the software industry’s equivalent of the Oscar® award) in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009. The company’s end-to-end solutions for Agile development also include Agile University, the largest source for Agile training, and Agile Commons, the largest collaborative Web 2.0 community dedicated to advancing software agility.



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