



Headquartered in Austin, Texas, HomeAway Inc. is the largest international network of vacation rental websites, with 284,000 paid listings of rental homes, condos, apartments, villas, cottages and cabins in more than 100 countries. The company

features inventory from several of the most-respected vacation rental listing sites on the Internet, all of which are owned and operated by HomeAway, Inc.

Overview

HomeAway's six development teams are located in Texas, Colorado, and the UK and each believes in releasing quality software often. Major releases occur every other week and patch-level releases on off weeks. As zealous followers of Agile practices, the teams run a mix of sprint lengths – anywhere from four days to one to two weeks, with the last day of each sprint set aside for planning the next sprint's work. Team members go into Rally daily to pick up assigned tasks or other tasks, based on their velocity.

At any time, C-level executives, business owners, and other members of the development team may monitor release development. The team embodies solid Agile principles with communication easily flowing between developers and the organization as a whole. However, this effective team had a bumpy start on its road to incorporating Agile practices.

Company Challenges

With globally dispersed development teams, product owners at HomeAway had no simple way of monitoring the various, simultaneous development efforts. This lack of visibility caused misunderstandings and miscommunication. Executives didn't understand when critical tasks were moved or not completed on deadline, or when onsite and off-site development teams deviated from objectives. The ongoing friction wore on developers, product owners and management, causing productivity to fall precipitously. There was also no consistent development methodology used in the various development teams, creating further misunderstandings.

When the quality of software releases began suffering, HomeAway's development team researched ways to improve the processes. They recognized the need to strengthen the quality of software releases and significantly increase communication among international offices, different business groups, and within their own team. As a result of the research, an effort was launched to rework the entire development process.

Moving to Agile and an Agile Tool

HomeAway needed a unifying development practice across the development teams and found incorporating Agile practices and an Agile tool were the answers. They looked at a number of different tools and tested a few internally, but had a hard time finding a tool robust enough to track the features they needed to track. Rally was the exception.

"Rally's solution was the only one that let us to see everything in one place, instead of forcing us to look for the information in three or four places," said Jack Yang, Director of Engineering at HomeAway.



Company and Industry

- The largest international network of vacation rental websites

Development Environment

- Multiple development teams, business owners and locations dispersed globally
- Frequent delivery of new features and updates to web-site(s) and other platforms

Challenges

- Little to no visibility for executives and business owners on the development process
- Lack of consistent development methodology across the organization
- Difficulty in tracking development costs back to particular projects

Solution

- Implemented Rally's Agile lifecycle management solutions, providing executives and business owners with a complete view of development efforts
- Engaged Rally coaches to educate team on Agile principles, driving company-wide adoption of Agile practices
- Software-as-a-Service platform drove fast implementation across the organization, increasing the entire team's effectiveness and productivity and significantly improving communication between dispersed teams

Results

- 20% faster time-to-market as compared to industry average, with no increase in defect rate
- 10-20% improvements in team productivity as compared to industry average
- Company-wide adoption of Agile practices
- Robust reporting tracks capitalization and non-capitalization development expenses

Scaling Software Agility



Implementing Rally and Agile Simultaneously

“At first, we were a case study of how not to implement Agile,” notes Jack. He explains, “While we recognized we had issues with both quality and communication, our initial way of solving the problems was a sweeping overhaul of the entire development process. We put Agile in place without any training or in-house expertise, which proved problematic.”

Things turned around when five team members and managers became Certified ScrumMasters through Rally’s Agile University. HomeAway also brought in Rally coaching services to provide a deeper understanding of Agile practices and teach the teams how to reinforce Agile principles using the Rally tool. Next, one of the lead ScrumMasters began socializing Agile and the Rally solution with one of the teams. Once that team was familiar with Agile practices and actively using and propagating the Rally tool with information, the ScrumMaster turned to a second team to help them adopt Agile and Rally.

“The first team acted as experts for the second team and taught them to use Rally effectively. From this point on, adoption spread quickly. Having Rally help us create internal experts made a world of difference,” says Jack.

The business also began to buy-in to Agile practices when the development team used the Rally reporting tool to demonstrate the great results. With the metrics from Rally, Agile began to have an influence on the entire company.

“With the exception of Rally, no other software lifecycle management solution recognizes the importance of, and makes it easy to incorporate, Agile principles,” notes Jack.

Improved Communication, On-Time Releases, Complete Visibility

HomeAway’s development teams have now practiced Agile for two years and reverentially follow Agile best practices. For the HomeAway Connect and Java Traveler teams, this resulted in more than 100 completed sprints, 40-50 of which were non-bug releases. The development teams at HomeAway continue to release often, on short release cycles. Their releases have included a major overhaul of the website including a Java Port of the existing Cold Fusion site, conversion of the entire brand and five milestone releases, as well as large feature enhancements, including calendar upgrades. Everyone from executives to business owners to the development team now have complete visibility to what’s coming and what’s in the backlog. As a result, productivity is at an all-time high, and communication at all levels of the organization has improved significantly.

In addition to shorter release cycles, enhanced visibility and improved communication, Rally has provided a framework for the organization to increase adoption of Agile practices throughout the HomeAway organization.

“I didn’t expect that our team’s adoption of Rally would end up advocating Agile throughout the organization,” says Jack. Now, product owners use the tool to reorder the backlog, designers, testers and developers access the tool as contributors, and the CTO uses the tool for insight on projects and team tasks.

“Rally has had a powerful and positive influence on HomeAway. I believe in what Rally does and will continue to recommend them strongly to organizations searching for an Agile solution.”

Jack Yang
Director of Engineering
HomeAway



“Driving adoption of Agile practices is the single most important thing Rally has done for us. Having the company completely in synch and delivering more value to our customers is more than worth the subscription price.”

As a result of his success in managing the adoption of Agile and Rally, Jack has found himself advocating Agile practices and the Rally solution at other organizations. “I can speak to both the acceptance of Agile best practices and the Rally solution because I’ve done it and have seen its success first-hand. Based on experience, I also encourage teams with no Agile experience to implement Agile and Rally the right way - adopt it within one team first and then spread it to others.”

A Swiss Army Knife for Agile

HomeAway continues to find new, unexpected uses for Rally. When HomeAway’s accounting team needed a way to capture capital and non-capital expenses from the development team, it turned to Rally to track expenses and run capitalization reports. Using the Web Services API and the openness of the Rally tool, HomeAway was able to record capital expense hours and trace those hours back to each developer’s tasks. While the team had to change the way they used Rally in order to get capitalization information, accounting now easily assigns costs to various projects across the business.

Jack explains, “The Rally solution is a giant Swiss Army knife. Although you may use the saw, file and bottle opener, more tools are at your disposal if or when you need them. Rally’s software lifecycle management solution provides all the tools and flexibility a fast moving, dynamic business like HomeAway requires. Although we may only use a fraction of Rally’s functionality now, we are continuously finding new applications because it is a very open solution.”

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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