

B.C. Bus Company Gets Going on Process Improvement with Office Project Server 2007

Overview

Country or Region: Canada

Industry: Transportation

Customer Profile

Coast Mountain Bus Company operates buses, community shuttles, trolley buses, and the SeaBus ferry service in Greater Vancouver, British Columbia, providing 600,000 passenger trips each day.

Business Situation

The company wanted to supplement its effective team-based IT project management practices with improved processes and governance for enhanced business intelligence and human-resources allocation.

Solution

Coast Mountain Bus turned to Microsoft® Certified Partner Western Principles Consulting to review the project management processes, and implement Microsoft Office Project Server 2007.

Benefits

- Streamlined processes
- Enhanced business intelligence
- Improved productivity
- Improved resource planning

Office Project Server 2007 gives team managers instant insight into team members' workloads, to ensure the right people are working on the right things.

Gerry Akkerman, Vice President, Business Technology, Coast Mountain Bus Company

Coast Mountain Bus Company in Vancouver, B.C. relies on technology to help ensure safe and convenient service on its hundreds of vehicles, including buses, community shuttles and ferries. The organization sought a better project management framework to improve IT efficiency. Coast Mountain Bus turned to Microsoft® Certified Partner Western Principles Consulting and Microsoft Office Project Server 2007 for a solution. Western Principles conducted a thorough project process assessment and helped implement the Microsoft software. Now the IS department can serve internal clients more quickly, and Coast Mountain Bus finds it easier to allocate human resources to support IT projects. The IS department is more productive, and the business has opened the door to a cost effective Enterprise Project Management solution in the near future.

Situation

Covering an 1,800-square kilometre region from North Vancouver, British Columbia to the U.S. border, and from Maple Ridge in the Fraser Valley to Point Grey on the Pacific Ocean, Coast Mountain Bus Company operates buses, community shuttles, and the B.C. SeaBus passenger ferry service. Together they provide 600,000 passenger trips every day. The company was created in 1999 as part of the family of operating facilities under TransLink – the South Coast British Columbia Transportation Authority. Coast Mountain Bus aims to excel in customer service, continuing a history of public service dating back to the 1890s when the first electric streetcars were introduced on the streets of Vancouver. The company has more than 5,000 employees.

Innovation is important at Coast Mountain Bus. The company has undertaken numerous projects to improve customer service and safety. For example, in January 2008 the organization began testing the new Transit Management and Communications System on 23 buses. This radio system employs Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to locate individual vehicles so dispatchers can respond to traffic and demand patterns and change route assignments accordingly. This technology also aids safety: buses can be located more accurately if an operator is not able to communicate the vehicle's position due to an emergency.

Coast Mountain Bus positions its IT projects to support the organization's overall goal of efficient and passenger-friendly operation, and takes a team-based approach to technology developments. Ten IS team managers oversee the direction of projects, including everything from ERP enhancements to supporting video cameras in vehicles.

However, each team leader tracked his or her own projects in their own unique way – some

used spreadsheets, while others used word-processing documents. This hindered the company's ability to track the progress of projects. "It was impossible to use the project-tracking information as any sort of knowledge base, because it was inconsistent," said Gerry Akkerman, Vice President, Business Technology.

The situation also made it difficult for Coast Mountain Bus to plan for project support. For example, there was no way to determine if extra database expertise would be needed to complete a new initiative. This caused delays as project deadlines had to be reconsidered.

Coast Mountain Bus sought a project management framework that would help the company plan its human resources so every team member's talents would be put to the best use. The ideal solution would also support improved communication among team managers.

"We started to look at our requirements as the first step towards an IT project management platform – something to help us govern the initiatives from inception to management," Akkerman said.

Solution

After researching several project management software systems, Coast Mountain Bus chose Microsoft® Office Project Server 2007. The solution helps organizations manage and coordinate projects of all sizes and scope, ranging from one-off initiatives to complex multi-faceted programs. Office Project Server 2007 provides resource tracking, project approval tracking, activity monitoring and reporting services. It helps organizations understand project-progress trends and investment gaps, and through its Web-based interface, the solution gives users anywhere, anytime access to the milestone tracking, resource coordination and budget allocation tools that

can be used to govern enterprise undertakings.

Coast Mountain Bus turned to Microsoft Certified Partner Western Principles Consulting to help implement Office Project Server 2007. Specializing in project management framework improvements, Western Principles started working with Coast Mountain Bus in August 2007.

“They already had some excellent project management practices, so we were able build on that,” said Christopher Schilling, Senior Consultant, Western Principles Consulting. “By implementing Office Project Server 2007 we helped strengthen the collaborative processes already in place.”

Benefits

By late 2007 senior managers were able to review comprehensive progress reports in Office Project Server 2007, providing a new level of insight to help guide future project plans.

“Project Server 2007 helps the IS department support the company’s overall goal of providing efficient, safe service to passengers,” said Joy Coronado, Project Manager. “Whether it’s a SAN improvement project or an ERP system update, the work we do in the information systems department touches all aspects of the business.”

Coast Mountain Bus has consolidated hundreds of projects, which has helped the organization operate more efficiently. Office Project Server 2007 has also introduced new reporting processes that have helped the company’s team and senior managers become even more productive. The resource planning features in Office Project Server 2007 allow Coast Mountain Bus to allocate its talented IS staff members for optimal effectiveness, and the planned upgrade to a complete Microsoft Enterprise Project

Management solution spells even stronger project governance in the near future.

Streamlined processes

Coast Mountain Bus and Western Principles found ample room for process and project consolidation. This resulted in a significant decrease in the number of projects – from 300 to 45 – and a significant increase in manageability.

“An important aspect of any project management solution is the review process,” Schilling said. “Office Project Server 2007 gave Coast Mountain Bus the opportunity to take a closer look at their projects and focus them, making it easier to track work already underway.”

Enhanced business intelligence

Prior to the new solution, IS team managers lacked visibility into each other’s work. Now with access to Office Project Server 2007, they can see how all projects are progressing. This has increased the collective business intelligence of the entire IS department, and has boosted the organization’s ability to respond to its internal customers – Coast Mountain Bus’s business managers.

“Now when managers want to know about a particular application, everyone on the IS team can respond, even if they’re not working on the project.” Akkerman said. “There’s a greater awareness of everyone’s initiatives.”

Improved productivity

In the past, IS team managers provided month-end reports about their projects. These reports were the primary project reporting mechanism for senior managers. With Office Project Server 2007, team managers now enter their project updates as needed. Instead of waiting for a month-end summary senior managers can review project progress at any time, and they have the information they need to make strategic

decisions. The new process also saves IS managers from having to collect details at the end of the month, enabling them to focus more on project management.

“We rely on our team managers for insight, but we also want them focusing on the projects, not reports,” Akkerman said. “Office Project Server 2007 lets them put project development out front.”

Improved resource planning

The resource planning features in Office Project Server 2007 give Coast Mountain Bus the ability to assign people to projects more strategically. “We now have more insight into team members’ workloads. This helps in assigning the right resources to the right initiatives,” Akkerman said.

The resource planning features also helps the IS department hit its deadlines. The organization can scrutinize employee availability well in advance of project inception and build out timelines accordingly.

“Project management maturity does not occur over night, but with this solution in place we have taken a solid step forward in the right direction,” Akkerman said.

Coast Mountain Bus plans to implement Microsoft Office Project Portfolio Server 2007 in the near future, adding portfolio management capabilities to the IT project framework. By combining Office Project Server 2007 with Office Project Portfolio Server 2007, Coast Mountain Bus will benefit from a complete Enterprise Project Management (EPM) solution. This will help the organization prioritize technology investments, manage financial as well as human resources, and ensure initiatives support specific business goals.

“That we’ll be able to integrate the portfolio management solution with the project

management platform means we’ll see a high return on our Microsoft investments,” Akkerman said.

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