

Bristol West Moves to PPM

INSURANCE & TECHNOLOGY ONLINE
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 SEP 14, 2004

Increased discipline in the execution of projects is only half of the IT investment battle; understanding their economic and operational impact is the other. Many companies continue to struggle to understand the risks and returns of ongoing projects. Others, such as Bristol West Insurance Group (Davie, Fla.; \$352.8 million in annual revenue), are turning to project portfolio management (PPM) to track projects in real time and ensure they are aligned to core business goals.

Bristol's path to PPM began two years ago, when the company hired Jack Ondeck as CIO. He purchased TrackerOffice from Automation Centre (Tucson) to better understand and prioritize IT projects. A year later, Kevin Brady, with a background in consulting for the insurance industry, was hired as project director to create a project management methodology. After evaluating other tools, he determined that the software that Bristol already owned would more than meet the company's needs. "It was very reasonably priced, and it was pretty intuitive to use," Brady says.

The TrackerOffice suite includes a project module for cataloging and managing projects according to priorities set by management. Time, expense and purchase modules are used to facilitate approvals before posting costs against projects. A personnel module catalogs human resource costs by position, skill and organizational area. At the back end, a data warehouse stores information for reporting needs.

TOOL SUPPORTS THE METHODOLOGY

Today, about 200 people at Bristol West - including the 120-member IT department - use the PPM tool. Outside IT, business users can initiate projects, access documents and receive project communications.

Senior executives and department heads meet every four to six weeks to provide guidance and direction to IT. "They devote a fair share of mind power and attention to prioritizing what's going to provide the largest benefits and, in a collaborative way, provide direction to IT," Brady says. "They actually look at the bigger picture and say what's going to benefit the company." In fact, Brady credits the executive team for the success of the



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program. "For this stuff to work," he says, "you've got to have executive sponsorship."

Once a project is approved, a project manager is assigned to develop a preliminary work plan and request resources. Because the system uses an e-mail platform (Microsoft Outlook), automatic notification can occur when there's a change, request for resources or for status reporting. "The tool supports the methodology," relates Brady. "It provides us with a repository where we can share project information with multiple people across geographic



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boundaries.”

TrackerOffice produces a variety of reports, including weekly CIO report that lists the department’s projects and their current status, budget and actual costs. “It’s valuable to our executive team and CIO because they can look at the costs and see where we’re spending our capital relative to return on the business,” Brady says.

After using a PPM tool and methodology in its IT department for more than a year, Bristol West has reaped benefits that include improved on-time performance, better prioritization and better matching of resources to each project’s importance. “At the end of the day, you’re working on the right projects that are going to provide the highest value to the business and its customers,” explains Brady, who adds that, since using the tool and methodology, on-time, on-budget performance has improved from 40 percent to 80 percent.

In addition, Brady says the project has improved communication with the business, as well as the image of the IT department. “It’s been one of the catalysts to better understanding the requirements before we start to work.”

CASE STUDY CLOSEUP

Company: Bristol West Insurance Group (Davie, Fla.; \$352.8 million in annual revenue).

Lines Of Business: Non-standard private passenger automobile insurance.

Vendor/Technology: Automation Centre’s (Tucson) TrackerOffice project management software.

Challenge: Implement tool to support PPM methodology and promote collaboration