

Project Management Automated

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Pioneer-Standard Electronics plans to use the same application it deployed to automate the request and approval of IT development prospects to also track and manage the life cycle of those projects.

The \$2.9 billion maker of electronic components and computer equipment is hoping that the project management app will help managers see if projects are on schedule and in line with allotted budgets, said Pioneer application manager Mike Anderson.

The automation effort will help the IT department manage as many as 300 projects per quarter. Pioneer-Standard has traditionally managed requests and projects with scattered e-mail communications, phone calls, and spreadsheets, according to Anderson.

The system, which will cost about \$100,000 to roll out, is expected to pay for itself by eliminating duplicate requests and by giving a better view of which IT projects are most important, Anderson said.

"We wanted to make sure that we were choosing the right project work to do, in addition to doing it right," Anderson said.

A growing number of IT organizations are turning to automated project management apps as an alternative to hiring accounting and consulting firms, said Aberdeen Group analyst David Hofferberth.

The system is based on Automation Centre's TrackerOffice software and Microsoft Project, both of which use Pioneer - Standard's Microsoft Exchange messaging system for authentication, routing of files, and notification.

The TrackerOffice component alerts participants in a project to changes by sending e-mails to those individuals who need to be informed. TrackerOffice, which presents information in the Outlook client, connects to the Microsoft Project, letting individuals view components of a project in the Outlook Calendar and use Outlook's other folders to manage or access templates or create project baselines.

Automation Centre requires that project managers set up user groups on the Exchange system. Automation Centre authenticates users based on their e-mail addresses, rather than having them log onto Pioneer-Standard's intranet.



Microsoft Project manages the tasks in a process, determining which tasks must occur before another can begin. It helps employees to see how tasks are related in a project and to plan the overall progression of the project, Anderson said.

For example, the application might preclude a project manager from devoting a team to a task if members of that team are already committed to another project. Or the app might ensure that a project manager plans tasks in the appropriate sequence—as, say, by requiring him to build a data mart before purchasing software for analyzing data within such a system.

The next phase of the project at Pioneer-Standard involves developing templates that standardize the setup of documentation, status reports and budgeted/actual expense reports for projects.

"We're standardizing those forms and putting it all in this consolidated tool," Anderson said, "so different people can come in and have access to it." ♦



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