

The Company

Investcom LLC is a leading international provider of mobile telecommunications services with operations in nine countries across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA). At present, the company is building and operating mobile networks across large parts of the region. Investcom employs 3500 individuals.

The Challenge

With staffing levels growing and business increasing, executives saw a pressing need to improve the existing e-mail-based solution. To collaborate effectively between large, distributed audiences called for a new form of communication.

The Solution

SharePoint portal solution would meet employees' challenges and scale more effectively with the company's continued development.

The Benefits

- Increased employee productivity
- Rapid document processing
- Less stress in the working environment

Productivity Increases at Investcom LLC, a Leading International Mobile Telecommunications Operator

Overview

If one department at Investcom typified the challenges of communicating efficiently with a wide audience, it was human resources (HR). It was here each week that the HR Services Officer Marya Barrage thought how the daily working lives of her colleagues could be made less stressful and more productive. She watched them wrangle with paper-based leave requests, field numerous calls on basic company procedures, and double-check that all employees had been updated on new work procedures.

Each month, Marya prepared herself for the payroll challenge. It was in those final days that the department's payroll specialist saw his stress levels soar as he worked against the clock to update his systems. Marya says: "He was feeling a lot of stress, as we all were. It was very challenging to keep on top of processing all the information passing through the HR department. Too many hours each week were spent processing standard forms, answering basic enquiries, and making sure everyone had received the latest company up-dates."

Marya believed there was an answer. A general interest in technology meant she had an idea of what needed to be done. For her, the solution lay in IT and finding some way of automating existing processes and storing information centrally where people could access it easily. However, Marya was unsure of how to drive change, let alone receive permission for a full-scale implementation of new technology within the company.

Investcom LLC is a leading international provider of mobile telecommunications services with operations in nine countries across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA). At present, the company is building and operating mobile networks across large parts of the region. From Cyprus and Yemen to Ghana and Liberia, new Global System for Mobile (GSM) networks are going live. Yet, a key part of the success of Investcom is the commitment of its 3,500 employees. It is they who are winning the contracts, rolling out the value-added services, and driving the business.





People need the right communication tools

The value of people has always been well understood from director level downwards. Investcom recognizes that maximizing the potential of people depends largely on giving access to the right communication tools. With staffing levels growing and business increasing, executives saw a pressing need to improve the existing e-mail-based solution. To collaborate effectively between large, distributed audiences called for a new form of communication.

Unbeknown to Marya, her employer's business vision held the answer that she was looking for. The company called on Dany Kattar, who had recently joined as the new IT Manager, to investigate an intranet solution. The idea was to use Internet connections to supplement e-mail for sharing internal information more efficiently. However, it was when Dany began assessing the possibility of an intranet that he talked to colleagues, including Marya, and the project suddenly escalated.

Marya says: "I sat with Dany and communicated the problems we were having in HR. He listened to me and you could see the scope of the project begin to evolve in his mind." Dany quickly established how employees in other departments were experiencing issues comparable with HR. For instance, when it came to winning new GSM contracts, the sales teams felt similarly pressurized. It took days to manually collect information, make revisions, and finalize bids before a request for proposal (RFP) could be responded to. One comment Dany received was: "Time is a critical factor in the proposal process because of the rigorous deadlines and requirements for each proposal. If the proposal is only minutes late, it won't be accepted."

A web-based portal provides the answer

Dany felt that a Web-based portal solution would meet employees' challenges and scale more effectively with the company's continued development. He says: "I went to the executive directors with a presentation that discussed the alternatives of an intranet or a portal. I pro-posed that a portal would further increase the efficiency of our business activities, improve internal processes, and increase the productivity of workers." For Dany, there were many advantages to using a portal. A quick look at the recognized business value of portals revealed the potential gains for Investcom:

- Connecting people, teams, and knowledge across large areas and driving innovation using reliable Web technologies.
- Integrating information from various systems into one solution and comprising flexible management tools.
- Driving end-to-end collaboration by ensuring information workers can find people and information quickly.
- Embedding relationships across the company and potentially with business partners and customers.

Dany's presentation was successful and the directors gave a portal solution the green light. However, there was a proviso. A cornerstone of the company's ethos has always been to maximise efficiencies from top to bottom and meet tight deadlines. "They gave me two months to have the portal up and running," says Dany. "Often these kinds of projects are completed in five to eight months."

Nevertheless, before work could begin, the company needed to choose the right portal solution. With such a tight deadline, any mis-takes at this stage would wreck the project's timelines. Dany and the IT team looked at several solutions, all of which had plus points; however, it immediately became clear where the solution with the greatest business value lay.



An enterprise-class infrastructure means rapid deployment

Historically, Investcom had invested resources regularly into the company's IT infrastructure, trying to ensure it supported employees in their daily working lives as well as possible. As a result, the network ran on latest-version software technology. This software was built specifically to provide a robust, flexible foundation for evolving new, efficient ways of working.

Dany and his IT team saw this foundation as a great opportunity. By implementing an enterprise-class portal technology from the vendor of the network's key systems, Microsoft, there were greater efficiencies and productivity gains to be had. For example, around deployment, the company could take full advantage of the vendor's major network of certified partners and achieve the rapid deployment needed. Plus, the technology would include the advanced integration, reliability, and performance that come with all Microsoft® solutions.

Investcom contacted Microsoft, and it immediately got behind the project. The vendor highlighted that as the company already had a Microsoft Enterprise Agreement (EA) it gained automatic access to Microsoft portal technology. As a result, Dany and his IT team decided to create a pilot portal to test the technology before pressing ahead with a full rollout.

To help integrate the necessary solutions, Microsoft put the business in touch with systems integrators (SIs) and local Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Netways. The creation of the pilot was a painless exercise. Investcom already had the core technologies that would integrate easily to form the solution's main engine. These solutions included:

- Microsoft Windows Server® 2003, as the operating system.
- Microsoft SQL Server™ 2003 supplying database services.
- Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 for communication and collaboration services.
- Microsoft Office System, delivering the main suite of desktop applications.

Developers at Netways effectively knitted the technologies together with Microsoft Office SharePoint® Portal Server 2003 as the technology for the portal interface. Their expertise meant Investcom also gained key value-added services for the portal such as Captaris Team-plate Workflow.

Dany says: "Everyone worked really hard to get the pilot off the ground and successfully up and running. With the tight deadlines, Netways really needed to push hard, but it responded well and ensured that we hit our deadline." The pilot portal included a workflow process for HR to administer leave requests, as well as a homepage with company news and libraries for documents and forms. It was available across the whole organization.

Winning over the employees

Dany admits that at the beginning the portal arrived without a universal fanfare. There were issues around the HR workflow solution that required ironing out. Dany explains: "Some felt the workflow needed adapting to further streamline the number of activities. For example, in the validation process for leave requests, we found that the workflow solution as it stood actually created a new relationship in the chain and this impacted efficiency. We had to re-work the model." With the "excellent goodwill" of Netways developers, Investcom tailored the workflow to meet the needs of colleagues better.

With the workflow teething problems sorted out, Dany and his team turned to building content and evolving a fully-fledged company portal. At this point, he called on Marya, hoping her interest in technology and insight into user needs would be of great value to the portal's finished design. He wasn't wrong. With the collaboration of Marya, Dany, other Investcom colleagues, and Netways, the portal began to deliver the productivity benefits originally laid out at the concept stage.

Marya says: "I was involved mostly in processes that involved HR; however, I did work with Dany specifically on the colors and format of the overall content." Marya correctly identified that the portal needed to be a welcoming place as much as a vital source for communicating company information and collaboration between colleagues. After selecting three possible design layouts for a completed portal, Dany tested the opinion of users in a ballot.

Today, the portal is really a "living entity" as described by those involved in the pilot and the subsequent development of the solution. It is driving productivity gains across all departments and among all employees. A simple snapshot of the company would reveal how the portal is helping people drive innovation, improve processes, build connections, and develop customer relationships.

Employee Productivity Improves and Drives Business Growth

The benefits of the new portal are clear across all departments. Personal productivity has increased significantly, and without the expense of large amounts of re-training. For Investcom, the portal solution provided a user interface that was familiar and trusted. Employees were already experienced in using Microsoft desktop solutions such as Microsoft Office applications and so incorporating this new communication tool seemed like a natural extension to their current working lives.

The fact that SharePoint Portal Server 2003 was not intimidating for employees was an important factor in Investcom's decision. Furthermore, it saw the huge potential that Microsoft technology provides for scaling portal services in the future. With features such as My Site and the ability to easily integrate Web parts, executives can really personalize portal content, gaining highly relevant information rapidly for smarter business moves.

Previously there were concerns regarding the speed of sending RFPs to clients and missing deadlines, but now sales teams can concentrate on simply getting the job done. There is a unified process across all business units for compiling RFPs that takes full advantage of the portal, coupled with desktop tools. Combining SharePoint Portal Server and Microsoft Office Word 2003, people can create smart documents. It means users can import product information and specifications from the central source directly into the Word document, saving valuable work time.



Document Processing Completed in Minutes Instead of Hours

Within HR the benefits have been profound. Processes such as compiling leave requests, which formerly took five hours a week can be completed in 15 minutes. The department is gaining an extra working day each week through new efficiencies across the board. Marya says: "The change has been impressive. There is increased productivity and reduced levels of stress among colleagues."

With the new system, an employee can now submit a leave request using the portal and an online form that is automatically routed up the approval chain. E-mail notifications are generated at each step in the process and the employee is kept up to date on how the leave request is progressing.

For Marya and her colleagues, they avoid the headache of double checking that every employee has received the latest bulletins on company procedures. In the past, disseminating information with e-mail had caused issues. Marya explains: "People would not read our e-mails, or simply forget about them among the many communications they received each day. At times, they told us an e-mail had not been sent." The portal has overcome this problem. When people log on to the portal each day, they automatically see the latest company directives.

This new centralized location for communications has left HR free to focus on more productive tasks. It has also given people access to company news that doesn't clutter their inboxes. And, importantly, it helps people focus their efforts in the same direction and make sure they are pursuing the company's aims. Again, with the personalization features of the portal, employees can choose to receive alerts to new information directly related to their roles.

Personal Satisfaction, Less Stress Among Employees

For Dany, the portal has delivered a great deal of personal satisfaction. People's attitudes to the portal are increasingly positive because they see it aiding them in better achieving their business goals. One comment that Dany received springs immediately to his mind: "The company's former administration manager, who worked at Investcom for 20 years had a look at the work we were doing and tried out the portal. He called it a dream come true and wished the company had had it in his day. I really appreciated his words."

Likewise, Marya can think of someone who has been particularly impressed with the portal. She says: "When I think back to how our payroll specialist used to be stressed at the end of each month because of the workload, I feel sorry for him and the pressure he was un-der. When I see him now without stress and enjoying his work more, I think how successful the portal has been."



Technologies used

- Microsoft Exchange Server 2003
- Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003
- Microsoft Office Word 2003
- Microsoft SQL Server 2000
- Microsoft Windows Server 2003 Standard Edition

Who are we?

Netways is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner with competencies in Information Worker and Business Solutions. Our solutions target a wide array of enterprise and small and medium size business challenges. In addition to our partnership with Microsoft, Netways has a well-built alliance with Captaris for providing fax automation, document management, and business process automation solutions. By leveraging our deep industry and technical expertise, Netways is able to provide customized end-to-end solutions for clients based on worldwide standards. The services we provide include consultancy, development, implementation, outsourcing, and training.



A Local company
taking a Global View

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