

Metrics Help Leading Software Developer Preserve Budget and Headcount

Customer: A leading global software developer

Industry: Technology

About the Company

The video production arm of the leading software company operates a 65,000-square-foot production facility that houses advanced production and post-production facilities, including three large stages, state-of-the-art digital post-production facilities, an interactive media development group and technology integration lab. Inside, the company creates multimedia marketing, public relations, training and other presentation materials to communicate to its various audiences.

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Dan O., consulting engineer

Business Challenge

On the campus of a leading global software developer, not all engineers are hard at work on the next software release. An experienced team of engineers keeps hundreds of pieces of equipment in the video production center running smoothly.

The 65,000-square-foot production facility has all the makings of a major motion picture studio, from stages to digital post-production facilities to makeup rooms. There, the company creates hundreds of video, audio and other multimedia materials each year to promote products, and educate and train its many audiences. It's also a real-world test bed for the company's own media and entertainment solutions.

When a stage is reserved for the day, and vendors and talent are onsite, the show must go on. Consulting engineers have to troubleshoot any technical problems that arise in order to stay on schedule.

Previously, the team used email to receive and track issues. However, issues and resolutions were not aggregated into one place accessible by all engineers and end customers, nor did email enable automation.

Moreover, outside vendors on site were not part of the corporate email system and consequently could not log their problems that way. Lack of an overall picture of workloads and recurring issues made it tough for the team to draw on past resolutions or demonstrate its value to the company.

"Being part of the marketing group, we're very metric driven," said Dan O., consulting engineer. "We had no real way of knowing who was doing what. In order to scale, we needed a good way to know what skill sets we would need."

Solution

The team evaluated multiple issue-tracking solutions. Web-based access, flexibility and knowledge base capabilities topped the list of requirements.

For those reasons, the team chose IssueTrak issue tracking software, a web-based, highly configurable solution. As an online application, IssueTrak lets employees and vendors access the program to log issues, including those on Macintosh and Firefox browsers.

Challenges

- Move from siloed, email-based tracking of equipment issues
- Enable access to hundreds of employees and vendors to log hours and problems
- Create a knowledge base of support resolutions
- Track and report on the amount and type of work the team provides

Solutions

- Centralized, web-based issue tracking with automated ticket creation
- Employee and vendor access with no license requirements
- Tie-in to Active Directory for single sign-on
- Multiple knowledge bases
- Detailed, easy reporting

Benefits

- Licenses required for support engineers only, reducing costs significantly
- Real-time understanding of vendor hours to keep projects on budget
- Faster resolutions
- Details on workloads to justify the team's value to management

"The web-based aspect is a huge win for us," said Dan O. "We don't have to ask our vendors to download or install anything."

Uniquely, IssueTrak's pricing model also well supports the nature of its client base. The company purchased 12 licenses but can extend issue-logging and tracking to an unlimited number of employees and vendors at no additional cost.

Within a month, the studios had implemented and configured the software with the help of IssueTrak. A connection to Active Directory sped deployment time by tying the software directly to existing data, rather than requiring migration. IssueTrak's Active Directory integration module also acts as the central authority for network security, so it readily verifies a user's identity and enables single sign-on.

Now, 70 percent of issues come in via email, with each email to the support team triggering IssueTrak to create a ticket immediately in the system. Emails also forward automatically to engineers' mobile phones and voice mail. The email subject line simply becomes the tag on the ticket.

With each issue in the system, the team has a "punch list" of projects to address, and a historical record of all issues and resolutions. Each day, the group meets to discuss and triage the hottest issues.

Benefits

Employee, Vendor Access – without License Fees

Many vendors remain onsite for just a day or two. From any browser, they log into IssueTrak to record their hours and input any technical issues. Otherwise, buying licenses for more than 200 vendors would not be financially feasible.

Beyond issue-tracking, the software allows the company to manage its vendors more effectively. Departments can easily report on vendor hours and know whether they are putting in the contracted amount of time and if projects remain on budget.

"We can track vendor hours on a daily basis to see if we're hitting or missing estimated budgets," said Dan O. "That's huge. We can have really smart conversations ahead of time instead of waiting for a bill at the end of the month."

Workflows to Fit Existing Processes

The engineering team configured IssueTrak with problem types, origins and automation based on its workflow, and not the other way around.

"Emails come in and the system knows who you are, how to categorize it, who to forward it to. Once you set all that up and set up your templates for users, it works marvels," said Dan O.

For example, the team separated its two distinct customer groups within the software. Each has a different set of issue types and knowledge bases, and each group can only see their own tickets.

Faster Resolutions with Searchable Knowledge Bases

A major addition, IssueTrak's knowledge base capabilities give the team something it never had before: a searchable, historical record of all resolutions. Anyone on the team can search IssueTrak to bring up a history of fixes for a type of problem or even a specific piece of equipment. Ultimately, that reduces the amount of time to solve and close out tickets. The knowledge base includes related notes and emails. Before, engineers searched through their individual emails, instead of having access to a group-wide history of resolutions as they do now.

"This morning I searched and came up with three or four entries regarding my

problem,” said Dan O. “It saved me hours of work to see all the notes and resolutions, and saves turnaround time.”

The Numbers Demonstrate Value

With a central location for all issues, the group pulls monthly reports – with templates in IssueTrak – that show just how much work the team and vendors perform.

Vendor hours – The hours vendors spend on projects informs future project planning and budgeting.

Engineer hours – Where engineers spend their time, and what times of day and year, helps set staffing levels and schedules.

Issues and time by group – Knowing the most served groups helps engineers communicate about their value to those groups.

Issues by types of equipment – Identifying trends, such as the age when equipment starts failing, enables proactive replacement.

The numbers not only support more efficient planning and service delivery; they actually justify the need for support engineers. Previously, the team could only provide an estimated, limited view of actual work to management. Now, they have complete records, which made a difference when budgets were being evaluated.

“We have a database full of hours and what engineers do so management can make smart decisions,” he said. “We were able to keep certain budgets for the next year because we had reports and data. They clearly saw how cuts would impact the business. It gave management our value statement.”

‘Constantly Appreciative of IssueTrak’ Support

Beyond the business value of the software,

the team appreciates IssueTrak’s above-and-beyond level of support. In particular, IssueTrak’s support team uses its own software, giving them greater insight and ideas on areas such as workflow to share with the company. Additionally, the account manager checks in regularly.

“I’m constantly appreciative of IssueTrak checking in on how we’re doing,” he said. “I don’t get that anywhere else, not even Nordstrom. It’s kind of refreshing.”

About IssueTrak

IssueTrak develops, sells and supports issue tracking software. First released in 2000, its signature software package has become a robust platform for internal and external customer support, IT help desk, workflow management, and issue tracking throughout the enterprise. The 100% web-based software is currently used by more than 1,500 companies in 35 countries, and across 54 major industry groups. Based in Virginia Beach, VA, the company is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner and has been recognized with a number of awards, including the Inc 500, Inc 5000, and Deloitte Technology Fast 500.