



Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Professional services

Customer Profile

Golder Associates is a global group of consulting companies, specializing in ground engineering and environmental services, and employing more than 5,000 people in more than 130 offices on six continents.

Business Situation

Golder works across geographical boundaries to meet customer needs and wanted a more efficient way to store and share documents, making collaboration easier.

Solution

The consulting group deployed a solution based on Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007 to provide collaboration workspaces, project/proposal workspaces, and global search capabilities.

Benefits

- Increased work-force productivity
- Faster time-to-market for proposals
- Shorter project timelines
- Less complex IT environment
- Road map for future efficiencies

Engineering Consulting Group Increases Efficiency with Global Collaboration Solution

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Bryan Rawson, Chief Information Officer, Golder Associates

With dispersed storage of critical information, Golder Associates had multiple document versions spread worldwide. The company wanted a faster way to identify the most recent information and to locate relevant, but dispersed, documents. Microsoft® Strategic Partner Avanade helped implement a global collaboration and search solution based on Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007. It provides the ability to locate documents, templates, and e-mail correspondence; project/proposal workspaces where dispersed teams can work together; and collaboration workspaces where those with similar areas of expertise can establish best practices and share ideas. Golder has plans to upgrade to Microsoft Office Professional 2007 for better support for mobile workers and tighter integration with the collaboration solution.



Situation

Golder Associates strives to be the most respected global group specializing in ground engineering and environmental services. The group serves customers in 10 market sectors, including Mining, Oil & Gas, Manufacturing, Power, Land Development, Transportation, Waste, and Water Resources. Golder has experienced steady growth in the number of people employed, doubling in size since 2000. The group now employs more than 5,000 people who operate from more than 130 offices across Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America. The staff members complete more than 12,000 projects per year.

Part of such growth is adjusting to serving customers across geographic boundaries and time zones. Often, the most qualified Golder employees to serve on a particular project team do not work in the same country as each other, or even in the same country as the project location. Team members had to rely on shared files and e-mail messages to collaborate, storing project information on unlinked file servers in the numerous Golder offices. Finding a piece of information often involved calling others or sending e-mail requests to locate the most recent version of a document, such as a proposal, past project file or report, safety policy, or past e-mail correspondence.

“The time that it took to find and verify information could be frustrating,” says Bryan Rawson, Chief Information Officer for Golder Associates. “For one thing, version control breaks down the minute anyone makes a copy from a shared site or attaches a copy to an e-mail message. E-mail attachments were our most used method of collaborating. With offices and information all over the globe, we knew that our employees would benefit from a single place to look for answers and work together.”

Golder had developed Web-based tools for basic collaboration workspaces, collection of files and photographs, and management of e-mail lists. These tools, however, did not provide intuitive synchronization with Microsoft® Office programs, and they relied on users to check out or download documents and to remember to check them in again.

Although the consulting group used an intranet to provide information to the people who needed it, IT staff discovered that information was dispersed in that realm, too. “Golder actually had several company intranets, which had been independently developed on a regional basis,” explains Rawson. “Building a search engine on top of multiple unique, disparate Web sites just did not make sense.”

Another area in which Golder saw room for improvement was in knowledge sharing and the establishment of best practices. “When you have such separated data, you risk duplication of effort. People would get together and describe what they had been working on only to discover that other staff had been working on similar projects elsewhere in the firm,” says Rawson. “We wanted to tap into our firmwide legacy knowledge by establishing a collaborative environment that would optimize our existing experience and insight.”

Part of that optimization involves enabling new employees to be productive quickly, which is particularly important given the consulting group’s expected growth rate of 10 to 20 percent annually to meet clients’ needs. “In the past, finding the right information depended in part on who you know within the firm,” says Rawson. “It was a challenge for new staff to gain access to relevant current and historical project information, and we needed to change that.”

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Solution

Recognizing that project and document management could be streamlined firmwide, Golder Associates set out to increase efficiencies. The consulting group started by evaluating its available technology and partnership options, releasing a request for proposal (RFP) in November 2005 to find a solution provider with demonstrated capabilities in developing information platforms for companies with a global reach.

Microsoft Strategic Partner Avanade responded to the RFP, reviewed the situation, and emphasized that Golder was in a position to benefit from the enhancements soon to be available in the 2007 Microsoft Office system, particularly those in Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007. “We are enthusiastic about taking advantage of available knowledge and software advancements when they are the right fit,” says Rawson. “We looked at technologies other than SharePoint Server, but we decided quickly that they would necessitate extra work and time. Plus, a SharePoint Server-based solution would help us maximize our current investments in other Microsoft technologies.”

Avanade compared the options of developing a solution using Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003 and developing one based on Office SharePoint Server 2007. “Our analysis showed that using SharePoint Server 2007 would be four to six weeks faster and approximately U.S.\$150,000 less expensive than using the older version because that version would have required customization to build functionality that is already incorporated in SharePoint Server 2007,” says Aaron Koenderman, Project Manager for Avanade. “If we’d developed the solution on the older version, we’d also face the additional development cost of eventually migrating from a customized SharePoint Portal Server 2003 environment to take

advantage of what we’ll install on the desktop with Microsoft Office Professional 2007.”

“It was a collective decision to save time and expense, and deploy the new 2007 Microsoft Office system,” recalls Rawson. “We look at it as more than a mere upgrade—we want to take the opportunity to get the most out of the software. We are globalizing and automating many of our business processes to gain more efficient document sharing and management.”

The solution, which helps Golder meet its goal of increasing efficiency for staff by providing a collaborative environment and global search capabilities, consists of three parts: a project/proposal workspace portal, collaboration workspace portal, and global search portal.

Project/Proposal Workspace Portal

Before embarking on a complete project/proposal workspace deployment to its global work force of 5,000, Golder decided to start with an initial pilot solution for a small subset of employees. In October 2006, the firm deployed a portal solution to track project information to enable a search engine that will help employees find statements of qualifications, proposals, reports, project descriptions, and other consultants.

“We are looking to roll out the pilot project/proposal workspaces at one office shortly and then progressively introduce the project/proposal workspaces to all our offices over the next six to nine months,” says Rawson.

Collaboration Workspace Portal

Also in October 2006, Golder created approximately 100 business-focused collaboration workspaces that are available to all 5,000 employees. The collaboration workspaces provide a place for employees within a particular market sector or technology focus—such as mining, water

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resources, or tunneling—to have easy access to group-specific information, calendars, lists, and e-mail correspondence. Employees in any location will have all of the consulting group’s market-specific resources available in one location, making it easy to answer questions about whether Golder has dealt with a particular issue or customer before.

“Even if they do not need to work directly with each other today, it is still valuable to link groups of people involved in similar projects through the workspaces for future opportunities,” says Rawson.

Over the next year, Golder anticipates that it will experience at least a fourfold increase in the number of collaboration workspaces in its core business areas alone, not including spaces dedicated to internal social or community issues. Users wanting a new workspace will activate an administrative wizard that asks them for data such as the space’s owner, purpose, location, and name. Workspace requests are processed by the Golder IT help desk within the same business day, and they no longer require the time and specialty labor previously necessary to set up new group Web sites or shared folders.

Global Search Portal

The search portion of the solution is available to all Golder employees, who use index and relevancy search features to find information in the HTML-based portions of the consulting group’s existing intranets as well as the new project and collaboration workspaces. Since June 2005, Golder had used the Google Mini system to search its Australian intranet and North American marketing sites. Says Rawson, “We invested in the Google Mini as a short-term solution, but we are moving from it to SharePoint Server 2007 for more comprehensive search capabilities that integrate with the rest of our environment.”

Eventually, the solution will include a business data catalog for sophisticated searching among the consulting group’s many line-of-business applications and the ability to generate key performance indicators that are based on real project information.

Benefits

With the new collaboration solution, Golder Associates has improved document availability and management for its projects. “Streamlining the flow of information at Golder allows us to work more effectively, better serve our clients, and make it easier for us to expand and help our new people be more effective sooner,” says Rawson. “Our improved search, collaboration, and version control capabilities will make our projects more efficient because of immediate sharing and the significant reduction in duplication of information.”

Increased Work-Force Productivity

In recognizing that it had room for improvement in the way that employees collaborated and searched for relevant information, Golder took the first step toward increased efficiency firmwide. “With SharePoint Server 2007, efficiency is inevitable because we minimize the risk of redeveloping information and ‘reinventing the wheel’ for our projects,” says Rawson. “People are not setting up the same folder in multiple offices on multiple servers—instead, they are sharing and reusing information to take advantage of the firm’s intellectual capital.”

By drawing on existing knowledge and materials, Golder employees save time at every stage of the project initiation process as well as throughout their projects. Using Office SharePoint Server 2007, even project-related e-mail correspondence can be captured for electronic storage and, if necessary, retrieved for later use. “People want to do their work in the collaboration

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solution because of all the collateral, best practices, and other materials that are convenient and available for project initiation, proposals, and issue resolution,” says Rawson.

The efficiencies extend to mobile workers as well, especially after the consulting group upgrades to Microsoft Office Professional 2007 next year. At least 40 percent of Golder personnel work daily on a portable computer, so the enhanced e-mail caching and synchronization capabilities available with Office Professional 2007 will make those employees more effective on the road. Says Rawson, “Connectivity to our team and project/ proposal workspaces is more convenient through a browser interface, and no longer requires direct connection to data that is isolated in local file servers.”

Faster Time-to-Market and Shorter Project Timelines

Employees can initiate new projects more easily thanks to the ready availability of the most up-to-date, corporate-approved marketing and business materials. That means Golder staff can prepare proposals more quickly. Adding to the increased speed are the market segment-specific past proposals, project descriptions, and resources available in the collaboration workspaces.

Beyond the proposal process, Golder can conduct more of its projects around the clock as a result of the improved collaboration capabilities. “People in our offices all over the world now have 24-hour access to project/proposal workspaces where they can always see who did what to documents and when they were last touched,” says Rawson. “For instance, a project team member in Australia can work on a project during the regular workday, a European counterpart can pick up and add to the work,

and then someone in the United States can contribute to it.”

Less Complex IT Environment

The timesavings resulting from the new solution are not limited to the Golder engineers, scientists, and project teams. The support effort provided by the IT group is also more efficient due to data consolidation and the reduction of so much disparately stored information.

“We anticipate a decrease in the amount of information in isolated project storage as it is replaced by work stored in project/proposal workspaces,” says Rawson. “This decrease will reduce the complexity of the overall environment that the IT group has to support and manage. Not only that, it will lower our file server investments by up to 40 percent.”

The amount of time that it takes for IT to set up team or project shared workspaces, for example, is significantly less because of the automated nature of the solution. “Previous collaboration solutions required anywhere from one to three business days to create a shared workspace,” says Rawson. “We are delivering new workspaces within a maximum of one business day, but the solution is so straightforward that we think that we will be able to get users the workspaces that they need in just four hours.”

Road Map for Future Efficiencies

After it is satisfied with the initial features and functionality in the collaboration solution, Golder plans to expand the solution to add capabilities throughout the consulting group. “This initial project is laying the foundation for a number of planned projects to improve overall efficiency and deliver firmwide productivity gains,” says Rawson.

Golder also plans to make the project/ proposal workspace solution available through an extranet so that customers can

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benefit from the communication and collaboration efficiencies.

Other plans include adding geographic information system (GIS) capabilities to the solution to tie in maps and project locations. "Ultimately, our users will be able to turn to a single system to find out what we have done, who we did it for, and where we did it," says Rawson.

Golder also plans to use Microsoft Office Forms Server 2007 to convert standard documents into Microsoft Office InfoPath® information-gathering program forms so that they can be tracked through all the consulting group's systems worldwide.

Concludes Rawson, "SharePoint Server 2007 is such a powerful foundation that we will definitely be asking what more we can do with it to encourage and support global collaboration. Our vision is to deliver a global platform that will make everyone's daily activities easier. Our new collaboration, project/proposal, and search portals are a significant advancement toward achieving this vision, and SharePoint Server 2007 provides the foundation we need now and for the future of our global intranet."

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