

Experience:

Icon Identity Solutions

[Extranet]

- | **eStrategy**
- | **Web Development**
- | **Deployment**
- | **Marketing**

The Challenge

The sign manufacturer had developed web-based client support a few years ago, and put together a solution that neither addressed the internal staff requirements nor client needs. A significant number of prospects were demanding that effective web-based support be included as part of the response to RFPs. Project management companies were entering the market and deliberately reducing profit margins for subcontractors. The sign manufacturer knew they had to do something in order to keep their existing market share at the very least, let alone grow in their marketplace. They wanted to be viewed as a major competitor not only to other sign manufacturers, but also to the Project Management companies. They realized that this meant making a serious investment in automated customer support that put the client first.

BuzzBoltMEDIA's Solution

The first thing the sign manufacturer did was hire BuzzBoltMEDIA to learn exactly what their clients wanted. Their in-depth conversations with existing and past clients provided detailed information as to what was really important to them. They talked within the organization to find where the delays were occurring. They looked at the departmental budgets to see where streamlining processes could save money. Tapping into the existing ERP system to decrease duplicate keystrokes would make the change welcome to existing staffers.

Then BuzzBoltMEDIA looked at the competition and assessed what their on-line support systems were. Not having access to the actual extranets was at first a significant drawback. However, gleaning anecdotal information about these services from many sources including research done on industry-specific message boards and chat rooms enabled them to provide enough information to help the sign manufacturer make decisions as to what the final extranet requirements would be.

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The next step was determining how to pay for it. BuzzBoltMEDIA researched the different options available from out-of-the-box software, application service providers to full custom development. Considering that a major aspect of the plan was integrating with the pre-existing ERP platform pretty much forced out most options. Utilizing current vendors would enable them to fast track their plan for launching as soon as possible. The sign manufacturer's current ERP development company and BuzzBoltMEDIA partnered together to produce an initial plan of development, broken down in stages, that detailed the reporting capabilities, on-line service and order requests, as well as integration with the ERP system.

BuzzBoltMEDIA developed the overall interface and navigational system, providing a page structure for the client login to signal customization of the home page for each client based on his access restrictions. Reports developed by the ERP integrator enabled clients to select from a list of standard reports, or build new custom reports, saving them for future use. Clients could export the reports to Excel for additional manipulation, which was a big hit for clients. Other services included on-line sign orders, sign surveys, sign maintenance, and status reports on each of these requests.

Building in phases enabled the sign manufacturer to launch enhancements on a regular basis. One phase included on-line approvals with additional storage capabilities for before and after photographs of individual locations for each customer, along with an ability for clients to download this data for their use. Another phase involved adding threaded project message boards. Other phases dealt with enhanced integration on the backend to streamline internal processes and reporting.

Even before launching the initial phase of the extranet, the sign manufacturer presented the prototype to many of their clients and prospects where they were met with lots of positive feedback. They determined that the entire first phase paid for itself within 6 months in cost savings alone, not even considering the retention of existing customers unhappy with the pre-existing customer support product, and new business gained.

By branding their extranet "e-process solutions", they were also able to market themselves as the technology leader in their industry, and pushed the extranet as a value-add offering, part of their project management services, essentially keeping the large project management companies from taking as large a bite of market share as had been previously projected.