

Case Study

Ziba Design

Design Firm Improves Customer Relationships with New Extranet Solution

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Ziba Design, an internationally recognized design consulting firm with five offices worldwide, wanted to create a customer extranet that would provide a superior user experience. The company relied on cumbersome file transfer protocol (FTP) sites and e-mail to share files with customers. Helped by Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner Saltmine, Ziba is implementing an extranet based on Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007. The look and feel of the new extranet closely reflects the clean, innovative designs and ease of use of the products and experiences the company creates. Because of this, and the improved collaboration tools Office SharePoint Server 2007 delivers, the company anticipates that the new extranet will help improve customer relationships. Additionally, the new solution has cost Ziba considerably less than it would have spent on alternate solutions.

Situation

For more than 22 years Ziba has created ideas, designs, and experiences for companies in the high technology, interactive, consumer, medical, and service industries. From its headquarters in Portland, Oregon, and satellite offices located in Munich, San Diego, Shanghai, and Tokyo, the company serves a variety of customers from small startups to Fortune 100 companies.

It's not uncommon for Ziba to be engaged in as many as 80 customer projects simultaneously. During each project, many documents, design specifications, images, presentations, and other materials are shared between Ziba project teams and customers. The company used to share files by posting them to file transfer protocol (FTP) sites for the customer to download. Customers often found the logon process complicated, or had a difficult time finding the information they needed within the FTP site directory—a list of folders whose names were the only indication of the type of content inside. Customers often had to open many folders and files before they found the information they

Solution Overview

<http://www.ziba.com>

Customer Size: 130 employees

Organization Profile

Through deep knowledge of specific markets and brands, Ziba Design helps companies achieve authentic design that wins customer loyalty. Based in Oregon, the company employs 130 people worldwide.

Business Situation

Ziba wanted to eliminate cumbersome information-sharing processes that caused frustration and negatively impacted customer relationships.

Solution

Using Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007, Ziba implemented a new solution to interact with customers throughout the project process.

Benefits

- Highly customizable user interface
- Better customer connection
- Enhanced security
- Faster time-to-market
- Impressive site at a lower cost

Hardware

- Dell Latitude D600 series and D400 series portable computers
- Dell Precision 300 and 400 series desktop

needed.

Documents and other pieces of information were also shared between Ziba project teams and customers as attachments to e-mail messages, but messages were often returned to the sender due to e-mail server file size limitations. Additionally, with security becoming a major concern for many customers, connection to FTP sites often failed because the companies' firewalls automatically blocked access to unknown sites. "Between the security challenges and our habits of using multiple methods to share data from a variety of locations, the company suffered some overall inefficiencies," says Dieter Reuther, Director of Information Technology at Ziba.

Ziba wanted to create a process for project teams to share information with customers that would offer a unique experience. "Interaction with the customer is everything," says Reuther. "We needed to bring our project process and information-sharing practices up to par with the rest of our business in order to deliver the best possible customer experience."

Solution

Ziba evaluated several software products designed to help companies manage content and business processes, including Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007, IBM Workplace, and several other offerings by smaller companies. "None of the other products we evaluated offered as complete a solution as SharePoint Server 2007," says Reuther. "The Microsoft package had all that we wanted—search, file sharing, item-level security, version control, and more."

Office SharePoint Server 2007 provides an enterprise-scale, integrated environment for information management, as well as many out-of-the-box capabilities that will enable Ziba project teams to easily share and manage content throughout the design process. At the same time, it offers a high level of flexibility for customizing the user interface. "The extranet requires a clean, simple design," says Reuther. Each customer site on the extranet is referred to as a "Virtual Studio" where Ziba teams share documentation, information, and ideas with customers. The Virtual Studio is an online metaphor for Ziba Project Studios—physical rooms in which staff from many disciplines, including graphic design, research, industrial design, project management, and others, meet to share ideas and collaborate on projects.

Improved security was a primary consideration in selecting Office SharePoint Server 2007 for the customer extranet. With customers in the banking industry, and other industries where safeguarding data and intellectual property is of utmost importance, Ziba must work to keep customer data shared within the Virtual Studios highly safeguarded.

computers
Macintosh PowerBooks and MacBook Pro portable computers
Macintosh PowerMac G5 desktop computers
HP Proliant DL360 and DL 385 server computers
HP MSA1000 SAN Storage

Partner(s)

Saltmine

Software and Services

Microsoft Active Directory
Microsoft Office Professional 2007
Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007
Microsoft Windows Server 2003 Enterprise Edition
Microsoft Windows Server 2003 Standard Edition
Microsoft Windows SharePoint Services

Vertical

Other Professional Services

Industries

Country/Region

United States

"We needed to be able to guarantee, to the best of our abilities, that users, depending on their level of access, will only have access to the functions and information they are supposed to see," says Reuther. Through integration with the Active Directory® service, a central component of the Windows Server® 2003 operating system that provides the means to manage user identities and relationships within a network environment, Ziba can implement project-based user accounts for customers with logon names and passwords in order to help control access and visibility of functions and data that exists on an extranet site.

Upon contacting Microsoft to find out more about SharePoint Products and Technologies, Ziba was directed to Saltmine, a leading Web development firm and a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner. "Saltmine had technology expertise as well as interactive and graphic design competency. This was important because we needed a partner who could understand the user experience we wanted to achieve, and could also construct a best-practice solution around that," says Reuther.

Working with Saltmine, Ziba completed a proof of concept for a customer extranet. The company decided to conduct a pilot that would deliver an extranet built on Microsoft Windows® SharePoint Services 2.0 to 30 Ziba customers. Windows SharePoint Services, a technology of Windows Server 2003 already in use at the company, enables teams to create collaborative Web-based workspaces for sharing ideas and information. Once deployed, Ziba and Saltmine gathered feedback from customers using the pilot extranet to inform the design and implementation of the full-scale customer extranet based on Office SharePoint Server 2007.

The company is now completing testing and implementation of the new Office SharePoint Server 2007 extranet. Saltmine has helped the company conduct extensive cross-platform testing because approximately 25 percent of Ziba employees use the Macintosh platform. Ryan Peck, Senior Project Manager at Saltmine describes the results of the testing: "We've tested the extranet on Firefox and Safari and found that SharePoint Server 2007 is very forgiving where the Macintosh platform is concerned. This summer we did an implementation of Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003 for another Macintosh-centric customer. It's been much easier to adapt the user interface for the Macintosh on SharePoint Server 2007." Reuther adds, "We have been able to deliver pretty much the same user experience on both the Macintosh and Windows platforms, using SharePoint Server 2007."

Terri King, Practice Director at Saltmine, comments on other improvements to the 2007 version of Office SharePoint Server: "Ziba required a highly customized interface in order to achieve its goal of

creating a user experience that reflects the products and experiences the company creates. SharePoint Server 2007 enabled us to provide this customization in a way that will scale much better than with SharePoint Portal Server 2003." As an example, she cites the master pages and page layouts features of Office SharePoint Server 2007, which provide reusable templates for publishing new content within the same look and feel of the existing site.

Benefits

Using Office SharePoint Server 2007, Ziba has been able to create a customer extranet that expresses the company's unique look and feel, improves the customer experience, and helps streamline the project process—all at a reasonable cost to the company.

Highly Customizable User Interface

While many customers are excited about the out-of-the-box capabilities and ready-made site designs of Office SharePoint Server 2007, Ziba represents an interesting shift from the paradigm. "Our project required a really high level of customization," says Reuther. "We needed to be able to remove functionality and interface elements that didn't fit with the user experience we wanted to create. SharePoint Server 2007 provided the flexibility we needed to achieve our design goals." The extranet Virtual Studios closely reflect the branding and engaging, straightforward design of the company's corporate Web site. "With SharePoint Server 2007, we've been able to take the experience of going into a Ziba office and turn it into an online experience," adds Reuther.

"Another Saltmine customer highly concerned with branding previewed the Ziba extranet. It hit the mark, and they consequently decided to base their own extranet on Office SharePoint Server 2007," says King.

Better, Longer-Lasting Customer Connection

Reuther believes that the new extranet will help the company create a better connection between customers and design teams because it will eliminate previous file sharing frustrations. Project teams and customers will share files in centralized document libraries—they'll have one place to go to find the information they need.

Additionally, through features such as Office SharePoint Server 2007 blogs (Web logs) and wiki sites (Web sites that allow visitors to easily add, remove, and edit content), Ziba plans to create an ongoing dialog with customers, through which they will be able to brainstorm and share design ideas. It also hopes to provide dormant customers with updates about Ziba innovations relevant to the customer's industry or market, in order to maintain a strong connection and continually renew their interest in the company.

Reuther refers to the latter as the Ziba Innovation Blog. "As we add to the Innovation Blog, we'll be able to tag blog entries with customer names, and through RSS [really simple syndication], feed the appropriate news to our customers."

Enhanced Security for Customer Information

Ziba has been able to create individualized workspaces with enhanced security for project teams to collaborate with customers. "The security-aware user interface is really important to us. We share information with users of many different access levels—some have access to all project information, others have limited access—depending on their role in the company. With SharePoint Server 2007 we have the ability to specify access to each item within a Virtual Studio. For example, within a project team, there may be only a few people who should have access to certain images or documents. Additionally, we have the ability to create a review area—a site within the extranet site where information can be reviewed by core members before it goes out to the rest of the team," says Reuther.

Faster Time-to-Market

Reuther believes that the new extranet will help promote better collaboration with the customer during the creative design process. He also believes that teams will be able to work faster and more efficiently, thus speeding the production time for new products or experiences, because they will have a centralized document repository, and consistent methods for organizing documents and information and tracking changes made to data.

Impressive Site at a Lower Cost

"When a customer visits the Ziba extranet, they're greeted with an awesome experience," says King. "Saltmine has been helping companies implement Web sites for over 12 years. SharePoint Server 2007 enabled us to create a rich user experience for a fraction of the cost of using other solutions." For example, King estimates that to create the extranet using IBM Workplace would have cost approximately twice as much in services fees alone. She attributes the cost savings to the out-of-the-box functionality of Office SharePoint Server 2007, which enabled Saltmine to create the extranet without extensive custom coding.

Future Plans

Once the extranet is fully deployed, Ziba will implement its intranet, also based on Office SharePoint Server 2007. Currently in the architecture design phase for the intranet, Reuther explains that once the intranet and extranet are linked, employees will be able to use Office SharePoint Server 2007 search functionality to find valuable company resources that are currently challenging to locate. "We have more than 22 years of history and knowledge stored in file shares,

spread among 5 offices worldwide," says Reuther. "When the company was smaller, information was easy to find. But even though it is still very well organized, it's difficult to know where to look for the documents or data you need. If a design team in Germany needs to know about a project in Japan, we want people to be able to easily access information that already exists instead of wasting time reinventing it. Enterprise search functionality will help us with this."

The company also plans to upgrade to Microsoft Office Professional Plus 2007. Reuther cites a new feature of the Microsoft Office PowerPoint® 2007 presentation graphics program, PowerPoint Slide Libraries, which allows users to store presentations on a site supported by Office SharePoint Server 2007 and later access the content from within Office PowerPoint 2007, as being potentially very important for the company in terms of reusing content in order to work more efficiently. The company is also currently evaluating Microsoft Office Project Server 2007. "The extranet is the first step. We're looking at the entire project lifecycle, and evaluating technologies that can potentially help us improve it," says Reuther.

Microsoft Office System
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For more information about the Microsoft Office system, go to:
www.microsoft.com/office
