

Alcatel TAS-Austria and Primavera: Keeping Projects on Track

Project Management Highlights:

- Decreased time required for project tracking by 50 percent
- Reduced time for re-planning by 25 percent
- Cut report generation by 33 percent



European unification and the opening of the Eastern block for trade has created a wealth of projects for western companies such as Alcatel Transport Automation Systems (TAS)-Austria. For example, the growing need for public transport requires that the European railway system be equipped with integrated, compatible hardware and software, which is interoperable with respective national standards.

Alcatel TAS-Austria develops and installs software systems for railway infrastructures, both within control centres and the Austrian network itself. These projects often last for several years and are resourced by a pool of employees. These people offer a range of skills and tend to work on several projects simultaneously.

To be successful in the international arena, Alcatel TAS-Austria needed to become project-focused. At first, the organisation relied on project management software that needed to be

enhanced by a variety of tools developed and implemented by individuals to suit their own requirements. As a result, valuable information was isolated in silos that only a few people could access.

Since the existing software tool was unable to cope with the complex multi-project environment and handle the resource planning needs of the organisation, Alcatel TAS-Austria decided that a radical new solution was required – Primavera. Within six months of implementing the project portfolio management software, the time required for project tracking was dramatically decreased by 50 percent while re-planning time was reduced 25 percent.

Implementation on the 'Living Project'

The first group of projects to be planned and executed by using Primavera software were the operative projects – such

as equipment assembly, product mounting and system installations. Since these projects usually follow a standard repetitive procedure and employees focus on one project at a time, the transition to Primavera was relatively straightforward.

For the first time, project managers had immediate information about current project data and resource allocation. To guarantee adherence to delivery dates, the old system had employed reserve buffers to plan additional time for compensation of delays caused by resource conflicts. However, Primavera provided such high-quality planning of employee availability that this function became redundant.

"In the past, the previous system enabled us to use resource allocation tools only when there was a conflict of work," comments Alfred Kucera, Head of Alcatel's Automatic Train Protection Systems. "We are now able to view the requirements of upcoming work and this allows us to allocate people much more effectively from the start."

Once the first phase had been completed, Alcatel transferred the technical development projects – such as system design, research & development, test, verification and validation –

into Primavera. According to Kucera, "These projects are far more difficult to plan because each project is different from the other. The resource management is more intricate as employees are only deployed for a short period of time and work on many projects at once. By using Primavera, project managers were able to streamline our internal processes, eliminating redundancies within the entire portfolio."

User acceptance is often a problem for companies implementing a new system. However, Alcatel TAS-Austria employees were aware that an improvement in project management capabilities was fundamental to the success of the company. Through a phased introduction and effective communication with Alcatel TAS-Austria, most employees knew that the implementation of the project portfolio management software was a success before they began using it themselves. This stimulated enthusiasm among the staff and a positive attitude that made the transition easier.

"The managers saw the quick success that was achieved with Primavera and consequently supported the standardisation of processes which were implemented," says Kucera. "This was



further enhanced by the ease with which employees learned to use the tool. It's so intuitive that the training process and adoption of the new system was extremely quick."

Project Management as Scheduled

When the TAS-Austria group's whole project portfolio was finally in Primavera, the full benefits of "enterprise project management" came into play. Kucera explains, "There is now one place where all project information – from baselines up to current status – is available for everyone. Employees can see how the information they input affects the project, rather than just receiving an anonymous order number in confirmation."

"This new transparency led to an increase in the quality of work and caused an astonishing change in attitude. The level of detail provided makes them feel more responsible for the scheduled project progress. In addition, management can now access precise data on project progress, enabling them to maintain accurate planned value estimates. We can now access all the information we need to make business decisions at the click of a button and be confident that it is up to date. This means that we can solve problems and act on opportunities much more quickly."

Kucera believes that better communication and feedback have created many benefits. "The project members have access to the full range of information that they need. They identify themselves with the project, learn to think about it independently, improve the planned estimates and even try to complete the task ahead of schedule," comments Kucera. "In the past, we had to restart planning when we noticed any changes or variations. Today, we can act pro-actively as we are able to identify and respond to changes well in advance. Being able to see the affect of their work on the

success of the project has helped employees to see that they are vital to the health and growth of Alcatel TAS-Austria."

Live Information at Their Fingertips

Many organisations find that effective reporting consumes immense amounts of time, yet managers need to be able to see the status in order to make good decisions. One of the most apparent benefits that Primavera has delivered is that time spent on compiling reports has been completely eliminated in some areas.

"In the past we had to spend two to three weeks gathering the necessary information to go into portfolio review meetings," explains Kucera. "Now there is no need to prepare documents – we just go in and get the information live online in Primavera."

"Project managers arguing over resource conflicts are also a thing of the past. They are now able to look far into their future requirements and plan accordingly. This gives them more time to concentrate on performance rather than fire fighting."

Another welcomed benefit has been the reduction of time invested before the project is begun.

"At our regular six-month review, everyone, including executives and project team members, stated that the quality of the project management and the speed of delivery has increased immensely," says Kucera. "Overall reporting time has been cut by a third and development of documentation has been reduced by 50 percent, mostly due to the availability of 'reports by a click' on the system. By reducing non-productive tasks, we have been able to deliver projects quicker while improving product quality and delivering greater value to our customers and Alcatel."

WORLDWIDE HEADQUARTERS

Three Bala Plaza West
Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004 USA
P. +1.610.667.8600, 1.800.423.0245
F. +1.610.667.7894
info@primavera.com

INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

2nd Floor, Commonwealth House
2 Chalkhill Road, London W6 8DW, United Kingdom
Phone: +44.20.8563.5500
Fax: +44.20.8563.5533
intlinfo@primavera.com



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www.primavera.com