



THE OPEN ALM COMPANY

Thomson Elite

FAST FACTS

Company

Thomson Elite, a business within The Thomson Corporation (NYSE: TOC; TSX: TOC), is a leading provider of financial and practice management solutions to the legal industry and to other professional services markets, including accounting and consulting firms.
www.thomsonelite.com

Industry

Business software for law firms, government agencies, corporate legal departments and professional services firms.

Geography

U.S., Canada, U.K., Europe, Asia/Pacific

Challenges

- Increase visibility and quality as part of overall process improvement effort
- Create a managed business process for software development
- Improve information quality

Solution

- Borland® StarTeam®
- Borland Services

Results

- 98% information accuracy
- 70% errors eliminated completely
- 30-40% increase in the number of software development projects

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CHALLENGES

Quality information and quality processes are critical to every business that creates software to be consumed by other professional organizations. Internal IT organizations must be able to demand accountability at every step in the software development lifecycle. To ensure visibility into its ever-evolving software development, Thomson Elite needed a solution that would help it to:

Increase visibility and quality as part of overall process improvement effort

In 2003, Thomson Elite began a company-wide process improvement effort. It mandated that teams within the company be more accountable to each other. For one software configuration management team, this meant finding a solution that would make data easier to update and more accessible to everyone in the application development lifecycle—from project managers and analysts to architects, developers and testers. The solution would also need to increase visibility for management into the development lifecycle of nine different Thomson Elite products. To meet its goals, the team began investigating solutions that would support its existing process improvement initiative and provide more insight into the entire development process.

Create a managed business process for software development

The team had solid step-by-step processes for its software configuration management team, but those processes also included acquiring information manually. As a result, there were information gaps from human errors, and those gaps yielded a lower level of confidence in the data. To increase confidence, the company sought a technology solution that would support and automate its existing processes across the lifecycle.

Guarantee information quality

At Thomson Elite, critical customer-facing internal teams and management rely on information from software configuration management teams. Without an automated solution, the team estimated that its data was limited to approximately 70-75% accuracy because individuals were relying on email and storing data in other applications. This not only caused errors, but made it nearly impossible to synchronize changes. In order to guarantee better quality information, the team knew it would have to more tightly control information.

SOLUTION

In 2003, after evaluating five competing solutions, the software configuration management team led by Adina Kram, release coordinator, deployed Borland® StarTeam®. The user interface was simple and provided visibility into the application development lifecycle. They also felt comfortable with the Borland team's ability to easily map the solution to its business processes.

Thomson Elite

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— Adina Kram, Release Coordinator, Thomson Elite

Prior to deploying Borland StarTeam, Kram’s team had defined processes, but the quality of the information they yielded was not at an acceptable level. “With manual processes, you can’t avoid human error,” said Kram. “With Borland StarTeam, everyone in our development organization can track progress and know where a project stands. That makes it easier for us to help other teams prioritize and communicate better externally.”

Currently, Borland StarTeam enables Kram’s configuration management group to deliver higher quality information, eliminate information gaps and provide more visibility to internal organizations, including management, support and implementation teams. Borland StarTeam is a comprehensive and easy-to-use software change and configuration management solution that features a single, integrated interface for managing files, change requests, tasks and topics, and provides a unified repository for key application lifecycle assets.

Today, over 200 Thomson Elite professionals use Borland StarTeam for version control to set up tasks and calculate estimates versus actuals. “The solution definitely reduces the amount of time individuals spend on tasks,” adds Kram. “Another major benefit is that it can accommodate any size group. Although the processes are different, a team of three can use Borland StarTeam just as effectively as a team of 45 developers.” With the expertise of Borland Services, Borland StarTeam was also integrated with the company’s existing customer relationship management (CRM) system from Pivotal®, to facilitate automated communication between development and support on status, issue clarification and software readiness.

According to Kram, Borland StarTeam is helping to enable the entire application lifecycle, which supports the process improvement initiative the company has had in place for two years. “Since the implementation, the terms ‘best practices’ and ‘process improvement’ are now commonplace at Thomson Elite,” explains Kram. The company is currently CMM Level 2 certified, but looking at adopting CMMI processes to further its process best practices.

For Thomson Elite developers located in the company’s Los Angeles headquarters, as well as those working in other locations across the world, Borland StarTeam facilitates a more efficient 24x7 collaborative work environment. According to Kram, “StarTeam’s powerful workflow feature allows us to automatically stage nightly work and prepare data for morning reports. This allows us to support remote users more effectively.”

With Borland StarTeam, Thomson Elite project management has more insight. “Automating our processes has made an appreciable difference in our ability to define, examine and evaluate product readiness. We now have more immediate visibility into release status,” said Kram.

RESULTS

Borland StarTeam helped automate manual processes and provide increased visibility into the entire software application lifecycle for Kram’s software development group within Thomson Elite.

Improved information accuracy

According to Kram, “Before utilizing Borland StarTeam, all information needed to be verified before publishing. Since implementing the Borland solution, we are confident of our data accuracy. I estimate that our information is now about 98% accurate since implementing.”

70% errors eliminated completely

Although manual processes were robust, the human factor always meant that there would be some level of error. “Once we instituted our workflow process and automated our manual processes, we noticed that approximately 70% of errors were absolutely gone,” explained Kram. “During routine verification procedures we easily locate and resolve the remaining errors. We now have an evolving managed business process in this software development group.”

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30-40% increase in the number of software development projects

Installing Borland StarTeam has enabled the development team to be much more responsive to the needs of other groups. “The amount of work has increased as we have proven our ability to provide more accurate information. As a result, our team has been able to handle about 30-40% more software development projects,” concludes Kram.

Borland is the leading vendor of Open Application Lifecycle Management (ALM) solutions - open to customers' processes, tools and platforms - providing the flexibility to manage, measure and improve the software delivery process.