

DHL Systems Inc.

Microsoft® Project enabled a team of systems administrators with limited time and resources to plan a company-wide transition to a new computer platform. They developed a thoroughly documented solution plan with zero downtime.

Vital Statistics: DHL Systems Inc. Burlingame, CA

Industry: Information Technology Support for the DHL Worldwide Express Organization

Employees: 130

Software Programs: Microsoft Project Microsoft Schedule+ Microsoft Word Microsoft Excel Microsoft PowerPoint® Microsoft Access Microsoft FoxPro®

Hardware: Sun and Hewlett-Packard file servers Pentium PCs

Results of Using Project: "Microsoft Project enabled us to structure a company-wide transition to a Microsoft Windows® 95 platform within a very limited time frame."

DHL Systems Inc. provides technology services and systems support for DHL Worldwide Express, which operates in more than 200 countries. This systems unit of the international air express services organization is based in Burlingame, CA.

The variety of computer platforms at DHL Systems created additional work for systems administrators. Hardware included a variety of UNIX-based workstations operating TCP/IP and Novell networks. Many of the organization's 130 employees also used PCs that ran the Microsoft Windows 3.1 operating system and a number of applications.

A decision was made by an executive management committee to move the PCs to the Microsoft Windows 95 operating system and to upgrade the applications. Responsibility for developing a comprehensive solution for this transition was handed to Jim Miglino, Patrick Morrissey, and two other systems administrators. The executive committee wanted a complete plan from the administrators in just 30 days.

This presented the team with a tough challenge. They had to develop a complete solution outlining every procedure needed to implement the new computer system in six months. In addition to planning all details of the migration to the Microsoft Windows 95 platform, their regular duties still had to be fulfilled. After examining several other project management programs, Patrick and his colleagues selected Microsoft Project as their planning tool because it was the easiest to learn and allowed them to fulfill all requirements within the time, cost, and resource constraints.

Quick Results

The team had very little time to develop their proficiency with project management software and deliver results. The fact that Microsoft Project was easy to learn made a critical difference. Patrick explains that the challenge presented by the executive committee forced the three systems administrators to become project managers practically overnight.

This job was made more difficult by the fact that their solution for a seamless transition to the Microsoft Windows 95 platform had to provide for zero downtime. The team spent more time planning and less time learning thanks to Microsoft Project's intuitive interface. Patrick notes that his group of administrators are computer literate and prefer to explore by toggling buttons instead of reading manuals in order to get what they needed. The common interface Microsoft Project shares with other Microsoft Office products helped to speed the learning process.

The Microsoft Windows 95 rollout required choosing vendors to provide equipment, training services, and other tasks. Vendors had to be selected from many possible choices although only a few would be able to meet cost and time objectives. The systems administrators had only 30 days to sift through a large pool of potential suppliers.

Microsoft Project's ability to produce instant results for "what if" scenarios saved Patrick's team valuable time in narrowing the choice of vendors to the few that met their selection criteria. The systems administrators also used the "what if" forecasting capability to document functions and quantify the duration of their regular duties. This allowed them to hire contractors to fill in while they were engaged in the Microsoft Windows 95 rollout.

Flexible Output

The DHL Systems executive committee wanted the plans for migrating to the Microsoft Windows 95 platform to be

thoroughly documented in order to provide a model for future development.

The final plan had to include fully-mapped details for implementation, precise scheduling reports for all tasks, and supporting documentation for every component. Patrick's group successfully used Microsoft Project to meet all of these requirements and more.

Microsoft Project was able to record every level of detail in the master project schedule. Supporting documentation can be included as notes listed under Task Information. For example, under the subproject titled "Upgrade 130 personal computers," a note can be attached that tells the user why this task is necessary and why it takes a certain amount of time to complete. Patrick explained that this feature was particularly helpful in documenting standards, which require a lot of this type of information.

Versatility in producing different types of reports was an important consideration in selecting a project management program for the company. The team of systems administrators were asked to provide Gantt charts and a variety of calendar reports for their plan. Microsoft Project was flexible enough to meet all of their reporting requirements.

Patrick observed that Microsoft Project was much easier to update than other project management programs and quickly consolidated information from multiple subprojects into a single report providing a comprehensive review. Microsoft Project proved to be a valuable presentation tool that allowed the executive committee to see every detail of the solution, from initial testing to final installation of equipment.

Works Within Constraints

There was no room for planning error in creating a solution for the Microsoft Windows 95 rollout at DHL Systems. Patrick's team had to develop a plan that worked within strict time, cost, and resource constraints. Microsoft Project's ability to show details of task relationships and dependencies allowed planners to create a scheduling model that accurately reflected these constraints. The final result of the team's efforts was a realistic model of the project that closely mirrored actual events and data.

Patrick continues to use Microsoft Project at DHL Systems to create plans for a company-wide transition to a major network software application.

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