



Vying to be healthy, wealthy and wise

CASE STUDY VIELIFE

Emily Rotberg on how a project was interrupted by the sale of a client

Valtech, the business consulting and technology services company, had to endure a hiccup halfway through a project when its client was sold.

Its client, Vieliflife, provides health and wellbeing services for staff at its clients to access information on sleep, stress, fitness and nutrition.

Its programmes, which include help with stopping smoking and hydration awareness, have been shown to improve health and reduce absenteeism.

"We can demonstrate that to the companies, as a direct productivity gain, thereby making them more profitable," says Mike Beason, Vieliflife managing director.

Vieliflife, whose clients include Bupa, the UK health insurance provider, and Standard Life, the life assurance company, decided to use Valtech when it decided to upgrade its website.

"Our original platform was rather restricted in our ability to incorporate changes. We needed a much more flexible model, where anything we wanted to change – be it content- or program-driven – could be done in real time," Mr Beason says.

Vieliflife's product requires software that generates individual reports. Its website had to take into account a range of health-relevant factors, including age, weight, gender, attitude to risk, eating preferences, allergies, illnesses, sleep patterns, work life and family structure.

"In order to add to the capabilities of the current version we needed a much more scalable, flexible platform," says Damian Stafford, chief technology officer at Vieliflife.

Although Vieliflife had access to the medical expertise vital to achieving the desired outcome, it lacked the technical ability to realise the project. Mr Stafford had worked with Valtech in his previous role at Yell.com and understood the consultancy.

Valtech and Vieliflife worked together on project objectives one at a time and incorporated the business's needs as they shifted through the course of the project.

"It enabled us to start working when we didn't know everything that we wanted, rather than having to wait six months for any demonstrable code," Mr Beason says.

"We were able to see the results of our designs on a two-weekly basis...so if we made a mistake in the design, we had a chance to make amendments very quickly."

Development began in June 2006. Halfway through the design process, Vieliflife was sold to Cigna, a health insurer, which produced a roadblock in the software development process.

"The project did lose its direction for a period of time because the customer was not investing the time to follow the process

through with us as the supplier," says Jonathan Poole, Valtech chief executive. "From a relationship point of view, from a project point of view, the biggest single challenge we had was trying to live through that period of time when Vieliflife was very, very defocused on their product outcome, and much more focused on [the acquisition]."

In the end, senior IT staff from Cigna joined the project to smooth the transition.

Vieliflife executives say the new framework has increased user flexibility and enabled the deployment of more sophisticated products. "Previously, the

content was very, very generic," Mr Beason says.

"It wouldn't talk about what you were trying to achieve...we weren't able to personalise our content and use it in such a way that it was actually about you."

In contrast, when the portal launches in January 2008, employees will log on to pages tailored to their specific healthcare needs. Vieliflife says the portal will make its users better-equipped to make more effective health-related decisions.

"If people believe they're being engaged on a personal level, they're much more likely to take notice and follow through on that information," Mr Beason says.

Mr Poole says the consultancy's Agile methodology was the key to the success of its relationship with the client.

"With Agile, we document business need and business demand, but the customers themselves are central to the activity. As their business changes, or as specific needs are identified, then by working with the customer as a central part of the development activity, you discover these things on almost a daily basis," he says.

Vieliflife executives are equally positive about the result of their collaboration with Valtech.

"As with all projects, requirements we set out at the start changed significantly but due to the nature of the Agile process, adjustments to development could be made along the way, ensuring each phase met expectations," Mr Stafford says.