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Approvals on the go

A mobility solution from RIM helped Greatship India substantially shorten its approval cycles and, in the process, save some money. **By Mehak Chawla**

With offices spread across India, Singapore, Mauritius, Australia and the UK, coordinating approvals was a humongous task for Greatship—a part of The Great Eastern Shipping Company Limited and an offshore service provider to operators in the energy exploration and production domain globally as well as in India.

As the company's operations grew, so did the number of employees in each location. The management could clearly see a lethargy creeping into processes because of delays in required approvals. Although Greatship was already running SAP, there was a defined need to extend the basic approval process in a way that could be efficiently completed. A mobility solution was the obvious answer.

Mohandas Manghat, GM - IT, Greatship (India) Limited, commented, "Quite a few of our employees are traveling at any given point in time and some of them are based at different locations. Therefore, getting approvals was becoming a long cycle for us." Also, some approval claims and forms were related to payroll leading to HR being impacted significantly.

As a result, Greatship decided to extend these approvals to mobile devices. After some evaluation, it figured out that most approvers were already using BlackBerry devices. Consequently, it made a lot of sense to extend these services onto the BlackBerry devices. To this end, Greatship tied up with RIM, the maker of BlackBerry handsets, to push its approval processes onto mobile phones.

Though the solution was envisioned as being pretty simple, Manghat explained that choosing the right partners involved quite a bit of evaluation. The implementation was done by Arteria Technologies, implementation partners for RIM.

At the backend

The implementation took about three months and today it covers all of Greatship's approving officers. "About 85 people are using the application as of now," revealed Manghat. Earlier, the application was icon based and an employee had to click on an icon to see if he had any approvals pending on his plate. With the latest upgrade, approval notifications now appear as pop-ups on the screen and they are also delivered as e-mail notifications.

Greatship often lends out rigs and vessels to oil companies. Since the day rates are pretty high, uptime is a crucial aspect. Any downtime can result in significant losses. "Since these approvals also included purchase approvals, their delay was resulting in loss of revenue for the company," said Manghat.

Since the implementation was application-based, the key challenge that Greatship faced lay in dealing with individual handsets. "BlackBerry has a number of models and our employees owned various handsets. We did have some issues with individual handsets as they all have different layouts, voice versions, response time etc. That had an impact on the initial deployment," elaborated Manghat.

Sriram Kanuri, CEO, Arteria Technologies Pvt. Ltd., detailed the project's backend saying, "The solution is a mobility app that's been developed by us. It runs on SAP NetWeaver 1.1 server and needs to be downloaded from SAP."

"We are now customizing this solution further for a few other clients."
Sriram Kanuri
CEO,
Arteria Technologies Pvt. Ltd.

There are two servers sitting behind the solution—one running SAP and the other RIM enterprise server on top of which the application, certified by SAP Labs, is running.

In the pipeline

Thanks to the mobility solution, the time required for approvals has gone down massively at Greatship. "There has also been a substantial reduction in downtime," observed Manghat. Apart from that, higher levels of coordination between offices at various locations has been achieved.

Now that the application is well settled, there are plans to expand its scope. "We intend to extend it to exception reporting and accident/incident management modules as well," said Manghat. Greatship is also planning to extend some MIS reporting onto the handsets of the top brass. Regular enhancements have been made to the application since its implementation.

Though this solution was exclusively built for Greatship, after witnessing its success, Arteria is customizing it for some other customers as well. "Such solutions require a great deal of customization to suit an organization's processes. This mobility app was designed exclusively for Greatship keeping in mind its needs but we are now customizing it further for a few other clients," explained Kanuri of Arteria.

Unlike most IT projects, this one had a rather smooth transition. "People found out soon enough that approving stuff over the mobile was a lot easier and, since it was mobile, they were not impeded by the availability of device. As a result, we had no issues on the adaptability front," summed up Manghat.

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