

TAHOE PARTNERS

Partner: Tahoe Partners

Partner Web Site: www.tahoe-partners.com

Partner Size: 100 employees

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Professional services

Customer: Navistar

Customer Web Site: www.navistar.com

Partner Profile

Chicago, Illinois-based Tahoe Partners is an IT consultancy that develops high-impact solutions to improve operational efficiency, utilize organizational knowledge, and enhance collaboration.

Software and Services

- Microsoft Office
 - Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007
 - Microsoft Office Excel
- Technologies
 - Office Business Applications

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Consultancy Creates Office Business Applications for Efficient Process Integration

“Thanks to the familiarity of the Microsoft Office user interface, companies can be confident their employees will readily adopt our custom OBA solutions without significant training time or costs.”

Amy Widicus, Managing Director, Tahoe Partners

Tahoe Partners helps customers better integrate and execute business processes with Office Business Applications (OBAs) by connecting enterprise data with the familiar user interface and functionality of Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007. In developing OBAs, the firm offers customers quick implementation timelines and affordable solutions that maximize existing IT investments and improve communication, collaboration, and efficiency.

Business Needs

Companies often have a variety of disparate business processes that are only partially supported by a business system for the purpose of completing a transaction. When internal and/or external constituents need to collaborate, share and store information, and follow a consistent workflow, the processes become more challenging to manage. Dealing with audits, product development, and employee, customer, or vendor on-boarding can be particularly difficult because those processes typically involve many different departments and the need to accommodate aggressive timelines.

Large companies in particular deal with silos of information in separate functional areas. Even tracking the progress of a given process can become complicated. When employees need to ascertain status, they often use e-mail to track information, but decisions and other key information can remain buried in an individual's e-mail account and not be shared among colleagues or easily retrieved.

Also, stakeholders may interpret and handle tasks in inconsistent ways, which means that critical steps can be missed. Without consistent workflow processes and

transparency, missed steps can lead to last-minute scrambling and considerable extra expense as companies pay rush fees and require staff to work late to recover.

Companies need solutions that streamline and integrate their disjointed practices, data, and tool sets into coherent processes. Those processes need to be supported by systems that pull in all related information, giving stakeholders greater visibility into the health of a process and improved accountability for those involved. For best results, the solutions need to be approachable so that employees willingly accept and adopt them.

Solution

Tahoe Partners is a Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner that solves customers' collaboration-related process challenges. The firm specializes in solutions that integrate a company's back-end enterprise resource planning (ERP) system with the easy-to-use functionality in Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007. "We believe that Office SharePoint Server 2007 provides an efficient, cost-effective approach for integrating unstructured data with structured data," says Amy Widicus, Managing Director for Tahoe Partners. "This helps users see a comprehensive view of all associated inputs and outputs of the end-to-end process."

Although Tahoe Partners' solutions integrate with a variety of back-end systems, the firm concentrates on SAP systems. Rather than heavily customizing SAP systems so that customers can use them as collaboration hubs, Tahoe Partners often develops Office Business Applications (OBAs) that rely on Office SharePoint Server 2007 to provide the conduit to ERP information and transactions. Building on Office SharePoint Server 2007 also delivers advantages for Tahoe Partners customers. "The product offers a natural

enhancement of collaboration beyond e-mail," explains Caleb Miller, SharePoint Technical Lead for Tahoe Partners. "Many companies use Microsoft Office products on their desktops, so using them to manage business processes is a comfortable extension for their employees."

One such company, Navistar, wanted to improve the efficiency of one of its highly manual, spreadsheet-oriented audit processes. "The process involves tracking hundreds of individual audit requests and their responses from across the company," says Leslee Scully, Managing Director of Enterprise Initiatives for Navistar. "We had difficulty getting an accurate picture of their status, and project managers spent a great deal of time trying to keep various tracking spreadsheets accurate and up to date."

To support Navistar's audit process, Tahoe Partners developed an automated OBA solution, including a document repository, workflow functionality, integration with Microsoft Office Excel® spreadsheet software, and a user-friendly interface. Tahoe Partners completed the solution in just eight weeks, in time for the Navistar year-end audit. "We've improved visibility into the process and have seen a dramatic efficiency boost. Together with our auditors, we've significantly reduced the number of project managers required to handle our audits, not to mention the long hours needed to hit our audit deadlines," says Scully.

Benefits

For Tahoe Partners, developing OBAs offers an opportunity to bring together technologies and create unique solutions that bridge information, process, and physical location gaps for customers. "With OBAs, we can offer expanded service offerings, which makes our business more successful and

also offers value to customers," says Widicus. Benefits include:

- **Faster time-to-delivery.** Tahoe Partners can develop and deliver OBA solutions more quickly using Office SharePoint Server 2007 than with other products, due in part to the out-of-the-box functionality of Office SharePoint Server 2007. "Connecting data sources is fast because the back-end work has already been done and our developers can use the standard Microsoft tool set," says Miller. "In fact, we can cut our project timelines by 40 to 50 percent when we build on OBA solutions."
- **Cost-effective solutions for customers.** OBAs also provide a way for Tahoe Partners to offer more affordable solutions to its customers. "Along with reusing their existing IT investments, our customers get solutions that cost less than one-third of the amount that it would take to customize an ERP system to deliver similar functionality," says Widicus. "And thanks to the familiarity of the Microsoft Office user interface, companies can be confident their employees will readily adopt our custom OBA solutions without significant training time or costs."
- **Ever-increasing market demand.** For Tahoe Partners, building OBA solutions is beneficial in terms of its growth. "Because OBAs capitalize on technologies that are already in place, market demand for them is strong and continues to grow, especially as companies look to conserve costs in this economy," says Widicus. "We've seen a 300-percent annual increase in business, even with today's economic conditions, because OBA solutions help our customers save money and increase effectiveness."