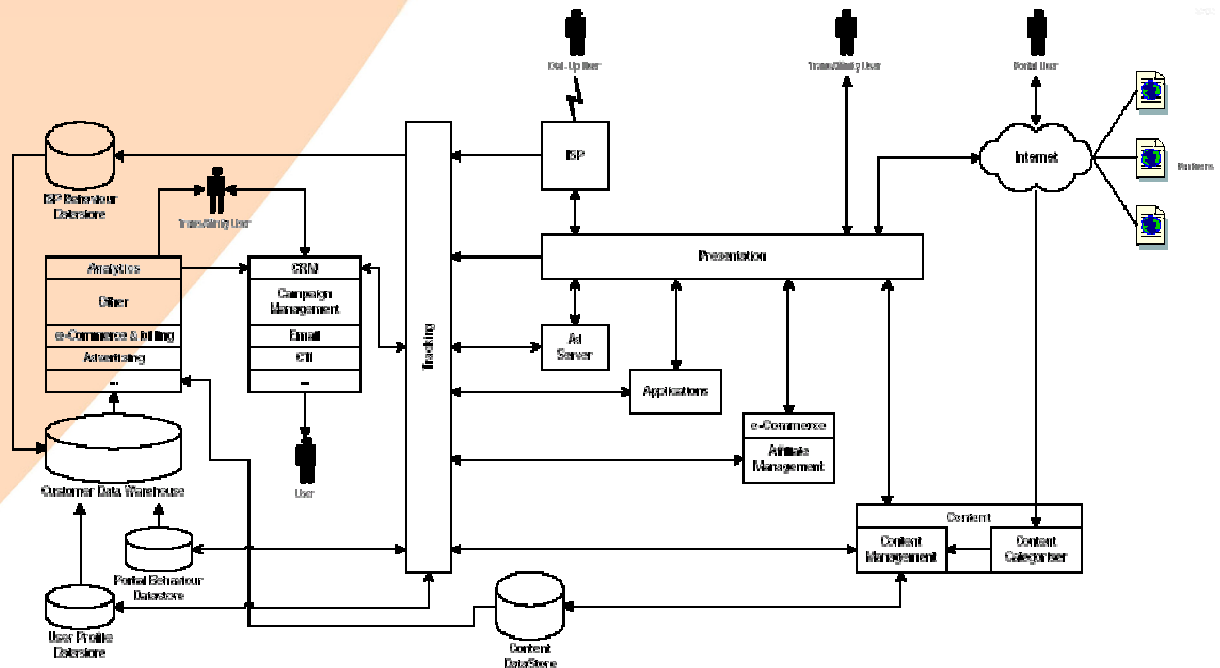# CASE STUDY

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADVANCED INTERNET PLATFORM

The Client

Oyster Partners, one of the top five digital media agencies in the UK, working on behalf of a joint venture between a UK technology PLC and a US corporation specialised in marketing and financial services .

The Project

The turnkey project consisted of carrying out a feasibility study, building a prototype and finally the full scale development and system integration of a platform that would support multiple internet portals, with the following key capabilities:

- advanced CRM (Customer Relationship Management) functions
- user specific content recommendation according to their on-line behaviour (profiling)
- user specific advertisement and e-commerce offers according to their profile
- handling of more than 10M concurrent users
- management of e-commerce transactions
- real time connection to a call centre to handle user queries

During its execution, under the guidance of a Projectize partner, the project reached £8M yearly budget and a development team of over 50 professionals.

The Challenge

1) Both the client and the joint venture were growing very rapidly in a fast changing industry. They had aggressive timescales for the delivery of the project to satisfy their corporate strategies and be the first on the market with such a product.

2) The platform itself was the first integration in the IT industry of newly developed applications such as Autonomy, E.piphany and Engage Ad Server, hence formulating timescales and plan activities was particularly challenging.

3) The programme required the sharing of activities with at least 5 main suppliers, which had to be driven and managed according to the needs of the project.

4) The joint venture sponsoring the project acquired corporate customers to use the platform with their own branding and specific requirements, requiring customisations which had to be integrated and managed into the programme.

5) The motivation and efficient management of the highly specialised staff for the delivery of the solution within the timescales agreed. A challenging, rewarding and dynamic working environment was therefore required to retain these individuals in the lucrative market and allow them to deliver consistently.

In brief, a project management infrastructure was required that could fulfil the following requirements:

- Ability to cope with rapid change due to the speed of evolution of the technology and the market surrounding the initiative
- Manage client requirements to allow speed of execution and yet frequent changes in the requirements themselves
- Capability to communicate quickly within the team and with the client and suppliers to track progress and manage change as necessary
- Tight control over progress and resource usage.
- Clear reporting to both the Client's Board of Directors and the Join Venture's CEO

The Solution

The solution was a project management platform based on a blend between Microsoft Solutions Framework (MSF) and Rapid Applications Development (RAD).

It provided an innovative methodology that is based on small teams of people that ensures constant focus on the client requirements, on the technical feasibility of these requirements and their integration with the rest of the product.

Based on the sharing of responsibilities, rewards and information, all teams were in charge of maintaining their own schedule of activities and reporting progress using simple templates.

All schedules were integrated in the programme master schedule that provided management with a birds eye view over the state of the project at any time.

As a result of information sharing and small teams planning and owning their own tasks, a clear working environment was defined were professionals were free to express their talent whilst being fully aware of the timescale and the issues surrounding their activities.

Results

The outcome was the software platform completed and active today. It was produced in three main releases over two years, comprising one prototype, one limited functionality development and a final full-scale launch.

The platform delivered the key functions required by the joint venture's business plan, within the timelines needed by the client.

Critical Success Factors

- Working with the client on identifying needs & requirements.
- Building a strong working relationship based on trust with the client, allowing fast decision making and direction setting.
- Letting professionals free to operate and share information within clear and visible boundaries
- Using and integrating small teams of people, where a 'client's advocate' role was always present to ensure technical development and evolving client requirements would always be aligned
- Teams owning their own project schedules, as well as easy integration using MS Project.