

ACHIEVING SUCCESS THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DYNAMIC COMMUNICATION PLATFORM



Tourism Australia is a statutory authority of the Australian Government whose job it is to promote Australia as a tourist destination both internationally and domestically. They operate 19 offices internationally (including Australia) from their Sydney headquarters. They are a diverse, global organisation with a workforce of around 250 people.

Internally Tourism Australia had a vision of being able to communicate and collaborate more effectively and overcome the geographical challenges of a global business, to deliver a consistent and unified set of values across the organisation and to be able to work together powerfully on a global scale. By building a business platform that would facilitate this vision Tourism Australia knew their people would then embrace its main objectives; Influence people to travel to and throughout Australia – including Australians themselves, help foster a sustainable tourism industry and help increase the economic benefits to Australia from tourism. The goal was to create a highly productive communication medium that would help deliver these objectives.

“The Information and Communications Technology team’s role is to provide a highly efficient and effective enabling platform that will be part of the foundation of success to drive Tourism Australia toward its mission, to have Australia as the most successfully marketed tourism destination in the world. There were clearly a number of limitations that had to be addressed with regard to the existing communication platform before the organisation could effectively proceed with strategies that were aligned with its mission.” - Roberto Martinelli, Chief Technology Officer, Tourism Australia.

Datasouth is an Information Technology Partner to innovative and leading businesses throughout New Zealand and Australia.

We understand Business Intelligence, Software Development, Network Infrastructure and total System Design and Support.

Through working with Datasouth, you are employing an Information Technology partner substantial enough to undertake any technology engagement.

We appreciate that the partnership with our clients is what matters, and realising the potential of this relationship enables us to understand your requirements to deliver effective business outcomes.

"TOURISM AUSTRALIA HAD VERY SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS WHEN IT CAME TO CREATING A COMMUNICATION PLATFORM. MICROSOFT OFFICE SHAREPOINT SERVER TICKED ALL THE RIGHT BOXES."

The Constraints

Tourism Australia had been using a traditional intranet that was completely reliant on a handful of technical personnel based in Sydney for its maintenance and upkeep. This meant that business unit managers were not responsible for any of their own content and this lack of ownership resulted in only limited use of the intranet as an effective communication and cultural platform. As a result content quickly became out-of-date and was therefore considered unreliable. The structure began to sprawl over time as content, pages and links were added and as a result the system became difficult to manage and the information difficult for users to find. Culturally the intranet was considered to be head office specific instead of owned by all the regions.

File shares were the primary method for business groups to share information with team members and with other business groups. Up to two terabytes of data, which represented hundreds of thousands of files, was being stored in multiple file shares across multiple physical locations.

Given the considerable number of files and documents, the potential for both duplication and documents becoming out of date was high. Searching for and finding the right information became difficult and time consuming and the structure of the file systems became difficult for employees to understand and manage.

Much of the inter-team and project communication relied on email. This often meant that important communications were not being seen at the right time or by the right people and in some cases were simply being overlooked.



The Motivation to Change

The way Tourism Australia managed their intranet and the way it was perceived by its users, combined with the way information was created, stored and shared did not make for a highly effective and dynamic organisation. Tourism Australia recognised that in order to fulfil their vision things had to change. Internally Tourism Australia's IT team had been looking at the capabilities of Microsoft Office SharePoint Server as a potential solution to their problem and an answer to their plan of creating a solid communication platform to drive the unification of their Australian and international locations.

Microsoft Office SharePoint Server was chosen because of its high degree of customisable functionality and its ability to integrate with Tourism Australia's desktop environment which was based around Microsoft's Office suite.

"Tourism Australia had very specific requirements when it came to creating a communication platform that was aligned with our business strategies. Being a highly dynamic, marketing lead organisation spanning different international locations, meant we needed a very adaptable and globally consistent product that integrated seamlessly with our Oracle systems and whose customisation could be lead by our own internal technical team. Microsoft Office SharePoint Server ticked all the boxes." - Roberto Martinelli.

Datasouth's Role

Tourism Australia's technical team sought to collaborate with a number of external partners in the design and development of a SharePoint communication platform. Datasouth was selected to work closely with Tourism Australia, and other third party contributors, as part of a virtual team and commenced to take a lead position in the design and architecture of the solution. Datasouth reviewed the requirements specification created by Tourism Australia and designed the architecture to meet these requirements. Subsequently Datasouth would become actively involved in the development, implementation and deployment of the Sharepoint platform.

"Our relationship with Datasouth started when they joined the virtual team we created to drive the development and implementation of our SharePoint project. They were quick at developing the understanding and appreciation for what we wanted to create from a business perspective whilst providing what we needed in terms of technical leadership, enthusiasm and commitment for the project." - Roberto Martinelli.

“THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF PHASE ONE WAS A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE FOR US AND DATASOUTH PLAYED AN IMPORTANT PART IN THAT SUCCESS.”

Development Methodology

A phased development plan was created to deliver predetermined features and functionality within agreed and achievable timeframes. The phased approach also enabled regular value to be delivered to the business and limited the impact of change in line with change management best practice. This approach also prevented the uncontrolled sprawl which was a symptom of the old intranet and made for a more robust and integrated solution.

Phase One Development

The technical team at Tourism Australia had developed a pilot SharePoint platform that enabled them to test the functionality and capabilities of SharePoint. The Datasouth team then became actively involved in the design and development of the architecture that would be used to create three SharePoint environments – development, test and production. Migration paths were established for the movement of content and functionality between the three SharePoint environments as well as disciplines and protocols around authoring and sign-off.

The operational objective of Phase One was the successful deployment of Microsoft Office SharePoint Server as a intranet platform to distribute current news and information to all members of the organisation, across all regions, in the same format and at the same time.

This involved developing the look of the site so it was aligned with the branding expectations of the communications team. In addition to this, functionality was created that enabled the aggregation of content from other locations within the site to the homepage. Also created at this time were centralised links to forms, templates and policy and procedure documents that are maintained by business unit managers.

A comprehensive staff directory was created that resulted in the centralisation of profile information for all Tourism Australia staff, contractors and stakeholders. This would be used later in the creation of personal portals called MySites and integrated into search and the creation of team and project workspaces. An important feature of the SharePoint profile platform was its ability to integrate with the existing Microsoft Active Directory, which in turn is integrated with Tourism Australia’s Oracle HR system.

Each business group has its own area within the main Tourism Australia site. Ownership of the news and information is assigned to the business unit managers. They are responsible for the updating and management of the content in their own area. No technical knowledge is required to keep the content up to date at this level. The main Tourism Australia homepage includes an aggregation of news from across the entire system and presents a global view of activities to its employees.

An important feature of the live, production environment is a redundant architecture to ensure the high availability of the system to its users; this was particularly important in terms of meeting the needs of Tourism Australia’s globally dispersed locations.



How the solution is starting to benefit Tourism Australia

Forms, policies and procedures are now accessible across the organisation from a centralised repository for this information. The capability of SharePoint to search more effectively within and across the organisation is also enhancing efficiency. Already Tourism Australia are starting to see their employees working together more effectively as a unified, global organisation.

“The successful completion of Phase One was a significant milestone for us and Datasouth played an important part in that success through the work they did around designing and developing the architecture for our SharePoint platform. We were impressed by their ability to integrate and work effectively as part of our team in producing a solution that is of very high quality both, technically and business wise.” - Roberto Martinelli.

Phase Two Development

Tourism Australia is constantly involved in a significant number of projects both at a local level and on a global scale. The projects are both external and internal in nature and range from the creation of marketing campaigns and events, to promoting the beauty of Australia and the attractiveness of travelling there, through to internal projects that assist the development of the business units and their activities within the organisation.

"WE HAVE DEVELOPED A RESPECT AND TRUST FOR DATASOUTH'S ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND OUR REQUIREMENTS, PROVIDE STRONG TECHNICAL DIRECTION AND WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH OUR TEAM."

Phase Two focused on the development of a global collaboration medium that built upon and utilised the technical platform deployed during Phase One. This involved the definition of "Team" and "Project" templates for the creation of workspace sites.

This has enabled collaborative workspaces to be quickly and easily created with only limited input required from the technical staff. Ultimately the intention is that the workspaces will be created by the users themselves and be fully functional and intuitive with a familiar Microsoft look and feel.

As part of Phase Two, Tourism Australia have developed MySites which they actively encourage their staff to use. These are personal areas for employees to create profile information at a personal and professional level which they can then share with other Tourism Australia staff. This is designed to aid and support the research and development of virtual teams and builds on the growth and success of social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and MySpace. Tourism Australia believes that the creation of this dynamic work environment, where physical boundaries have been reduced to a minimum, will help foster a highly productive environment where innovation and creativity abound throughout the organisation.

"Phase Two really was the core of the overall project in the sense that it delivered the global collaboration functionality that was integral to Tourism Australia's internal communications and in the delivery of its marketing activities. The successful implementation of Phase Two was made significantly easier thanks to the excellent work that had been done in Phase One by the technical team and Datasouth to create a technically stable platform upon which to operate." - Roberto Martinelli.

Phase Three Development

As a statutory authority of the Australian Government, Tourism Australia is bound to regulatory compliance. Therefore, the creation of a robust Records Management system was the primary objective of Phase Three. In order to achieve this Tourism Australia undertook the development of a solution that integrates well with the existing SharePoint architecture. The tool selected for management of records and archiving is called RecordPoint.

RecordPoint is a records management solution that integrates with SharePoint's native records management

capability. It acts as a business rules engine which automates archiving based on the details contained within the content of the document. It does not require the user to intervene in the classification of the document prior to, during or after it was created. Instead, classification and archiving are automated according to predetermined rules which are aligned with regulatory records management requirements.

Based on Datasouth's experience with Phases One and Two, and intimate knowledge of the design and architecture of Tourism Australia's SharePoint system, they were commissioned by Tourism Australia to provide independent technical and quality assurance for the RecordPoint implementation to ensure the successful integration into the SharePoint platform.

Conclusion

Datasouth and Tourism Australia have formed an open and highly productive partnership. Datasouth has been able to understand and empathise with the vision Tourism Australia had to create a dynamic communication platform across the organisation. This ability, combined with Datasouth's Microsoft Gold Certified Partner status and qualified expertise in the areas of infrastructure, software development and consultancy, has enabled a solution to be developed around the advanced capabilities of Microsoft Office SharePoint Server and rolled out in accordance with Tourism Australia's overall plan.

"The relationship between Tourism Australia and Datasouth has been highly productive and mutually rewarding. As the project has progressed we have developed a respect and trust for Datasouth's ability to understand our requirements, provide strong technical direction and work effectively with our team to develop and implement a high quality solution." - Roberto Martinelli.

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