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TECHNOLOGY / CONSULTANTS / SOLUTIONS

NEW APPLICATION CREATES STRATEGIC BENEFIT

SOLUTION HIGHLIGHTS

◆ Keller Schroeder redesigns Atlas Van Lines legacy quality system using the latest Microsoft development tools.

◆ Expert business analysis, project management and rapid development techniques ensure that the complex system is delivered on time, within budget, and with minimal modifications required.

◆ New solution provides Atlas' agents and headquarters staff with improved data access, flexibility and efficiency.

◆ Smart application design and knowledge sharing simplify long-term maintenance and support for Atlas' IT team.

MICROSOFT DEVELOPMENT TOOLS

◆ SQL Server 2005

◆ SQL Server Integration Services

◆ Visual Studio 2005

◆ VB.NET

◆ ASP.NET

◆ Report Viewer

◆ XML / XSL style sheets

◆ AJAX

Keller Schroeder helps Atlas Van Lines replace legacy system using latest Microsoft-based tools.

Quality is of vital importance to Atlas Van Lines. The global provider of transportation and relocation services regularly assesses its network of agents using a 12-point rating system that encompasses customer satisfaction, labor certification, safety, claims and more. A complex quality system collects, correlates and crunches data from several line-of-business applications to generate these quality assessments.

When it came time to move the mainframe-based quality system to a browser-based environment, Atlas called on Keller Schroeder to partner on the redesign and development. Keller Schroeder had the skills and experience to complete the project on time and within budget, with the same dedication to quality that has become Atlas' hallmark.

Keller Schroeder brought the legacy application up-to-date using the latest Microsoft development tools and techniques, creating a dynamic platform that allows Atlas to provide greater value to its agents and headquarters staff. The new system also better supports Atlas' commitment to continuous quality improvement.

BACKGROUND

Atlas Van Lines originally developed its quality system in the early 1990s. The system served its primary purpose but was complicated and difficult to modify and support. It also lacked the detailed information agents needed to fully interpret their ratings.

"The system only provided a summary of the data used to calculate ratings," said Mike Wathen, IT Business Analyst for Atlas Van Lines. "If an agent had a question about his rating, it was very cumbersome for us to drill down to the details.

"Keller Schroeder's project manager met with ratings owners, IT staff, all levels of management and other stakeholders throughout our organization. She had to very quickly grasp how our business ran in order to lead the development. She did a superb job including the appropriate depth and flexibility in the solution to meet our needs and allow for growth and change."

PROJECT DETAILS

The design phase consumed the bulk of the 15-month development and testing schedule. During this phase, Keller Schroeder helped Atlas make some software platform decisions and introduced the Atlas IT team to new Microsoft development tools.

"By using these rapid development tools, Keller Schroeder was able to meet our schedule and help us stay within budget," Wathen said. "Although we've been on a Microsoft platform for some time, we were unfamiliar with these tools — many of them had only been available for a short time. But the Keller Schroeder team knew how to take advantage of them at an advanced level. I'm very pleased with the expertise of their developers."

Wathen says he was also impressed with the quality of work Keller Schroeder delivered.

Although the application is extremely complex, the construction phase was completed within four months — yet the product delivered for testing required only a handful of changes.

"We've been involved with vendors in the past who would just write an application and hand it to us. When we tried to use it in a testing environment we would run into all kinds of problems," said Wathen. "When Keller Schroeder brought the application to us, we found at most a dozen things for them to change. It was beyond our expectations.

"This is a very large system. There are 148 database tables and views, and approximately 300 stored procedures, various functions, Report Viewer modules and SQL Server Agent Jobs. Keller Schroeder clearly tested the application extensively on their end so that when it was delivered to us there was hardly anything to adjust. We've run it for three months now in a production environment with no problems whatsoever."

PROJECT RESULTS

Most importantly, the new system provides much-needed functionality for Atlas' quality team. When officially launched it will reduce the amount of time staff members spend researching agents' questions regarding their ratings, and also make it easier for Atlas to update the system with new quality metrics.

"I spend a lot of time on the telephone talking to agents and explaining the program. Often, the calls have to be transferred to the ratings' owner so a rating can be researched. We believe the new system will allow the agents to be more self-sufficient with very little training," said Jo Ellen Hein, Director of Agency Services for Atlas Van Lines.

"We meet as a quality committee several times a year as part of our quest to continually improve our services. When we see that standards are being met we raise the bar again. We also change standards as appropriate. The new system will allow our IT staff to make these changes with relative ease."

The new system will also deliver more value to Atlas' agents, who can drill down to line item detail and even export the data to a PDF document or Excel spreadsheet. In addition, ratings data will be published monthly rather than quarterly.

"With the old system, agents might not have known they had a quality problem until four months later. They had no way to gauge their quality ratings until we published the report," said Wathen. "Now they'll be able to identify problem areas and take corrective action much more quickly."

Also, ratings owners at Atlas are able to preview agents' ratings before they are published. Adjustments for anomalies in the incoming data can be made if needed.

STRATEGIC BENEFITS

Atlas Van Lines partnership with Keller Schroeder has enabled it to accelerate its platform transition without hiring additional personnel. Atlas' in-house development staff simply didn't have the time or experience to take on a project of this scope.

"We've had a strong push for several years to move all of our systems off the mainframe, but with limited internal resources it was taking too long," said Wathen. "Thanks to Keller Schroeder we were able to get it done quickly and we're not left with a large staff of developers we no longer need."

Keller Schroeder's willingness to share its expertise with the Atlas team was also of immeasurable help. During the development phase, Atlas' developers worked on small modules to get a feel for the system design and development tools. A knowledge transfer helped close the loop after the project was complete.

"Being able to work with the Keller Schroeder team helped us get up to speed — that was a big benefit. Plus the system is designed in such a way that it's easy to make changes. Our in-house staff can easily handle maintenance and enhancements," Wathen said.

"Keller Schroeder has been doing work for Atlas for nearly a quarter century, and we've always been pleased with their quality. They had the skill sets and resources to do this project so it really was an easy decision for us to engage them."

ABOUT ATLAS VAN LINES

Atlas Van Lines is the largest subsidiary of Atlas World Group, an Evansville, Ind.-based company that posted record revenues of $986 million in 2006. Atlas World Group companies employ more than 700 people throughout North America. More than 500 Atlas agents in the United States and Canada specialize in corporate employee relocation and in the transportation of high-value items such as electronics, fine art and new fixtures and furniture.