



Case Study

Rocla To Save More Than \$300,000 A Year with CDC Praxa and Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007

BUSINESS SITUATION

Inefficient use of laboratory time and potential loss of sales created internal client frustration and diminished confidence in the lab, causing major business issues for Rocla

REQUIREMENT

Rocla Technology wanted to implement workflow and collaboration tools to enhance the operation of its research facility. In particular, it sought improvements in defining tests, scheduling research, documenting mutually agreed procedures and storing and sharing results

SOLUTION

Rocla Technology and CDC Praxa designed and implemented a new test scheduling system based on Microsoft Office InfoPath 2007 and Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007

SOFTWARES

Microsoft Office 2007 Professional
Microsoft Office InfoPath 2007
MS SharePoint Portal Server 2007
Microsoft Active Directory 2003
Microsoft Windows Server 2003

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***Bede Harrington
Manager Laboratory Services
Rocla Technology***

As a prominent designer, manufacturer and distributor of concrete construction products, Rocla relies on its technical arm, Rocla Technology, for day-to-day operations support and research and development. Facing constant testing requests, the Rocla Technology laboratory had become a bottleneck. Using Microsoft Office InfoPath 2007 and Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007, Rocla and Microsoft partner CDC Praxa implemented a pilot project that involved a new automated test scheduling system to improve the lab's operation. Independent third-party analyst BearingPoint was engaged to measure the results. BearingPoint found the pilot project will allow Rocla to approach product development with renewed vigour, make better use of laboratory resources and take product to market more competitively. This could generate savings of more than A\$300,000 per year.

SITUATION

Rocla's reputation is built on its technical and engineering design standards, its innovative manufacturing processes and the quality of its products. The company's strong design and development capabilities that enable it to supply ready-made products as well as those designed to meet customers' specific needs.

Rocla's technical arm, Rocla Technology operates a research and development centre staffed by scientists and engineers. The centre provides technical support for day-to-day operations as well as research into product enhancements and new ideas.

Rocla Technology plays a fundamental role in the company's ability to take product to market quickly and cost effectively. All Rocla products must be certified by its laboratory to meet Australian design standards or customer specifications.

“There are a range of internal clients at Rocla,” says Bede Harrington, Manager of Laboratory Services at Rocla Technology.

“We conduct regular quality assurance testing for our colleagues in concrete technology and compliance testing when a customised product has been developed for a specific client.

“Internal clients also include product or technical staff who need tests to develop enhanced or radically re-engineered products; and project management staff involved in developing customised solutions for specific projects”.

In recent times, the Rocla Technology laboratory had become a bottleneck because of the sheer number of testing requests.

Many requests were communicated in an ad hoc, unstructured manner. These requests were open to interpretation and the desired outcomes were not always specified clearly. Also, there was no automated scheduling of tests. Combined with resource shortages, this led to departures from schedules, the risk of overlooking tasks and a lack of visibility of progress.

Testing methodologies were inconsistent and management could not track performance of the testing facility to compare demand with resource availability. In addition, there was no consistent way to link tests to project codes.

Rocla suffers significant delays in getting product to market when testing does not result in the required certification. This in turn affects customer relationships. For example, product development staff have reported recent loss of market share to another supplier because of delays in certification.

Certification problems can also delay the manufacture and launch of new products, jeopardizing Rocla's capacity to achieve sales targets.

Internal clients understand the resourcing issues facing the laboratory, but are still unhappy with its repeated inability to deliver timely results. Laboratory management is also aware of the threat of staff turnover, which potentially results in the loss of know-how, particularly relating to testing methodology. Loss of such expertise exacerbates the pressure on the laboratory.

The ineffective use of lab time, lost opportunities due to the company's inability to win tenders and the failure to reduce costs was costing Rocla more than A\$300,000 per year.

Rocla Technology wanted to implement workflow and collaboration tools to enhance the operation of its research facility. In particular, it sought improvements in defining tests, scheduling research, documenting mutually agreed procedures and storing and sharing results.

SOLUTION

Rocla Technology and its Microsoft partner CDC Praxa designed and implemented a new test scheduling system to improve the day-to-day operations of its laboratory. The two firms implemented a pilot project using Microsoft Office InfoPath 2007 and Microsoft Office SharePoint 2007. The result is a portal for lab technicians, testers and supervisors.

"Rocla is keen to be involved in new technology and already has several Microsoft-based solutions developed by CDC Praxa in place," says Amanda Donohue, Senior Project Manager at CDC Praxa.

"This project provided an ideal opportunity to use the features of Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 and Microsoft Office Infopath 2007.

"CDC Praxa and Rocla analysed the problems and devised a solution that would resolve the immediate issues of scheduling, visibility, lack of structure and document organisation.

"We put together a functional design document for Rocla to review and approve. The system was developed and implemented at two sites in Sydney – Rocla's Chatswood head office and the main laboratory in Guildford – during September 2006."

The solution is based on Microsoft Office SharePoint 2007 running on Microsoft Windows Server 2003. CDC Praxa encoded program logic into Microsoft Office InfoPath 2007 forms using managed code and deployed the forms to a Microsoft Office SharePoint 2007 library. CDC Praxa also integrated the new system with Rocla's existing database, which contained details of test methods and standards.

Each user of the system can now access a portal with content relevant to them. Users are defined in Microsoft Windows Active Directory as belonging to one of five groups, each of which has different permissions within the portal.

The shared document library contains various documents that are available to portal users based on their access level. Staff can upload documents to this common library and they also have individual areas where they can maintain their own documents.

BENEFITS

Independent business analyst, BearingPoint, was engaged by Microsoft to review Rocla's laboratory management processes both prior to and post deployment in order to measure the impact of the change.

As a result of the implementation, Rocla has realised a number of operational and strategic benefits.

Potential Savings of A\$300,000

Rocla has improved its ability to respond to market demands with products that can be demonstrated to be compliant with Australian Standards and customer specifications.

The company now has an integrated environment to manage its laboratory tests. The portal incorporates new security measures to protect information and provides authorised personnel with a personalised portal view, an event calendar and quick access to relevant information.

Rocla can control and monitor the allocation of labour and equipment for laboratory tests and notify key personnel of important information surrounding the scheduling of tests.

Bearing Point estimated Rocla could save more than A\$300,000 each year by improving its laboratory processes in these ways.

Complete Visibility of Testing Demands and Elimination of Laboratory Wastage

Laboratory management now has access to a system that makes all testing requests visible. This ensures no requests are overlooked and all are completed within the required timeframe.

In particular, the process of requesting a test is now formalised. The test is scheduled by a supervisor who can gauge resource availability and balance staff and equipment to demands. The process of selecting samples is automated and testing activity is now linked with project information at the time of scheduling.

"It is no longer possible to overlook a request, or fail to complete a test within the required timeframe," says Harrington.

Managers and supervisors define research requirements using an online form, which demands a level of discipline and formality not required by the previous system.

The portal allows all testing to be scheduled in advance, including recurring tasks and maintenance tasks such as calibrating equipment. Testers have access to schedules in a calendar format and users are notified of all activity via email.

A repository of test methodologies is now embedded in the new system. This means intellectual property can be retained and ensures tests will be deployed with a high degree of consistency.

Formalised scheduling allows management to compare the demand for scheduling with the ability of the laboratory team to meet this demand.

"This information allows us to allocate lab resources more effectively and reveals any need for further resources," says Harrington. "Also, all test requests are now linked to a project, which means better reporting of the lab's activities."

Ability to Produce Certification in Required Timeframes and Comply with Stringent Regulations

The portal will allow Rocla to approach the task of product development with renewed vigour. Rocla can only be innovative and reduce production costs if its laboratory can provide timely product certification. The new environment is also restoring user confidence in the testing service and the data it produces.

"We can not bid on construction projects or respond to customer requests until our products have been tested and certified," says Harrington. "The portal has helped us improve our ability to take products to market because certification data is generated in a more timely fashion.

"It has helped us preserve intellectual property because the new environment provides a mechanism for documenting and updating methodologies. And we have enhanced our ability to link testing requests to project codes in order to match investment with return."

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