



Technology Program Succeeds, Hikes Project Productivity by up to 50 Percent

Overview

Country: United States

Industry: Information technology

Customer Profile

Based in Redmond, Washington, Microsoft Corporation is a worldwide leader in software, services, and Internet technologies for personal and business computing.

Business Situation

Microsoft needed a better way to manage solution deployments for seven customers in six months, including 140 participants, 3,500 tasks, and just four Microsoft team members.

Solution

Solution provider Project Hosts implemented a hosted deployment of the Microsoft® Office Enterprise Project Management (EPM) Solution, including a portal, Remote Desktop, and automatic programwide status reporting.

Benefits

- Resources optimized to meet milestones
- Full visibility into project status
- Status reports created 30 percent faster
- Project plans developed in 50 percent of the time
- Secure solution access for customers and partners

“We use the Microsoft Office EPM Solution to ensure that we are going to complete all deliverables within the scope of the project timeline.”

Melinda Curtis, Program Manager, Enterprise Project Management Solution Technology Adoption Program, Microsoft Corporation

Microsoft Corporation faced 3,500 tasks in getting seven customers fully deployed on the prerelease version of its Microsoft® Office Enterprise Project Management (EPM) Solution. With just four staff members to manage those tasks within a six-month program period, Microsoft turned to the very EPM Solution that it was helping customers deploy. Solution provider Project Hosts implemented a hosted version of the EPM Solution that gave users customized views of an EPM portal with complete visibility into the status of their projects, a Remote Desktop connection for managing those projects, and automatic rollup of status reports to enable a programwide view. The result: Microsoft is able to optimize project resources to ensure that milestones are met and projects are completed successfully. Productivity for project planning is up by 50 percent, shaving weeks from the deployment process.

“We have seen significant time savings by using the EPM Solution to streamline reporting, tracking, and team collaboration. We’ve cut our weekly status meetings time by 75 percent.”

Melinda Curtis, Program Manager, Enterprise Project Management Solution Technology Adoption Program, Microsoft Corporation

Situation

One of the many ways that Microsoft Corporation facilitates the adoption of its newest technologies is through technology adoption programs (TAPs). In a TAP, a team of Microsoft product managers and carefully chosen solution providers work with customers who have agreed to deploy new solutions while that software is still in prerelease form. The TAP customers get extensive support in designing and installing their deployments. Microsoft gets early feedback on its solutions, which can help shape both those solutions and the resources that Microsoft provides to customers, system integrators, and others who will later deploy the final-release versions of the software.

TAPs are implemented in the relatively narrow window between the time that prerelease software is sufficiently developed to be deployable and the time that the software will be released publicly. That puts Microsoft, its TAP customers, the third-party solution providers, and lab-testing partners under pressure to complete the deployments successfully in a limited period of time. For one recent TAP—for the Microsoft® Office Enterprise Project Management (EPM) Solution—Microsoft sought to complete seven customer deployments, of more than 1,000 seats each, within the six-month period of January to June 2004.

For each deployment in the Microsoft Office EPM Solution TAP, 20 people from four organizations—140 people in all, given the seven deployments—had to collaborate not only across time zones, but also across continents (North and South America, Europe, and Asia). Adding to the challenge of the TAP deployments is the range of steps involved in a typical software deployment. Each deployment project had seven phases to coordinate: visioning, architecture review, lab validation, proof-of-concept (POC) configuration, POC implementation, pilot, and full

deployment. The lab validation phase for a single project included 183 tasks that had to be tracked and coordinated, and an entire implementation project had more than 500 tasks. Given the seven deployment projects, the EPM Solution TAP team had to track and coordinate more than 3,500 tasks—and ensure the successful completion of those tasks over the six months of the program.

Moreover, Microsoft had to take into account that each deployment would have unique variables, depending on the configurations being deployed and the different sets of internal resources that each customer would bring to the program. And Microsoft had to manage all of the information with just a four-person program team.

“We faced a tremendous challenge in project communication, coordination, and collaboration,” says Melinda Curtis, Microsoft Office EPM Solution TAP Program Manager. “Each of these deployments was complex. The stakes were high as well, because capturing key learnings from deployments in the TAP would help enable other successful deployments of the EPM Solution. We couldn’t afford delays or mistakes.”

Solution

Microsoft didn’t have to go far to find a way to ensure the success of its Microsoft Office EPM Solution Technology Adoption Program. It chose to use the EPM Solution itself to track the deployment projects for the seven TAP customers.

ASP-hosted EPM Solution

To quickly implement a Microsoft Office EPM Solution that would enable secure access and management by customers, partners, and Microsoft employees from anywhere in the world, Microsoft chose a solution hosted by application service provider (ASP) Project Hosts, a Microsoft Certified Partner.

Figure 1. Project Hosts provides TAP customers and Microsoft users with access to the EPM Solution through an EPM portal. Key resources are apportioned between shared resources and a dedicated server.

The Microsoft Office EPM Solution brings together client, server, and Web-based technologies to help an organization or team to manage complex business processes as companywide projects, to enhance project communication and collaboration, and to ensure optimal resource allocation. To achieve this level of project management sophistication and optimization, several core Microsoft software products must be tightly integrated. Essential product components in the EPM Solution include Microsoft Office Project Server 2003, Microsoft Office Project Professional 2003, and Microsoft Office Project Web Access.

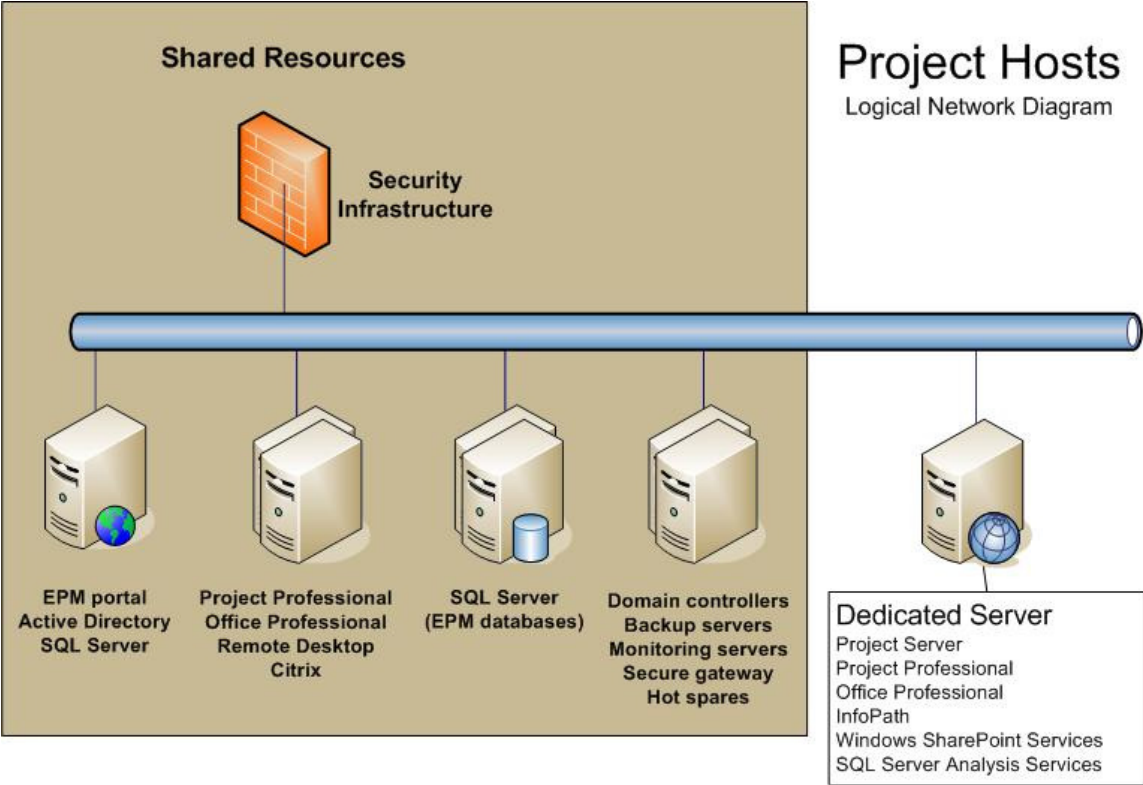
Components of the Microsoft Windows Server System™ integrated server software also contribute to the solution—namely, Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 and the Windows Server™ 2003 operating system,

which includes Windows® SharePoint® Services. Project Hosts and Microsoft also make Microsoft Office Professional Edition 2003 available remotely to TAP customers through the solution.

EPM Portal for Access

To facilitate secure access from anywhere in the world, Project Hosts deployed an EPM portal for the Microsoft TAP that manages authentication to the hosted solution for users from Microsoft, the TAP customers, and the third-party providers.

Normally, users from outside domains have to authenticate again each time they use different parts of the solution such as Windows SharePoint Services or Portfolio Analyzer. Using the EPM portal, however, users from different domains can access the various parts of the solution with a single



logon, taking advantage of the Active Directory® service in the Windows Server 2003 operating system. Active Directory also helps Microsoft and Project Hosts tailor the portal view so that TAP customers see only information relevant to their project, rather than information for all TAP deployment projects.

The EPM portal runs on two servers. Two other servers support the Active Directory domain controller, and two more support two SQL Server databases—one for data related to the portal’s use and one for data related to the EPM Solution configuration.

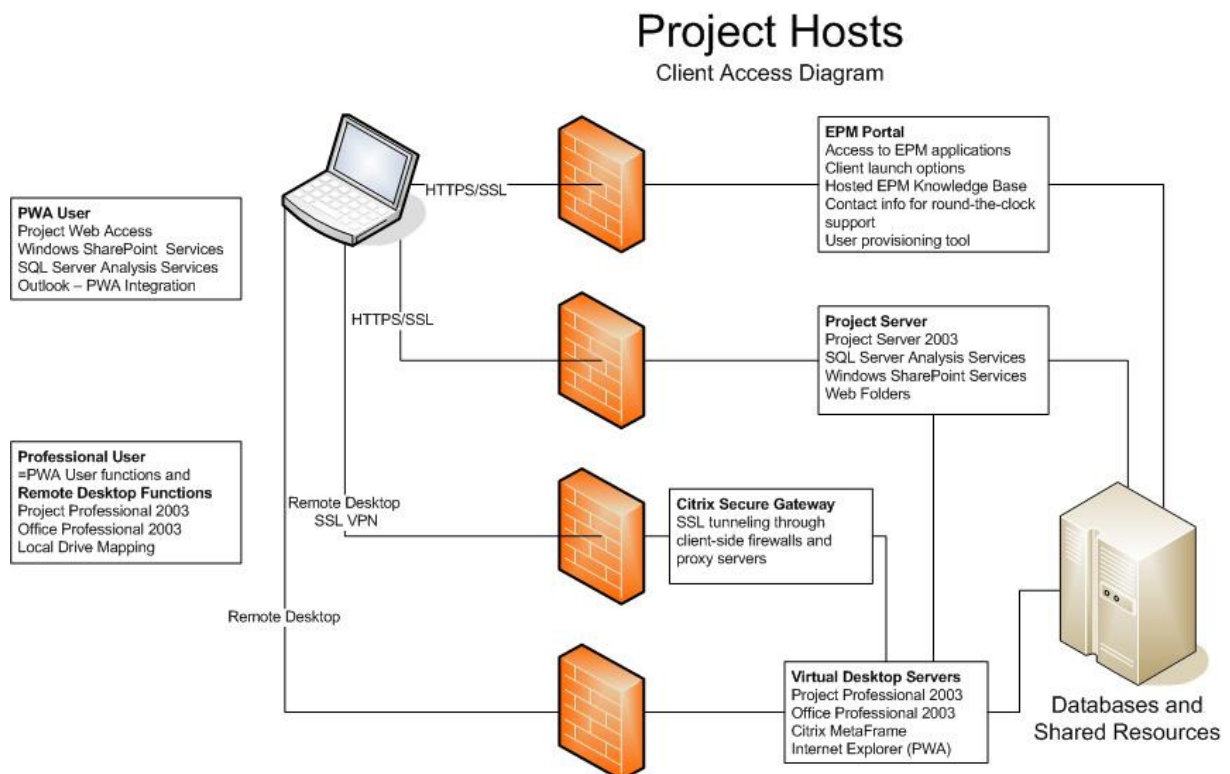
standardization of project and resource information to enable enterprise resource management, Web-based time and status reporting, Web-based views of portfolio and project performance and health, portfolio analysis and modeling, and customization and integration with line-of-business systems. Project Server runs on a single server.

That same server also hosts the Project Professional software environment, which provides tools for project managers, including planning and scheduling, enterprise templates, skill-based resource assignment, and resource availability views. In addition, the server supports Windows SharePoint Services, Office Professional Edition 2003, and the Microsoft Office InfoPath™ 2003 information-gathering program—the last of which uses XML to enable individual status

Figure 2. Users can access the solution either directly over the Internet or through a Remote Desktop connection.

Standardized Information and Tools

At the core of the solution is a hosted Project Server environment. This Microsoft Office EPM software provides centralization and



“We’ve saved weeks with each project because, thanks to this hosted EPM Solution, team members can just hit the Web site, see everyone else’s input into the project plan, and respond immediately.”

Michelle Wood, Senior Consultant, Enterprise Project Management Solution Technology Adoption Program, Microsoft Corporation

reports to roll up into a programwide report that can be viewed and analyzed in Microsoft Office Excel 2003. This server also hosts SQL Server Analysis Services, which is used for the EPM Solution Portfolio Analyzer.

Two Ways to Access the Solution

Because ready access to the hosted Microsoft Office EPM Solution is critical, users can access it in either of two ways: directly over the Internet using Project Web Access to access the EPM portal and Project Server, or through a Remote Desktop connection using Terminal Services in Windows Server 2003 to access Project Professional and other desktop programs.

The Remote Desktop option runs either directly through a firewall or through a Citrix secure gateway for tunneling through client-side firewalls and proxy servers. The use of Terminal Services for TAP users—all of whom are accessing the solution over the Internet—provides the speed and interactivity that those users want and would expect from a solution hosted over their local networks.

Team members use Project Web Access and the portal to update time and task notations; view project status; or access the Portfolio Analyzer, which enables them to analyze resource and project performance, including costs and schedule data, using online analytical processing. Authorized project managers use the Remote Desktop connection to do more advanced tasks with Project Professional—such as creating and editing projects and project templates, and reassigning resources—and to access the InfoPath-based status report form and other Microsoft Office tools.

Benefits

Thanks to the Microsoft Office EPM Solution, the TAP customers deployed their software successfully within the six-month program window. The project managers could spot

potential problems and optimize resources and priorities to avoid them. A manager who formerly spent 30 percent of his time on status reports had that time freed for more productive uses, and the time needed for project planning was cut in half.

Optimizing Resources

The Microsoft Office EPM Solution gives Microsoft and its TAP customers the visibility they need to immediately understand the status of their deployment projects and to modify resource use as needed to optimize their progress. Each task is assigned a highly visible, colored risk indicator showing whether the task is on time, completed, behind schedule, or a risk to the project.

“We use the Microsoft Office EPM Solution to ensure that we are going to complete all deliverables within the scope of the project timeline,” says Curtis. “We’re meeting our milestones better than we did in the past because the EPM Solution gives us true portfolio management with the real-time information we need to spot milestones that are at risk and to make decisions that keep the projects on track.”

For example, an early deliverable for the TAP deployment projects is the customer’s assignment of a team to work on the lab verification process and produce key documents related to it. In one case, the customer had failed to assign resources to the lab team. Thanks to the EPM Solution, Microsoft Senior Consultant Michelle Wood was able to spot the problem before it created a delay in the lab process. The team made a decision to outsource that customer’s lab process and all key deliverables were managed on time.

In another example, Wood used the portfolio management capabilities of the EPM Solution to spot a customer’s looming failure to implement Project Server reporting on time. In this case, the team made a decision to

switch another project element—nightly merging of data with the customer’s financial system—to a later phase of the deployment, freeing additional resources to complete the more urgent task.

“The EPM Solution enables us to identify and track the responsibilities of each of the parties to the process: customers, solution providers, lab partners, and the Microsoft team,” says Wood. “We not only manage the projects better, but we manage ourselves better, too.”

Increasing Productivity up to 50 Percent

The use of a project template that is customized for the Microsoft TAP also boosts productivity up to 50 percent, according to Wood. At the start of previous deployment projects, TAP members would spend about four weeks sending information back and forth through e-mail, obtaining revisions and approvals, until a solid project plan was finalized and the project launched. Thanks to the EPM Solution, that initial planning period has been cut in half, to just two weeks.

“We’ve saved weeks with each project because, thanks to this hosted EPM Solution, team members can just hit the Web site, see everyone else’s input into the project plan, and respond immediately,” says Wood.

“We’re also seeing that type of continuous response and activity throughout a project. It doesn’t matter where in the world a participant is; he or she can access the EPM Solution at any time. And that means that we make progress on our projects continuously, 24 hours a day.”

By facilitating communication and collaboration, the Microsoft Office EPM Solution also boosts the productivity of individual team members by up to 30 percent. For example, on a previous TAP, Microsoft team member John Gearty, EPM

TAP Coordinator, spent a day and a half of each week assembling status report information in preparation for the weekly team status meetings. Thanks to the EPM Solution, customers and project managers can easily update the status of their projects and information about each project, and that information is automatically rolled up into a programwide report, eliminating the need for Gearty to collect the data manually. Having freed 30 percent of his time, Gearty can now apply that time to more value-added tasks.

“We have seen significant time savings by using the EPM Solution to streamline reporting, tracking, and team collaboration,” says Curtis. “We’ve cut our weekly status meetings time by 75 percent. We no longer have to chase documentation via e-mail. This saves staff time and ensures that the most current version of a document is readily available to the team.”

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to: www.microsoft.com

For more information about Project Hosts products and services, call (408) 736-3448, or visit the Web site at: www.projecthosts.com

© 2004 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. This case study is for informational purposes only. MICROSOFT MAKES NO WARRANTIES, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, IN THIS SUMMARY. Microsoft, Active Directory, InfoPath, the Office logo, Outlook, SharePoint, Windows, Windows Server, and Windows Server System are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. The names of actual companies and products mentioned herein may be the trademarks of their respective owners.

Document published July 2004

The Microsoft Office System

Microsoft Office is the business world's chosen environment for information work that provides the software, servers, and services that help you succeed by transforming information into impact.

For more information about Microsoft Office System, go to: www.microsoft.com/office

Software and Services

- Microsoft Office Enterprise Project Management Solution
 - Microsoft Office Professional Edition 2003
 - Microsoft Office Project Professional 2003
 - Microsoft Office Project Server 2003
 - Microsoft Project Web Access
- Microsoft SQL Server 2000
- Microsoft Windows Server 2003, Enterprise Edition
- Windows SharePoint Services

Hardware

- HP DL380 servers

Partners

- Project Hosts

Microsoft®