



## ASP Speeds Customer Deployments by 50 Percent, Reduces Labor Costs by 25 Percent

### Overview

**Country:** United States

**Industry:** Technology

### Customer Profile

Project Hosts, based in San Jose, California, is a leading application service provider (ASP) for hosted deployments of the Microsoft® Office Enterprise Project Management (EPM) Solution.

### Business Situation

Project Hosts needed to better prioritize the use of its personnel and to speed processes that involved coordination among its own employees plus those of third-party partners.

### Solution

The company is using a remote-hosted version of the Microsoft Office EPM Solution, the same technology and services it provides to its customers.

### Benefits

- Greater ability to prioritize resources
- Customer deployments up to 50 percent faster
- Greater customer satisfaction
- Personnel costs at least 25 percent lower

“The most important benefit we get from the Microsoft Office EPM Solution is the ability to better prioritize our work so we can provide exceptional service to an increasing number of customers.”

Scott Chapman, Chief Executive Officer, Project Hosts

Project Hosts, an application service provider (ASP), wanted to speed customer deployments that required tightly scheduled and highly synchronized steps by its employees and third-party partners. The ASP’s answer is the Microsoft® Office Enterprise Project Management (EPM) Solution, which helps the company document and improve its project management processes. The result: Project Hosts’s customer deployments are completed up to 50 percent faster, while staffing levels are at least 25 percent lower. This means that Project Hosts boosts customer satisfaction even as it reduces cost. Best of all, the company shows off the advantages of its own service: hosted deployments of the Microsoft Office EPM Solution.

**“The Microsoft Office EPM Solution enables us to complete customer deployments up to twice as quickly as we otherwise could.”**

James Flavin, Chief Technical Officer,  
Project Hosts

## **Situation**

In the last five years, the market for solutions hosted by application service providers (ASPs) has continued to see double-digit growth. Using an application that is hosted over the Internet can make great financial sense for medium-sized companies or divisions of larger organizations that want to be freed from the time and cost of acquiring and maintaining their own technology infrastructures. To host applications successfully and deliver this benefit to customers, the ASP needs to provide a robust technology infrastructure with guaranteed reliability, high levels of security, and authentication and integration outside the customer's domain.

Allegrix, founded in 1999, became a success story in the application hosting space. And its success—combined with the release of Microsoft® Office Project Server 2003 and the growth of the enterprise project management (EPM) market—led two of Allegrix's founders, Scott Chapman and James Flavin, to create a new company that is devoted exclusively to the hosting of Microsoft-based EPM solutions.

This new company, called Project Hosts, has quickly become a leader in the U.S.\$100 million market for hosted EPM solutions, according to the company. Using advanced Microsoft technologies and managed-hosting techniques, Project Hosts reduces the time, costs, and complexities involved in EPM deployments. Project Hosts creates tailor-made configurations of EPM solutions for its customers to streamline their project management process and to improve their business effectiveness.

In addition to delivering and managing hosted deployments of the Microsoft Office Enterprise Project Management (EPM) Solution, Project Hosts provides online EPM demonstration deployments that can last 30 days or more. This ASP-based demo service

provides potential customers with easy access to a fully functional EPM solution so they can gain a thorough understanding of the offering without incurring large up-front costs for on-site demo environments. This streamlines the evaluation process while providing the ability to deal directly with thousands of prospects simultaneously.

To accommodate all those customers and prospects, Project Hosts has developed advanced techniques to deliver EPM solutions through any firewall, proxy server, or client configuration that the company encounters. And that requires a round-the-clock support operation. In its first year in business, the Project Hosts support staff assisted more than 3,000 companies in demo deployments alone.

“If we run into a customer configuration that we haven't seen before, we have to resolve the problem quickly so that the customer can get online and use our solution,” says Chapman, Chief Executive Officer of Project Hosts. “Fast customer service is absolutely crucial to our success.”

Complicating matters, the work of getting a customer successfully deployed on an EPM solution can involve up to 90 tasks—some of which are carried out by Project Hosts staff and others by the company's partners.

“When one task in a sequential process is completed, we need the next task to start right away,” says Flavin, Chief Technical Officer at Project Hosts. “That's central to expediting the entire process. Sometimes that means our own people need to understand exactly where the process stands and where they come in. Sometimes, it means our partners need to have that understanding and jump right in. If you're waiting for a project manager to tell you what to do and that person isn't available, the work comes to a standstill. That's death for productivity.”

To ensure high productivity, customer satisfaction, and streamlined partner integration, Project Hosts needed an Enterprise Project Management solution every bit as effective as the one it offers to customers: the Microsoft Office Enterprise Project Management Solution.

### Solution

Project Hosts runs the Microsoft Office EPM Solution on servers located at Navisite, a leading data center service provider. To allow users in Project Hosts corporate domains and external partner domains to access the hosted EPM domain at Navisite, Project Hosts required a secure EPM extranet solution.

### EPM Portal

Project Hosts's solution was to create an EPM portal that manages the authentication process from each user's domain to the domain of the Microsoft Office EPM Solution. The portal handles the process of authentication to the various parts of the solution, including Microsoft Office Project Server 2003, Project

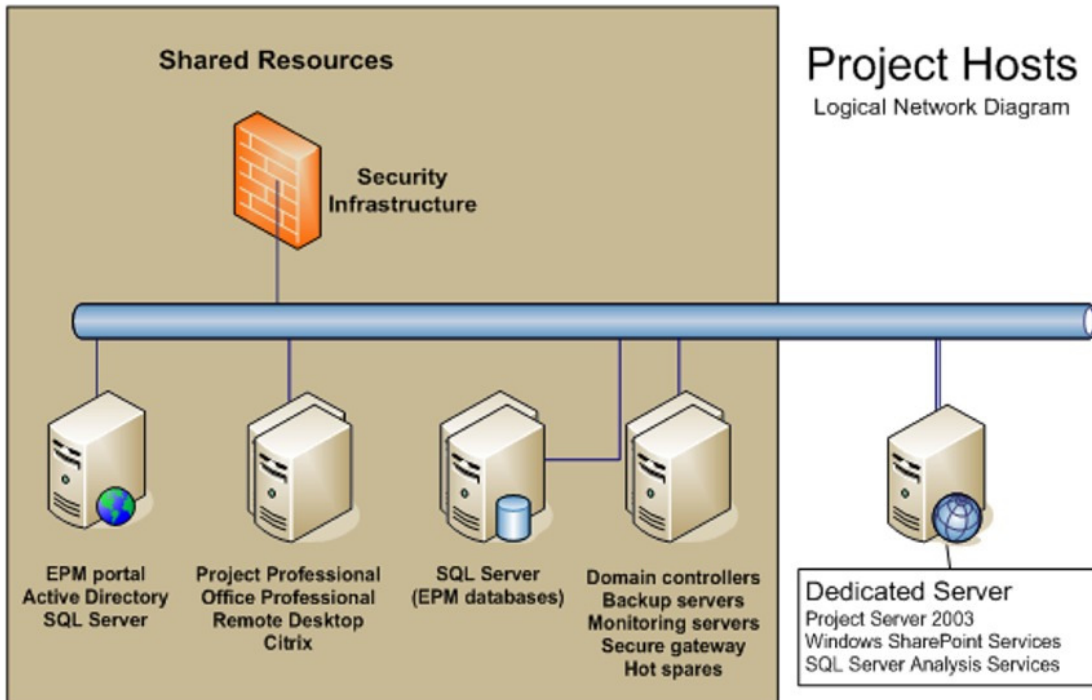
Professional 2003, Windows® SharePoint® Services, SQL Server™ 2000, and the Microsoft Office Outlook® 2003 messaging and collaboration client.

The portal manages this authentication with a single logon, taking advantage of the Active Directory® service in the Microsoft Windows Server™ 2003 operating system. The EPM portal runs on a single server that supports the Active Directory domain controller as well as two SQL Server databases—one for data related to the portal's use and one for data related to the EPM Solution configuration. (See Figure 1.)

### Project Management at the Core

In many ways, the Project Hosts architecture for its own hosted Microsoft Office EPM Solution mirrors that of a single-domain customer deployment. At the core of the solution is Project Server, the EPM software that provides centralization and standardization of project and resource information to enable enterprise resource management. Project Server offers Web-based time and

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



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 also hosts Windows SharePoint Services and SQL Server 2000 Analysis Services.

example, to update percentage-complete

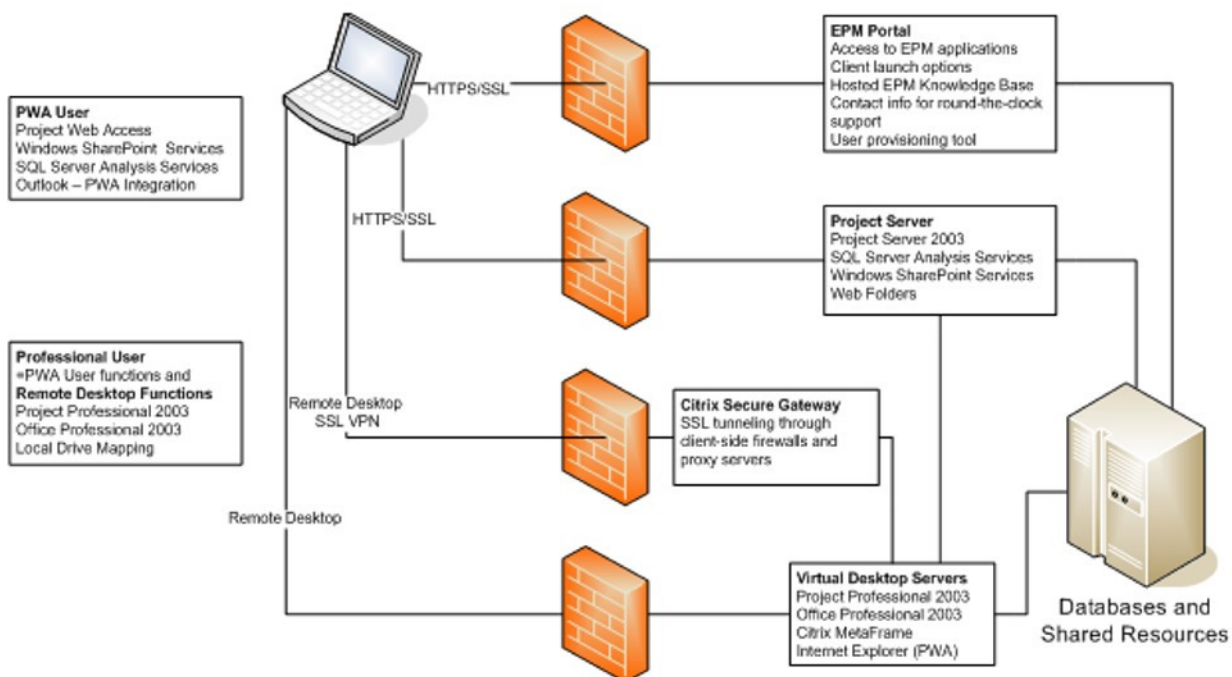
### Tools for Project Managers

The Project Hosts solution also uses Project Professional, which provides tools for project managers, including planning and scheduling, enterprise templates, skill-based resource assignment, and resource availability views. In addition, the Project Hosts deployment gives users access to Microsoft Office Professional Edition 2003 and related tools such as the Microsoft Office InfoPath™ 2003 information-gathering program.

The integration of Project Professional 2003 and Outlook 2003 is an important part of the solution. The integration is useful, for

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

## Project Hosts Client Access Diagram



**“The Microsoft Office EPM Solution enables us to provide better customer service at lower cost. That’s a great way to keep the revenue stream flowing.”**

Scott Chapman, Chief Executive Officer,  
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figures, enabling users to see up-to-date status of each component of a project.

### **Two Ways to Access the Solution**

Users access the EPM Solution in either of two ways: directly over the Internet using Microsoft Office Project Web Access to access the EPM portal and Project Server, or through a Windows Server Remote Desktop connection using Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) and a virtual private network (VPN) to access Project Professional and other desktop applications. (See Figure 2.)

The Remote Desktop option runs either directly through a firewall using Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure (HTTPS) or through a Citrix secure gateway for tunneling through client-side firewalls and proxy servers. Project Hosts users take advantage of this last option when accessing the solution from a customer site that is protected by a firewall.

### **Benefits**

Thanks to the Microsoft Office EPM Solution, Project Hosts is able to better prioritize its projects and make more effective use of its personnel. This result in turn enables projects such as customer deployments to be completed more quickly and at lower cost. Customer satisfaction is higher.

### **Better Project Prioritization**

“The most important benefit we get from the Microsoft Office EPM Solution is the ability to better prioritize our work so we can provide exceptional service to an increasing number of customers,” says Chapman. “If we had just one ‘incident’ at any one time, life would be easy. We’d solve it and go on to the next one. But we typically have multiple incidents occurring simultaneously. Which incident is the hottest and how do we battle as many of them as we can? The EPM Solution answers these questions.”

For example, Project Hosts recently implemented a hosted deployment for the IT division of a major corporation. That job included the typical challenges of expediting a process that included some steps for Project Hosts and some steps for its third-party partners.

At the same time, one of Project Hosts’s established customers moved its proxy server, which provided Internet Protocol (IP) access to its EPM Solution, and found it no longer could access the solution. The challenge facing Project Hosts was whether it could pull technicians from the deployment in order to service the current customer and still meet the schedule and goals of its deployment customer.

“Thanks to the Microsoft Office EPM Solution, we could see exactly when it was possible to move resources from one job to the other and still hit our timelines,” says Chapman. “We solved the proxy server problem without dropping the ball for our deployment customer.”

### **Customer Deployments in Half the Time**

“The Microsoft Office EPM Solution enables us to complete customer deployments up to twice as quickly as we otherwise could,” says Flavin. “Everyone is always able to see the current status of projects and when it’s time for the next person to do his or her part—without waiting to be informed by a project manager. The nightmare scenario is that something gets done and then it takes a couple of days before the next person realizes it’s time for the next step. The EPM Solution eliminates that nightmare scenario.”

Based on his extensive experience with solution hosting, Flavin estimates that the Microsoft Office EPM Solution speeds customer deployments at Project Hosts by 25 to 50 percent.

## 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](http://www.microsoft.com)

For more information about Project Hosts products and services, call (800) 507-2819 or visit the Web site at: [www.projecthosts.com](http://www.projecthosts.com)

## Higher Customer Satisfaction

Increased productivity boosts customer satisfaction because the customer is up and running on the Project Hosts solution faster than would otherwise be possible with the ASP's current staffing level. Project Hosts is able to save at least 25 percent in the additional staff costs it would otherwise incur to deliver customer deployments as quickly without the Microsoft Office EPM Solution.

"We're a young, fast-growing company," says Chapman. "Our revenue stream is crucial. The Microsoft Office EPM Solution enables us to provide better customer service at lower cost. That's a great way to keep the revenue stream flowing."

## 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 the Microsoft Office System, go to: [www.microsoft.com/office](http://www.microsoft.com/office)

## Software and Services

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

## Hardware

- Intel-based dual-processor servers

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