Surebridge Hosted Applications Keep Context On Track

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--John Shore, Controller Context Integration Inc.

BUSINESS BACKGROUND

Context Integration, Inc., of Burlington, Mass., is an Internet services firm that provides business-to-business solutions to companies who want to integrate their back office systems with the Internet. Founded in 1992, Context's solution areas include Digital Marketplaces, Relationship Commerce and Web Business Intelligence. The company's services include strategy, technology architecture, and creative design.

An expected high rate of growth propelled Context to look for a robust software solution that would provide them with Project Tracking and Financial capabilities. In February 1999, they purchased PeopleSoft due to its scalability and robust Projects and Financial modules. With an aggressive timeline in mind, Context looked at other consulting companies for implementation and ultimately chose Surebridge due the company's PeopleSoft experience, their ability to meet Context's aggressive timeline as well as meet their budget. At that time, Context was counting on their own ability to host and maintain the software.

But growth proved to be faster than expected. Hiring more than 50 to 100 new employees per quarter, Context knew that the company could take better advantage of PeopleSoft's capabilities.

Once implemented, Context realized that they would be unable to support their system and began to look for an ASP that would meet their needs. "We were functional on PeopleSoft, but being such a robust system, we didn't have enough expertise in-house," comments Jon Shore, Context's Controller. PeopleSoft required a lot of maintenance and with a large focus on filling other consulting positions within the company; it did not make financial sense for Context to hire an in-house staff to support their ERP application.

At that time, Context queried other ASPs in addition to Surebridge about hosting its solution, but didn't find the right match. "Other ASPs were targeting larger companies and did not meet our needs and they were far too expensive. Surebridge was targeting growing, mid-market companies, like Context, [and] was able to put together a financial package that met our needs," says Shore.

"In October 1999, we contacted Surebridge about hosting and managing our application Shore estimates using Surebridge's services saved Context "at least 30 to 40 percent versus in-house."

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

As Context used PeopleSoft, they realized the software could provide a number of very valuable functions, but they needed help implementing them. "We are consultants and were hiring people very rapidly. It's hard to get

qualified people for the sophisticated work we do. As a result, hiring for the back office was not a priority," comments Shore.

Context looked to Surebridge to meet some important needs:

- Help Context use PeopleSoft's power and flexibility, fully and efficiently

- Take on the responsibility of hosting and maintaining PeopleSoft

- Allow Context to focus on its core business and not be immersed with information systems challenges

- Create customized applications to enhance generation of valuable, real-time information

BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

Surebridge implemented a series of solutions to meet the challenges faced by Context. They became Context's ASP and took over responsibility for hosting and maintaining PeopleSoft. But they went further than that.

According to Shore, Context wanted to get real time data to its system, including time sheets. Time reporting is critical especially because of the influx of new hires. PeopleSoft's time-sheet application is Java based, but proved to be too large an application for their consultants to download and enter time. As a result, Context asked Surebridge to develop an HTML application, which would allow their consultants to quickly and easily enter time records.

This application resulted in a dramatic improvement in Context's efficiency. Before, time sheets had to be manually gathered and input into the system before it could be determined how much

time per employee was spent on each project. The longer it took to compile this information, the longer it took Context to bill the client. "It was taking us three to five days to gather the time sheets, enter them manually and then analyze them. That was cut down to a single day by using the time report Surebridge developed," says Shore. With this Web-based application, timesheets now could be saved on-time and on a daily basis and updated frequently.

This time report proved so successful, Context had Surebridge develop another application for expense reporting. "Because we're hiring 50 to 100 people per quarter," says Shore, "it's essential we get expense reporting done efficiently." Previously, a manager had to manually sign off on a report, then it would be entered into the system manually, then audited and finally approved. "We wanted to automate everything, so Surebridge developed an HTML expense report system:' says Shore.

Now, Context consultants enter expense data in real time on the Web application. The consultant routes the data to their supervisor who can approve it online. Then it gets submitted right into the financial system where it is audited online.

"We have literally eliminated all the paper pushing. We get real time data and it saves us a tremendous amount of administration time both for consultants and in the back office. I expect huge cost savings from both [time sheets and expense reporting] apps," says Shore.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

Among the benefits Context has received from their relationship with Surebridge are:

- The efficient, cost-effective implementation of PeopleSoft

- The use of Surebridge's facilities and professional expertise, which has resulted in measurable cost savings - 30 to 40 percent less than if done in-house

- Reliable hosting and management of PeopleSoft

- The implementation of a system that allows multiple offices and off site employees to access the solution remotely, Surebridge's ASP model seamlessly ties all offices together

- A real-time view of its business allowing up to the minute time-keeping and project status including profit-and-loss statements and employee utilization reports

- Customization that met specific needs of Context and that help it run its business better and more efficiently

The Surebridge/Context business partnership continues to thrive the companies are looking at additional ways to leverage PeopleSoft to support Context's business strategy and needs.

ABOUT SUREBRIDGE

Surebridge, a leading full-service application service provider (ASP), was built from the ground up to service the complex needs of mid-size organizations. Founded in 1997, Surebridge delivers a choice of brand name applications, quality deployment and value-priced solutions. Our full-service offering includes software selection based on business need, rapid and precise application deployment, secure application hosting and management, and continuous business improvement services.

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