

CUSTOMER SUCCESS

 **VERSIONONE**
FOTOLOG
Customer Success Story

As a result of their recent acquisition by Hi-Media, Fotolog was poised to make a number of enhancements to support more than 18 million members of the world's #1 photo-blogging website. The problem was that they had begun adopting Extreme Programming (XP) processes for the first time eight months earlier, which were not bringing them the results they had expected. Development was chaotic, reports were cumbersome or non-existent and communication between the team and the product owner was strained. In response, Fotolog brought in agile coach Emmanuel Szabados to restructure the development team and to promote agile development in the management and executive levels as well.

THE CHALLENGE

When Szabados arrived, Fotolog had been using XP for less than a year. Some of the XP practices were working for them, but the team was somewhat vague on certain concepts. For example, iterations were running into one another as user stories followed each other, with new iterations beginning before the previous ones had even ended. The team also seemed to lack a firm understanding about other basic agile concepts such as product backlogs, burndown charts and effort tracking. At the same time, the US team was challenged to coordinate with an existing team in France and a newly forming team, to be located in Brazil. Trying to develop new features in this environment was frustrating and difficult for all involved.

Szabados' first mission was to introduce the team to Scrum and the value of using Scrum with XP. He felt a hybrid approach would provide the straightforward framework the team had been lacking without weighing them down with heavyweight processes. However, Scrum was new to this team. As a result, they were sometimes unsure how to execute a planning meeting, how an epic was different from a story, and how to move from a project-centered mindset to a product-centered, constant-delivery mindset.

Fotolog decided to add an automated tool to help both with their workflow needs and their distributed environment. They were concerned about how they would learn to use a new tool on top of the Scrum framework they were beginning to assimilate into their XP environment. As it turned out, they found a tool that actually sped up their learning curve, rather than slowing it down.

“The learning curve on VersionOne was fast – the workflow was straightforward and reinforced agile concepts, while the UI was so intuitive that our developers were able to begin using the tool immediately. They just got it. VersionOne works.”

*Emmanuel Szabados, Agile coach
Fotolog.com, a website of Hi-Media Publishing Network*

SNAPSHOT **FOTOLOG**

- Fotolog, a Hi-Media Publishing Network website
- Fotolog is the world's leading photo-blogging site and social networking sites with over 18 million members in 200+ countries
- 90 total Hi-Media engineers working across multiple regions and products

BUSINESS ISSUES

- Use of XP development processes were not yielding the benefits the team had anticipate
- Need to collaborate across multiple countries, including the US, France and Brazil
- Existing tools (Excel spreadsheets and XPlanner) did not provide the desired tracking capabilities
- Required project-level reporting capabilities including burndown
- Team lacked understanding of some agile concepts

RESULTS WITH VERSIONONE

- Intuitive agile workflow guided the team through the project management process, from planning through delivery
- Centralized tool easily supported distributed teams and promoted team member communication
- Standardized and customizable reports provided project visibility to all stakeholders
- Ease-of-use for both technical and non-technical users resulted in little training overhead
- At-a-glance tracking through the unique visual task board simplified effort tracking

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THE CHOICE: VERSIONONE

Fotolog began its search for a new tool with open source options but quickly found that they were not sufficient for their needs. The tools were too immature and didn't provide enough support. Additionally, the team required comprehensive reporting in any tool they selected and concluded that reports in the open-source options they reviewed were cumbersome and visually unappealing.

When it became apparent that open source was not the solution, Fotolog began looking at a variety of other tools. In Szabados' estimation, many of these tools seemed only to be waterfall development tools with an agile skin. Others, the team decided, were so customizable that functionality was lost in the confusion of how to configure the tool.

In the end, Fotolog chose VersionOne Enterprise, citing three key reasons:

1. Built-in agile workflow in general and Scrum concepts in particular that supported their enterprise-level requirements
2. Extensive reporting capabilities, providing visibility for the team and outside stakeholders
3. Configurable to a hybrid XP/Scrum methodology environment but completely usable "as is" out of the box

RESULTS

VersionOne gave Fotolog the robust, yet easy to use, tool they needed. Even though they expected to have some struggles learning both a new tool and a new methodology (Scrum), they quickly found that the tool was actually helping them learn many agile concepts. The tool reinforced the terminology they were learning and helped guide the team through the framework.

"The workflow the tool uses is user friendly, intuitive, and easy to understand," says Szabados. "If you know agile, you understand the application and can move through it quickly. We didn't have to spend time in multiple meetings defining rules and so on."

The taskboard interface is especially popular with the Fotolog team, as it provides them an at-a-glance view of the tasks in an iteration and allows individuals to manipulate tasks just as they would do with post-its on a whiteboard.

Szabados is most excited about the built-in agile process flow and reinforcement of agile concepts that VersionOne has given the team. Terms such as backlog and story that were once only abstract notions are now accessible and understandable through the tool. The Getting Started, Planning Overview and Help features provide definitions that mirror the Scrum concepts Szabados has introduced. This symbiotic relationship between the tool and the hybrid agile processes the team was using made adopting the new framework easier and much more productive than Fotolog believed possible.

"VersionOne works," says Szabados. "The tabs function well. Its interface is somewhat Windows-like and that familiarity makes it easy to use. The sidebars give you quick access while the tool takes you step-by-step [through the Scrum process.]"

"Support has been wonderful, too," Szabados concludes. "They are quick to respond and accurate in their answers. But I imagine they hear that all the time!"

ABOUT FOTOLOG

A website of Hi-Media Publishing Network, Fotolog is the world's leading photo-blogging website, with more than 18 million users in over 200 countries, from Antarctica to Zimbabwe. Launched in May 2002 by Scott Heiferman and Adam Seifer as a small community project of 200 friends, Fotolog today generates more than 4.4 billion page views and receives more than 18 million unique visitors each month. Fotolog ranks among the top 100 in the Alexa list of the world's most trafficked websites and was named a Site of the Week by PC Magazine.

ABOUT VERSIONONE

VersionOne is recognized by agile practitioners as the leader in agile project management tools. By simplifying the planning and tracking of agile projects, we help teams deliver better software faster. Since 2002, companies such as Adobe, Dow Chemical, Lockheed Martin, Motorola, Novell, Sony and Symantec have turned to VersionOne. Today more than 30,000 teams from over 170 countries use VersionOne.

Start small. Scale smart. See for yourself at www.VersionOne.com.