

# IT Product Development Case Study

By MS IT solutions

## **Introduction:**

MSIT has been setup with a dream of building software products by outsourcing software development work to engineering and MCA colleges. MSIT had a grand vision of building products for SMEs while empowering college students with real time project needs this way. While this is a very good vision for the sake of college students too, its practical implementation was beset with lots of problems. In this paper, MSIT brings out a brief case study of one of its product development efforts while trying out this model. We conclude this seemingly effective strategy to predict a better mechanism in building products for SMEs.

## **SME customer:**

It goes without saying that SME customers would be the most sportive and supportive for this type of cooperative strategies. Identification of an SME customer who is a very good representative of a specific industry is the first step in this process. The customer must have had well-established business practices in his organization; he must have built reasonably good business with his practices. There must be sufficient number of people in his organization who can verbalize the various processes followed as clearly as possible. The organization clearly identifies that an IT product that suits its needs can really make a difference to its business. Half-the-battle is won if we can identify such an organization.

The other half of the battle is convincing the organizational head of our capability to build an IT product. MSIT identified a very good customer in TMI network who is among the top 5 recruitment companies of India. They had all the characteristics mentioned above. To win the other half of the battle MSIT showed its 'IT interns' strategy. MSIT had few senior employees but it also had 20 interns who paid a small fee to it to learn about 'real time project' implementation.

Hence, the business model has been formed as one to have part funding from TMI, another part from MSIT and a part from IT interns. There was enthusiasm from all quarters to start on this new strategy and MSIT set out on the product building process. The vision was to build a 'recruitment tracking and scheduling system' that addresses the needs of recruitment departments of corporate.

The team work between the customer representative and development representative must be very good to **evolve commonly-acceptable milestones for the product**. Each side must be sold into these milestones so that work is done accordingly. Otherwise, there are grave chances of not meeting each other's expectations

especially so from a technology point of view. When we are attempting to meet tough goals with not a fully-fit team, more often than not the schedules fall apart because of technological difficulties. This risk must be built-in into the system to develop mitigating strategies.

### **Development Team:**

The development model involved senior talent working with fresh talent right from day one. Here it is very important to get the buy-in from the senior talent to work with the fresh talent and to permit them to choose the best of the freshers from those available. The freshers in a learning mode even though seemingly cost-effective, will not have the seriousness, commitment and emotional stability of committed senior talent except for a very few percentage of them. The rigor of product building and regular deliveries is way beyond their average capability level even though they exhibit sufficient knowledge to build the same.

MSIT underwent all kinds of problems in building a stable development and testing team from the talent pool available to lay the foundation to the product building process. It needs to be mentioned here that irrespective of these problems, it is heartening to find that India is full of so many fresh aspirants of software engineering jobs that it will continue to have dozens of them searching for good work and remuneration; every new software company is bound to find 25% of the talent coming to its doorstep in search of work sufficiently productive in spite of all of its processes.

MSIT built good work through a committed customer like TMI, retained sufficient seniors on its roles to work with the young engineers that the eco system was founded strongly. The other important aspect of the team is the Project and Requirements Manager. He / she should have the stature and expertise to command the respect of customer and the development teams equally well.

### **Implementation Team:**

The importance of this implementation team comes a little later in the product life cycle. It is equivalent to a beta customer. If it is part of SME customer it will have one outlook and will have quite another one if it is different from the SME customer. The product's applicability to a job to be implemented by this team is to be studied with great care. This team bears the brunt of demonstrating results and also demonstrate a sympathetic outlook to the development team's work.

MSIT's experience shows that only when there is real time work all parties involved will have a very clear idea of the needs involved. If it is not real time work, then everyone only guesses and it is very difficult to identify who makes the best guess. Under such circumstances, it is best to have only a very SEASONED REQUIREMENTS MANAGER than trying any other stakeholder for that job.

Since seasoned requirements managers are very few in the market, it is best to have real time work and then give opportunity to identified stakeholders to identify requirements. The author agrees that only few functional specifications can be built and tested in any real time work, whereas a product might have to have many more features to be a saleable one in any competitive market. Product building is a TOUGH JOB and it can not be done by doing normal work. All team members have to rise very high above their normal competency levels to build a GOOD PRODUCT for any market.

### **Management Team and Investors:**

This being a highly complex job there are more chances of it failing than succeeding in coming out with a final deliverable meeting the expectations of most of the stakeholders. Hence, the management team must get the commitment of investors for amount and duration of funding and be very clear on deliverables. There must be a common management team leading the efforts of SME customer, development and implementation teams without which it will be a very loosely-knit effort and can fall apart any time.

It will be the sheer commitment of the top most leaders only that can see this type of effort yielding results. MSIT and TMI have this commitment sufficiently and thus succeeded in producing TAPME – Talent Acquisition Pipeline Manager for Enterprises.

### **Conclusion:**

MSIT brings out the following take-away for all those teams collaborating to build a successful product:

1. The product idea must have been a tested one and must have had established business built around it.
2. A common management and investment team must be built to spearhead this complex activity
3. The project manager and the requirements manager must have the most crucial expertise in building a product.
4. Few real time projects must be used to beta test the product to cover all the functionality.
5. The beta customers must be necessarily found within the SME customer's company and also from other companies.
6. The product journey is a long and a tough one; it must have very strong leaders to keep the team together and have the goals met.
7. The benefits are bound to be enormous for all stakeholders involved in this complex process if the first 6 points are followed strictly.