



The Globe and Mail: Web Site Redesign



On February 17th, 2006, The Globe and Mail – Canada’s National Newspaper launched their new web sites, www.theglobeandmail.com, www.globefund.com and www.globeinvestor.com. Mediaboot partnered with the Globe and Mail Web Production team, assisting with the hiring, project management and production activities involved in their web redesign project. The Globe and Mail took advantage of our expertise in Agile Project Management, Web Development Methodology, and Database System Integration to deliver their project on time and on budget. It was a great opportunity for Mediaboot to apply our expertise to a high profile project.

Research shows that the more unknown the technology and requirements are in a project, the more suitable the project is for “SCRUM”: Agile Project Management methodologies. SCRUM was designed by Ken Schwaber and Jeff Sutherland to help software project managers mitigate risks and bring quicker return on corporate investment. Schwaber and Sutherland have been involved in the software consulting industry for over 30 years. Their methodology is best applied in projects that have high levels of uncertainty.

“In many cases, organizations have reported an increase of over several hundred percent in productivity using Scrum”

¹ “Agile Software Development with SCRUM”, Mike Beadle, Ken Schwaber, Prentice Hall, Paperback, Published October 2001, 158 pages, ISBN 0130676349

When Mediaboot was first engaged by The Globe, the term of the placement was set for four months. The scope of the project however was still undefined and no one had a thorough understanding of The Globe's proprietary software. The graphic designs were provided to us in Photoshop format. Our tasks would start at converting the design images into web code, then learn the proprietary language to connect the pages to The Globe's database news feeds. The final scope of work would be to convert the code and functionality to conform to accessibility and functional standards. The accessibility requirements included support for the visual impaired, (who may use text-to-speech devices), and for the physically handicapped, (who may visit the site using special display or control adaptors). The project appeared to be very interesting and it was very clear that success would depend directly on the ability of the team to learn the Globe systems and adapt to changing requirements.

Working with their Senior Web Producer, Mediaboot helped interview and hire team members to form a 'swat-team' that could convert the graphic designs, create JavaScript code and connect the data feeds. The 4 month project officially began October 11th, 2005. We finished the production phase of the project by December 12th and handed the project off to the Quality Assurance (Q.A.) team on December 16th. We received our bug list report from Q.A. by January 9th, 2006, at which time we began refining and optimizing our code, working toward the February 17th release date.

When the project was more than 75% complete, it is clear to see the team developed according to a project development model created in 1965 by Bruce Tuckman. Tuckman's article, "Developmental sequence in small groups", outlined 4 stages of effective team development. The stages were titled, "forming", "storming", "norming" and "performing".²In 1977, Tuckman extended his model to include a fifth stage,

² Smith, M. K. (2005) 'Bruce W. Tuckman - forming, storming, norming and performing in groups, *the encyclopaedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/thinkers/tuckman.htm. Last updated March 14, 2005:.

“adjourning”, which occurs after a project completes. According to Tuckman’s model, we entered the “adjourning” stage in mid February.

Forming

We decided that the best team would be formed by people who could learn new technologies and adapt them to overcome project hurdles. The SCRUM method works best with people who can learn and adapt. Knowledge and experience would be necessary but the ‘right’ people would demonstrate an interest in learning and adapting to evolving requirements. We successfully hired three additional team members.

The team was formed officially by November 1st. A project launch meeting was scheduled. We introduced ourselves, provided a brief outline of our experience and asked questions about the project. On a deeper level the meeting was a symbolic start, and the first opportunity for the team to get together and collaborate.

Storming

Storming is the ‘idea-generation’ or ‘brain-storming’ phase of a project. It can also be described as the ‘jump-right-in’ phase. Collaboration and knowledge sharing is absolutely necessary. Our project is too large for any one person to understand all aspects, so we decided to assign specific areas of the project to each person. One of my sections was “Weather”; others had sections like “Front Page” or “Editorial”. Our team had an immediate dependency on each other to share the solutions we created and help each other. All members shared their ideas, questions and answers through meetings, instant messaging and email communications. These are the characteristics of the “Storming” phase of team development. It was an exciting part of the project.

Norming

After the storming phase things calmed down. Everyone began to manage their own time schedule and deliverables. We had entered the “Norming” phase of team development. All team members had an equal distribution of work, our general solution had been

identified and we began to take advantage of the lessons learned from the “Storming” phase. The “Norming” stage can feel like it is going on forever. I remember when I was excited about the Weather section. It had cool maps and a customizable interface. Then, only 30 days later, I was bored by its JavaScript cookies and CSS2 properties. It is important to have daily meetings (also called *scrums*), to help team members keep focused on their deliverables and share their progress. Loosing momentum can sometimes kill a project, so managers use scrums to let the team quickly review what they did yesterday, what they will do today and what barriers need to be removed so they can achieve their daily goals.

Performing

Truth be told, our team began “Performing” earlier than expected. The sites were working and began to look a lot like the Photoshop designs we were provided. Other members of The Globe staff had seen our work and clicked on my ‘Weather’ link to remind them how cold it was outside. The “Performing” stage of team development is all about the team achieving its goals and getting recognized for their contributions. Performance recognition is not related to financial compensation, but rather the affirmation from your peers that you are doing well. We continued performing until near the end of the project in mid February, leading into the “Adjourning” phase.

Adjourning

Most of the project hurdles had been overcome and the team could see the end of the contract. This simply meant that we were completing the work and were handing the project off for final sign-off. The Q.A. team reviewed our fixes to their list and had additional feedback for us. We completed the last part of the project by February 17th. Although this date marked the end of the contract, the “Adjourning” phase continued a little bit longer. According to Tuckman’s team development model, “Adjourning”,³ “is

³ “Tuckman forming storming norming performing model”, <http://www.businessballs.com/tuckmanformingstormingnormingperforming.htm> , accessed December 7th, 2005

the break-up of the group, hopefully when the task is completed successfully, its purpose fulfilled; everyone can move on to new things, feeling good about what's been achieved.”

Releasing the new Globe and Mail Web sites was a great way to start the year 2006. Our team continued to “perform and adjourn” according to the classic model outlined by Bruce Tuckman. We also continued to use SCRUM methods to manage the project to completion.

Reflection

In hind sight, the entire project went very well. The team dynamic had both its challenges and rewards. There were areas of miscommunication (which were resolved) and areas of conflicting coding practices (which were also resolved). In the end the project was delivered on time and on budget, and The Globe and Mail was extremely happy with our performance.

Bibliography

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