

Xtramind Flexible working in the software sector¹

The challenge

[XtraMind GmbH](#) started as a spin-off from the Saarland University in Germany. It was one of the first companies to offer complex interactive solutions for the Internet. In particular the company specialises in intelligent customer interaction, bringing together the latest concepts in artificial intelligence, language technology and object oriented software to generate customised solutions in the areas of :

- communications management
- information and knowledge management
- content management

In March 2002, the company had 27 employees. Its customers included innovative SMEs and providers of B2B and B2C e-commerce services.

The company wanted to improve the way in which managed its corporate knowledge. Its principal priorities were:

- improving communications with co-workers, partners and customers
- sharing information, knowledge and documentation both internally and externally
- creating process-oriented interfaces and metrics for monitoring the business processes
- providing universal, uniform, mobile access to company data

The technical solution

The solution was intended to be compatible with the standards used by a parent company and major clients for sharing data in an efficient and secure way. It uses a combination of IBM Lotus Notes, Domino Sametime, Domino.doc and Verisign certificates to support knowledge sharing, document management and secure access. A Virtual Private Network was also established to provide remote access to the facilities.

The results

The platform allows the company to communicate internally and externally. It makes possible the effective use of the company's collective data and can support further process oriented software products. It has created an environment for ongoing process improvement within the company.

Teleworkers appreciate the greater freedom that they have to balance work and social life and office workers believe that the system could offer them greater flexibility in the way that they work. Managers consider that the system has stimulated the motivation of employees and increased their productivity. The company restricts the time that individual employees can spend teleworking to 80%. This offers the employees the social benefits of teleworking but avoids them becoming isolated from other team members.

The solution is being used in the day-to-day business of the company and is expected to recover its costs in slightly under 3 years.

General Manager Dr Klaus Netter says 'My company is working on the front line of the new economy and the level of technical innovations we are implementing is a key element of success on the market. Teleworking is not only helping us to reduce our expenses, it enables us to provide better services to our customers, to compete more efficiently and to extend our markets'.

¹ A more detailed case study can be found on the website of the IST project 'PROTELEUSES' (www.cbt.es/proteleuses), which analysed the ambitions of a number of SMEs and implemented flexible working solutions addressing the principal bottlenecks preventing the achievement of those ambitions.



Conclusions

A knowledge intensive product, such as software, is a good candidate for flexible working techniques. It can be produced efficiently by distributed teams that include a high proportion of teleworkers. However XtraMind considers it important that teleworkers spend some time in the office to foster team spirit, avoid feelings of isolation and understand the company's philosophy. It is also important that all team members use a common set of applications in a consistent way – something that can be difficult to control when most of them are skilled IT professionals!

The XtraMind solution is essentially a best-practice solution, integrating commercially available hardware and software, to provide a distributed working environment for a team of professionals. A similar solution could be of interest to other small companies with knowledge intensive products.