



FOREVER INTERACTIVE

Tools For Agile Customer Success Story

Forever Interactive is an indie game development studio located in Chicago, IL and Milwaukee, WI.

The company is a completely virtual studio. They don't have physical offices and all work is coordinated through the Internet.

If you thought being agile with a co-located team was hard, then you'll appreciate the immense challenges involved in coordinating seventy people completely online. That's right, seventy! This is not a small team. Most of the team members are from the Midwest, some from other parts of the United States, and a few as far away as the UK, Malaysia and Australia.

If that wasn't hard enough, game development is a domain full of specialists – game engine developers, scripters, gameplay designers, 2D artists, 3D artists, special effects, sound engineering, musicians, testers and story writers. Each role requires specialized knowledge of tools and theory.

The Challenge

The group at Forever Interactive knew that they couldn't just use vanilla Scrum, so they adapted practices for their context from a number of agile processes and tied them together into a hybrid agile process.

For instance, they use feature teams – a practice adopted from Feature Driven Development. Each user story is worked on by a small cross functional team composed of people with the necessary skills to complete the story. This allows them to break up the seventy member team into a number of smaller four or five member teams to work on individual stories.

The entire team is completely self managed. Feature teams are created ad-hoc as team members with different skills pick the stories they want to work on. From there they coordinate amongst themselves to get the story done.

Impediments are identified and aggressively eliminated. Complete transparency is maintained throughout the sprint. Everyone knows what everyone else is doing, how things are going and how their story fits into the bigger picture.

The organization adopted the mantra of "complete communication and total transparency" to guide their way of developing software.

How do you do all this with a virtual, online-only team?



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*Emil Harmsen, CEO
Forever Interactive*

Overview

- Agile, indie, game studio
- Industry: Game development

Challenges

- Coordinating a virtual team completely online
- Scaling using feature teams
- Implementing "complete communication and total transparency" values

Solution

- Set up Silver Catalyst as an online project management hub
- Online taskboard with all the information required visible on it

Results

- Saved hundreds of thousands of dollars a month on office space and relocation expenses
- Enhanced self organization as every team member had the information to take decisions
- Enabled the unique virtual studio business model



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The Solution

Forever Interactive needed a tool that would allow them to coordinate their hybrid agile process online.

Their requirements were stringent:

- The tool had to be web based so that anyone could access it from any location.
- It had to be easy for non-technical people like artists and musicians to use.
- The tool had to be flexible enough to support the heavily customized agile process used at Forever Interactive.
- Finally, the tool had to fit in with the corporate values of complete communication and total transparency.

"We evaluated a lot of agile project management tools," says Emil Harmsen, CEO, Forever Interactive. "Other tools were too complex and seemed to hide more information than they made visible. Silver Catalyst used a visual approach to agile management which aligned with the way our creative people think. It was the only one that ticked all the boxes."

Results: Enabling the virtual team

Forever Interactive used an online Silver Catalyst workspace through which the entire project could be coordinated. Any team member could view and update stories and tasks no matter where in the world they worked from.

Silver Catalyst fit in with the organization culture of communication and transparency. The tool's visual management system was able to take complex information and present it in a way that everyone – even non-technical team members – could easily understand. Says Emil, "Since the whole team was self organizing, it was important that everyone in the team was able to easily use and understand what was happening. Anybody could glance at the taskboard and see progress. Everything we wanted to know was right there. We didn't have to create complex reports to figure out what was happening."

The team at Forever Interactive is constantly on the lookout to eliminate impediments. Any time a task was blocked, it was prominently

highlighted on the taskboard and an email was sent to the team.

"The card becomes bright red on the taskboard," explains Emil. "You can't miss it. We immediately evaluate the impact: which story, which state, who was working on it, what was the reason. We stop everything to resolve it. For technical impediments, we call a 'metascrum' meeting, which is a meeting of all the team members in that specialization. For other impediments we have an 'all hands on deck' meeting with everyone on the team. Impediments don't survive very long out here."

And what about the impact on the bottom line? Emil has this to say: "Without Silver Catalyst we would have had to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars a month leasing office space and relocating all our team members. That was simply not viable. Silver Catalyst is a key enabler of our business model."

Forever Interactive has been able to run agile projects using a model that nobody thought was possible.

As Emil says, "We've blown apart the myth that agile only works with small, co-located teams."

About Tools For Agile

Tools For Agile is a premium suite of agile tools, built for teams that want to take charge and deliver great software. The toolset marries the power and simplicity of physical tools with an enterprise quality feature set.

The time has come to start delivering. Get started at ToolsForAgile.com today!

