

Case Study

GroupSystems Success Story: Sun Microsystems

Sun Microsystems' Global Vodafone Team Stays Unified with GroupSystems Collaboration Technology

With 260 million customers worldwide, Vodafone ranks as the world's leading mobile telecommunications company. Customers from Tasmania to Tanzania stay in touch with Vodafone products and services.

Globally, the company has hundreds of suppliers. In 2005, Vodafone entered into an extensive global agreement for Sun's entire hardware, software, and services product line. Just three years later, Sun took home the prestigious award of Vodafone Supplier of the Year for 2008.

With about 60 Sun representatives managing the account in 23 countries – across diverse time zones, languages and cultures – how does the global Vodafone account team stay unified?

Real-Time, Global Collaboration

Early on, Gary Ashworth, executive director, Sun's Vodafone Global Account, implemented monthly calls and an annual conference to improve communication and unity across the worldwide team.

"The calls and conference are key communications vehicles in terms of our Vodafone strategy, to understand how we're progressing globally," Ashworth said. "English is not the first language of many of the participants and there are cultural differences regarding asking questions on live calls. People were not feeling comfortable asking questions and were not understanding answers if they were delivered with a strong accent."

For both the conference calls and annual conference, Sun engaged with Steve Bather, a certified GroupSystems facilitator. Bather saw the opportunity to apply GroupSystems collaboration technology to break down cultural and communications barriers among the global Sun team managing Vodafone.

The Web-based technology enables virtual interactive meetings, brainstorming and collaboration. Sun uses the tool to collect information prior to meetings, encourage real-time interaction during phone conferences or in-person events, and to assimilate all input easily at the close of meetings.

Doubling Attendance on Monthly Calls

Monthly "Vodafone Tuesday" calls run like a radio show with a host, guests, and questions from the audience. Leading up to each call, Ashworth poses questions for the team online through GroupSystems collaboration technology. They answer and provide insight on current issues they are facing – all anonymously.

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— Gary Ashworth,
Executive Director,
Vodafone Global
Account

Customer
Sun Microsystems

Business Benefits of GroupSystems

- Monthly attendance doubled on "Vodafone Tuesday" calls.
- Easier collaboration among team members across diverse languages and cultures.
- More focused, richer, interactive in-person or virtual meetings.
- Participants take away immediate deliverables.

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With that feedback, the team identifies three to four topics to discuss on the live call. During the calls, all participants log in to GroupSystems. As the call runs, participants type in their questions online. Speakers answer some questions during the call and others within a few hours after it ends.

Since implementing a new format, monthly attendance has doubled. Ashworth attributes that to the more engaging, interactive format.

"By introducing GroupSystems technology, we've seen an improvement in attendance and in the volume, quantity and quality of the questions the Vodafone team asks," he said. "There's a lot more interaction. It's given them a vehicle to ask questions more easily. People feel there are no silly questions."

Walking Away with Deliverables

Sun takes a similar approach at its annual Vodafone conference. The team inputs information online before meeting in person, allowing organizers to plan topics for discussion. During the live meeting, all participants use GroupSystems collaboration technology to interact in real time via the online portal. Throughout the process, participants are not identified, which frees them to add input and ask questions. Seeing answers typed on the screen helps non-native English speakers understand more clearly.

"GroupSystems provides the best of face to face and eliminates the worst," said Bather, who assists in facilitating the live conferences. He guides the group in specific exercises the tool enables, such as brainstorming, prioritizing and voting.

"Steve has a clear understanding of how to drive the technology," Ashworth said. "His understanding and direction on how to use the tool is crucial."

It's a much more interactive, open approach, and enhances meeting productivity. "People are fed up with seven hours of PowerPoint presentations," Ashworth said. "It gives us a richer experience and the opportunity to go deeper, and that's so key. We're not wasting time in calls or meetings. It would be difficult to achieve this level of communication without it."

After calls and meetings, Sun has the entire recap of the event already logged and organized in GroupSystems technology – ready to act on.

"Walking away with a deliverable is so important," Ashworth added. "It gives people great confidence that something is coming out of this. People are impressed with the take-away. All these people work on their own in different regions, so they have pieces they can extract and take back with them."