



Injection-Molding Innovator Saves Time, Cuts Costs with Conferencing Solution

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Manufacturing—Plastics

Customer Profile

Medway Plastics/Plastics Fabrication Technologies (MEDWAY/PFT) is a California-based custom-injection-molding company with an affiliated research arm in the United Kingdom. Combined, the companies have 200 employees.

Business Situation

MEDWAY/PFT needed a conferencing solution to demonstrate parts and processes to its affiliates, suppliers, and customers, but third-party video and Web conferencing solutions were costly, cumbersome, and unreliable.

Solution

The company deployed Microsoft® Office Live Meeting and the Microsoft RoundTable™ conferencing and collaboration device to its affiliates and selected suppliers and customers.

Benefits

- Travel costs down by 50 percent
- Demonstration shipping costs down by 50 percent
- Time-to-market faster by up to 60 percent
- Sales closing faster by 30 percent

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Jay Magness, IT Consultant, Plastics Fabrication Technologies, MEDWAY/PFT

Medway Plastics/Plastics Fabrication Technologies (MEDWAY/PFT), a world leader in custom injection molding and tooling, needed a better way to communicate with affiliates, suppliers, and customers. The company tried a third-party video conferencing solution, but had problems related to software compatibility, firewalls, and Internet-connection speed. The company then tried a third-party Web conferencing solution, but it proved impractical and costly. So MEDWAY/PFT deployed a conferencing solution based on Microsoft® Office Live Meeting and the Microsoft RoundTable™ conferencing and collaboration device. As a result, the company has reduced costs for traveling and for shipping parts for demonstrations by 50 percent, time-to-market by up to 60 percent, and time to close sales by 30 percent, and is saving U.S.\$3,000 per user in annual software licensing and maintenance costs.



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Fabrication Technologies, MEDWAY/PFT

Situation

Founded in 1974 and based in Long Beach, California, Medway Plastics/Plastics Fabrication Technologies (MEDWAY/PFT) is part of an affiliated group of companies that also includes Advanced Plastics Technologies, which is based in the United Kingdom. In the world of custom injection molding and tooling, MEDWAY/PFT is primarily a research operation, whose scientists and engineers work with manufacturers to generate new processes. One such process involves the innovation of packaging in a market that constitutes 30 percent of all beverage bottles produced in the world.

Typical of its industry, MEDWAY/PFT faces the ongoing challenge of how to maintain efficient communication with suppliers and customers around the world. The company feels this challenge most keenly when communications involve demonstrations of objects that must be viewed in great detail.

Consider, for example, a critical conference involving a problem or question related to a mold design. Prototype frames must be shipped between MEDWAY/PFT and manufacturers in China, engineers must travel between the company's various affiliates or to manufacturer or customer sites, and so on. This process often involves development and manufacturing delays while parts are in transit, and always involves out-of-pocket expenses and lowered productivity while employees are traveling.

MEDWAY/PFT tried to overcome these challenges by incorporating slides of photographs or drawings into videos and displaying them through an online conferencing system. As part of this system, the company provided suppliers and customers with portable computers that were enabled with Sprint EV-DO and that could be connected to a projector for viewing slides.

This approach was problematic, however, in that it required the consistent support of suppliers' and customers' IT departments. These departments were responsible for ensuring the compatibility of proprietary software on which the system depended; for opening ports when needed; and for ensuring a secure, high-speed Internet connection. Even then, communications were difficult, because the software needed greater upstream bandwidth than what was available, even with EV-DO.

In an attempt to remedy these problems, MEDWAY/PFT deployed a third-party Web conferencing solution. But it, too, proved impractical because of cost and reliability issues.

MEDWAY/PFT needed a way to share highly visual information without shipping parts, sending employees across the globe, or having to rely on complex and unreliable software solutions.

Solution

When Jay Magness, IT Consultant for Medway Plastics, and his colleagues learned about the full video support that was available in the upcoming 2007 version of the Microsoft® Office Live Meeting Web conferencing service, they evaluated that product as a potential replacement for the earlier solutions. They were satisfied with the service's video capabilities and its integration with Microsoft Office Live Communications Server 2005 and other Microsoft software products. They were also happy with the quality of the Microsoft RoundTable™ conferencing and collaboration device. Magness and his colleagues decided to deploy Office Live Meeting into their companies.

After installing HP TouchSmart computers at offices of its affiliates and selected suppliers

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and customers, Magness's team deployed Office Live Meeting in a single day. The team subsequently incorporated the service into a comprehensive video and online conferencing solution that includes the RoundTable device, a Sony UX handheld computer, and a Sprint EV-DO network. The solution also includes Sprint EV-DO cellular cards for users in locations not served by wireless so as to reconcile transmission and receipt speed differences and avoid potential problems with ports and firewalls.

According to Magness, the team encountered no significant challenges during deployment. “Our rapid deployment of this service demonstrated a central benefit of using a hosted service: the simplicity of getting the solution up and running,” he says.

Today, MEDWAY/PFT employees use Office Live Meeting frequently for conferencing with affiliates, suppliers, and customers. No longer limited to locations that have a functioning PVX connection, anyone at MEDWAY/PFT can hold a conference from practically anywhere, with any affiliate, supplier, or customer to which the solution has been deployed.

“In the lab, for example, a digital microscope is connected to a computer for Live Meeting conferences that require observation of minute detail of a given part,” Magness explains. “We just pop it to the screen on a slide, and anyone who is connected through Live Meeting can see details at 100 times the magnification.”

As of late 2007, about 50 employees are regular users of the Office Live Meeting solution. Magness expects this number to double early in 2008.

Benefits

The combination of the Office Live Meeting service and the RoundTable device provides

MEDWAY/PFT with a “one-stop shop” Web-conferencing solution, according to Magness. “With this solution, we can bring together text, video and other images, and the voices and faces of fellow conference goers in a way that can really help an audience to understand what we’re talking about,” he says. “For the first time ever, we can do video conferencing from anywhere and realize benefits in cost, productivity, usability, and time-to-market.”

Lower Costs, Higher Productivity

As Magness explains, with the Office Live Meeting solution, MEDWAY/PFT is more visible and available to its affiliates, suppliers, and customers while spending far less time and money on transporting parts and people.

“With Live Meeting, we’ve reduced the need for shipping parts overseas for the sole purpose of in-conference demonstrations, saving 50 percent of such costs over what we spent the prior year,” Magness points out. “Similarly, we’ve reduced the need for people to attend many such conferences in person, saving 50 percent of travel costs and cutting the productivity losses that are inevitable when individuals must travel long distances.”

To cite just one example, Magness tells of a Live Meeting conference during which a team of engineers discussed a highly detailed manufacturing process. “In the past, such a conference would have required us to fly in 10 people from all over the world,” he says. “With the Live Meeting solution, all 10 of them attended, but only one had to do so in person.”

Additional cost savings come on the IT side, as a result of the comprehensive integration of Office Live Meeting with the Microsoft Office Outlook® messaging and collaboration client and other Microsoft technologies. “Thanks to the integration of Live Meeting

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Versatile, User-Friendly Solution

Still more savings come from the versatility of the Office Live Meeting solution. Magness himself has taken advantage of that versatility by conducting conferences from his motor home and even while on a visit to the beach. “The solution is so easy to access that a participant’s location or setting is irrelevant,” he points out. “As a result, we are using the solution at least once each week for international video conference calls.”

The Office Live Meeting solution is equally useful for internal training. “New hires for positions ranging from machine operators to managers have received Live Meeting very well, with lots of ‘oohs’ and ‘ahhs,’” Magness reports. “As a result, we expect to replace a significant amount of in-person training, reducing yearly travel costs and lost productivity by half.”

Whether Office Live Meeting is used for a conference call, training, or other event, users especially like the RoundTable component of the solution, Magness adds. “The RoundTable unit functions well right out of the box; the voice-detection technology is excellent, and so are the sound quality and integration with Live Meeting,” he says. “Consequently, we see RoundTable as key in encouraging our customers to adopt Live Meeting.”

Faster Decisions, Time-to-Market

With Office Live Meeting, MEDWAY/PFT is saving not just money, but also time. In product development, for example, a model or part for a conference review can be “delivered” in the time that is required for setting up and spotlighting the part for the

live video that will stream across the Office Live Meeting connection—about 20 minutes.

“In the past, when that part had to be shipped, usually overseas, the delay could be up to four days,” Magness notes. “That’s four days saved on just one decision—thanks to Live Meeting—of maybe dozens that need to be made over the course of development, accelerating time-to-market by up to 60 percent.”

The Office Live Meeting solution can expedite matters similarly on the sales side. “By using Live Meeting for conferencing with customers who are considering a purchase, MEDWAY/PFT will close sales up to 30 percent faster,” Magness says. “And whether we are using the solution in a development or sales capacity, with or without audio and video, communications are rapid and clear, with no issues whatsoever surrounding bandwidth.”

Continued Tradition of Innovation

As far as Magness is concerned, having both Office Live Meeting and RoundTable deployed in such a successful solution represents “just the start” of what he and his colleagues will do with real-time unified-communications technology at MEDWAY/PFT. For example, they are incorporating RoundTable into a manufacturing-support solution. They also are planning to use Office Live Meeting in a unified-messaging system with EV-DO for wireless connectivity.

Such work fits in smoothly with an ongoing tradition of innovation at MEDWAY/PFT. “Our biggest asset outside of our employees is our technology,” Magness says. “With the deployment of Live Meeting and the RoundTable device, and active plans for the deployment of unified messaging, we’ll remain on the forefront of using that technology to the benefit of our affiliates, our suppliers, and our customers.”

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to: www.microsoft.com

For more information about MEDWAY/PFT products and services, call (562) 685-8160 or visit the Web site at: www.medwayplastics.com or www.pftllc.com

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Software and Services

- Microsoft Office
 - Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007
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 - Microsoft Office Outlook 2007

Hardware

- Microsoft RoundTable