



- Modernization of business partner management

RESULTS

- Great User Experience
- Increased Developer Productivity
- High Application Quality
- Improved Business/IT-Alignment

APPLICATION OVERVIEW

Hannover Re replaced its existing business partner management system.

The company modernized its technical platform and established agile development principles.

SUCCESS FACTORS

- Scrum (Agile Development)
- Cross functional Team
- Service-oriented Design (SOA)
- Silverlight RIA

TESTIMONIAL

“The user experience is much better than what we’ve had before.”

“The sustainable, modular and service-oriented design allows us to evolve the solution over time.”

“Scrum fits perfectly. It helped us greatly to meet the user expectations and deliver in time.”

“It is impressive to see how an agile team performs.”

“We are sure that the chosen best-of-breed technologies offer us great flexibility.”

About Hannover Re

Hannover Re, with a gross premium of around EUR 11 billion, is the third-largest reinsurer in the world.

It transacts all lines of non-life and life and health reinsurance and is present on all continents with around 2,200 staff.

Initial situation

Business partner management is a key area that is vital for risk management and successful business activities.

Hannover Re used several expert systems to maintain and assess its business partners. The core of the system was implemented in Oracle Forms and JEE technology.

Over the years the business departments extended this system with Microsoft Office based solutions. Over time several islands grew up that were hard to maintain.

The user experience was unacceptable and there was a need for a modern solution to support the business users with their daily work. The software development approach of the past was perceived as heavy-weight and not efficient.

Challenge

When the project started, the business partner system was spread across several application islands implemented in different technologies.

It was challenging to understand the whole context. There were especially high expectations in the area of performance as the users work with the system very frequently.

“When we started there was the notion that the new system would be identical to the old one. We quickly learned that this was not the case. We had to make sure that the new system met the user expectations to be successful.”

Data quality is especially important for business partner management. A design was needed to support all kinds of complex validations, as close to the end user as possible.

The system should also be extensible, so that it can grow with new requirements.

As an alternative SAP was investigated for business partner management, but it was perceived to be too limiting for the business requirements.

Solution

Hannover Re decided to build the Register of Business Partners (RoBP), a system for managing business partners.

It consists of a solid set of software services that are accessible via several different technical protocols. A sustainable design approach that fosters reusability was chosen to allow the evolution of the solution.

The service-backend is built using Windows Communication Framework (WCF), Hibernate object-relational mapper and Apache Lucene search engine.

The current UI is built using Silverlight RIA technology. The chosen software design offers a great level of connectivity even with future technologies such as HTML5.

The solution was developed with Scrum.

Some functional highlights:

- Fast search for groups, companies, business partners, etc.
- Complex validations, close to the user
- Visual, interactive amendment of partner structures
- Subscriptions and reminders of partner data changes
- Plug-Ins for common business processes

BENEFITS

The project delivered the following results to Hannover Re:

Great User Experience

Silverlight-RIA-Technology behaves like native applications but can be deployed like web applications.

It is customizable to meet even sophisticated requirements. The web based deployment enabled us to easily distribute the application to our local offices worldwide.

"The Silverlight template mechanism is very flexible and completely decouples behavior and presentation aspects. It allows us to create user interfaces that meet exactly the requirements of users and designers."

Increased Developer Productivity

The Silverlight controls are very powerful and there is an established component market. Developing in Silverlight means a great level of reuse.

This, paired with an appropriate user interface design, greatly lowers the effort to implement new features. Silverlight is developed in C#, a strong and powerful programming language.

"The combination of Silverlight and C# is clearly one of the most productive user interface technologies today. And it is highly interoperable. It is the ideal choice for line of business applications like ours."

High Application Quality

The project aimed to deliver a potentially shippable product with every sprint. To achieve that a continuous agile testing procedure was established.

This included unit-testing, load & performance-testing and acceptance testing. Test results were part of the Definition

This led to a high quality solution even at early stages of the project. Finally we could deliver the product in time and budget.

"We have never had a project that was delivered to production with such a high quality and little stress for the people involved. Scrum is definitely the way to go."

Improved Business/IT Alignment

The team was organized in a cross-functional manner and collaborated closely. Most of them but not all worked together in a project office.

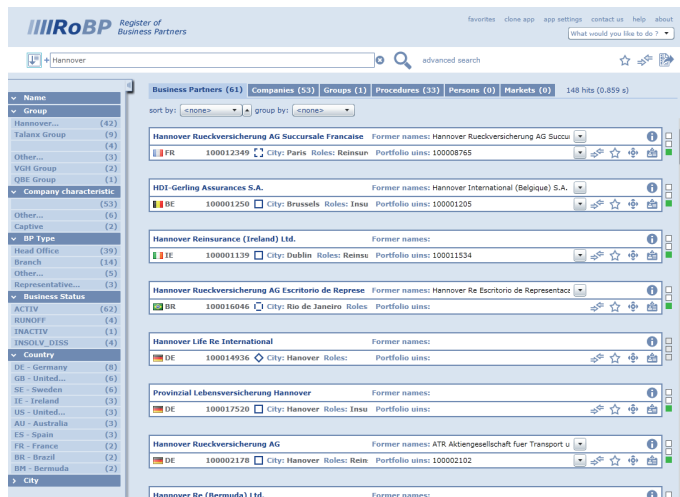
Over time the people formed a team that was very much committed to the project success. Scrum was essential to give structure to the team and to keep focused. Regular velocity tracking and product backlog grooming workshops allowed us to adjust the project when needed.

We established an agile specification process as part of our sprints which is in line with our corporate standards. This created a mutual understanding between our engineers and business specialists.

"Having an experienced Scrum Coach on board was essential to establish Scrum in a way that it really helped the project and delivered value."

Conclusion

Beside the immediate benefits the new business partner management system brings to the users, the technologies, principles and methodologies utilized will definitively affect the way in which we will develop software at Hannover Re in the future.



RoBP search screen

About PLEUS Consulting

PLEUS Consulting supports companies with the implementation of mission critical software solutions since 1993. Proven track record in the areas of SOA, BPM and Agile make PLEUS Consulting an ideal partner when it comes to creating business value with the help of modern information technology.