



CASE STUDY - KNOXVILLE NEWS SENTINEL

Promantek's TrakStar Software Delivers Impressive Performance Appraisal Organizational Productivity Improvement

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This Case Study describes how a new appraisal process began and developed into a particularly good example of a performance appraisal process change. This change has resulted in impressive organizational productivity improvement.

In the fall of 2004, Knoxville News Sentinel assembled a small task force to design a new performance management system. Task force members wanted to focus on this critical aspect and were confident they could improve it by working together in collaboration with organizational input from all levels.

Once system requirements were defined, the task force evaluated a number of software vendors. The team selected Promantek, Inc., a leading, innovative provider of Web-based software aimed at dramatically improving HR and line manager productivity with TrakStar, their Web-based performance appraisal system. This automated software centralizes and simplifies the appraisal process. With TrakStar, Knoxville News Sentinel now provides supervisors with tools to help them quickly and easily create quality performance plans and appraisals that communicate specific goals to employees along with the behaviors that will lead to further successful performance. TrakStar completely automates and ensures uniform performance standards.

CUSTOMER BACKGROUND

Knoxville's largest daily newspaper, The Knoxville News-Sentinel, is noted for its coverage of issues and events in eastern Tennessee, as well as the rest of the state. Whether the news involves state government, Wall Street, or developments in the Middle East, THE KNOXVILLE NEWS-SENTINEL can be relied upon for through, up-to-the-minute reports. Please see <http://www.knoxnews.com>

BUSINESS DRIVERS FOR IMPROVEMENT

There were many economic, management and Human Resource drivers that led the Knoxville News Sentinel to implement an online Web-based performance appraisal system.

Having used paper systems for years it was very easy to immediately see the value in moving to an online, Web-based product according to the Knoxville News performance management team.

Anytime and Anywhere Access. TrakStar is accessible from any location with Internet access and it supports Internet Explorer on PCs as well as Firefox and Safari on Apple Macintosh.

Powerful Notes Capabilities. TrakStar encourages employees and managers alike to take continuous notes about accomplishments and issues. Managers can empower other individuals including an employee's peers, subordinates and others to provide them with notes and relevant observations. The use of performance notes from a manager's perspective is a life saver

Offers Organizational Insight. We know the structure of an organization affects its thinking, ability to act, efficiency and accountability. TrakStar's Organizational Ranking Reports provide empirical insight into our competency strengths and weaknesses at executive, director, manager, position and employee levels. TrakStar helps us plan and train more effectively.

DESIGNING THE SOLUTION

Knoxville News assembled management team that first began a search of products that would meet our needs. Our management team was already heavily involved in revising our values and company core competencies which made

embracing an automated process a little easier. Promantek demonstrated TrakStar to and showed us its features and benefits. It was clearly obvious that TrakStar would take us far beyond the next level of our existing performance management system.

SETTING GOALS

Along the way, the Knoxville News Sentinel performance management team established specific goals:

Automate the Process. Move away from paper forms and processes and allow anytime/anywhere access for line managers through Web technology.

Reduce Time Spent. Cut the time managers need to produce performance plans and appraisals and conduct reviews.

Establish Future Institutional Memory. Make it easier to change and track goals/objectives throughout the year.

Make HR More Efficient. Rely upon the new system to automatically schedule plans and appraisals and remind supervisors and HR of delinquencies.

EVALUATING VENDORS

What follows is a description of the Knoxville News Sentinel's evolution from the old appraisal system to the current performance management format utilizing Promantek TrakStar software. It covers the evaluation phase through the impact the software continues to have on the organization.

Evaluation. The redesign team conducted in-depth research on software vendors/products and compared vendors and their offerings against pre-established goals. The most critical factors identified by the team were the need for flexibility, ease of use, vendor hosting, support, customer service, and cost.

TrakStar Selection. Knoxville News Sentinel chose Promantek's TrakStar Performance Appraisal System which exceeded all the required criteria. The full product implementation was completed successfully and on time in March 2005.

Flexible Solution. During the product functionality evaluation, Promantek demonstrated a flexible solution that proved to be relatively easy to implement. Promantek was responsive to Knoxville News Sentinel's specific needs especially setup of the organizational analysis and ranking reports.

Ease of Use. Knoxville News Sentinel was in search of a fairly simple solution, one that would be not only easy to implement, but also easy to use and access.

Hosted Solution. Knoxville News chose Promantek's hosted version of the TrakStar application. We examined their ASP's Data Security, Reliability and Confidentiality dimensions and determined they met the highest Data Center standards.

Cost. Promantek provided a complete solution and at a lower cost than competitors. In short, the primary factors in choosing Promantek's product were its flexibility, ease of use, and cost. It was a comprehensive and yet simple to use solution that would allow each supervisor to configure and customize appraisals.

IMPLEMENTATION

This phase went smoothly. The combination of internal Knoxville News Sentinel collaboration and close attention by Promantek made it a success.

Data Transfer. Promantek helped us in the he first step in implementation by quickly and easily importing employee, position and organizational level data.

Going Live. According to Knoxville News Sentinel, the actual implementation was quite easy and seamless. Knoxville News Sentinel was given almost instant access to the software.

TrakStar Introduction. Promantek has been awesome making adjustments and improvements to the product. We didn't have any problems getting the software up and running. Our biggest issue was the time between the training we attended and our chosen go-live date. Fortunately, Promantek offered and hosted Web Conference training sessions for us to overcome this obstacle. We decided to create ten (10) co-workers and managers for training purposes with Promantek's help and that facilitated our hands on training process tremendously.

ACCEPTANCE AND BENEFITS

The reaction to the Promantek TrakStar solution across the organization has overwhelmingly positive.

Management. Management is still learning. One key finding is the ability to see how our people are ranked. There have been several surprises for in this process which were not seen prior because there is no compilation of ratings in the paper system.

Employees. Employees are now using the self-appraisal more than ever before (it was not a mandatory item here) and working hard to keep performance notes they can use and share with their manager at review time.

Human Resources. Going from a manual process of reminders and delinquents to an automated process alone is a huge efficiency for us. Also the ability to get data that can help us strategically use and plan our training time and money is invaluable. We really have defined company core competencies and we expect everyone to meet them such as customer service. We can now get a measure of where we are, deploy training and strategies and then get a measure of our effectiveness. This should help us with our goal to continually develop our workforce.

CONCLUSION

Organizational Benefits. Down the road we should be better equipped to focus on our performance management process. Using the TrakStar software and being able to do comparative analysis should help us be able to minimize the subjectivity involved in the measuring of performance across our organization. For instance, why is the average rating in one division is 3.5 and the average in another is 4? We need to understand. If one really is better than the other we can benchmark their tactics and deploy them in the one not doing as well. If they aren't doing better then we need to focus our training efforts on the management's ability to measure good value versus exceeding expectations.

Organizational Efficiencies. Knoxville News Sentinel says the Promantek TrakStar software improves appraisal quality, accuracy, and privacy with intuitive interfaces and centralized storage. The new system also provides the ability to track and modify objectives/standards and performance notes throughout the performance year