

CASE STUDY

SPECSAVERS ARE TIME SAVERS WITH AGILE METHODOLOGY AND INDIGOBLEUE

With accolades including the prestigious Jaeger-Lecoultré Telegraph IT Director of the Year and the Albert Heijn Career Achievement both awarded in 2005, Michel Khan, IT director at Specsavers for the past 10 years, is not a man who has rested on his laurels.

Specsavers has grown threefold in his tenure and the systems deployed have supported business and management processes, driving sales to over £620m per year and increasing productivity by 50%. Over 12,000 staff are employed across the Specsavers group, which sells a pair of spectacles every six seconds. The customer experience is the most advanced on the market and customer satisfaction levels are testimony to the familiar advertisements.

So how does he do it? Firstly, Michel sits on the group's board - a position that enables him to have a significant input into the company's direction and progression and gives the other board members a true vision into the requirements and possibilities - without having to talk bits and bytes.

"We are an ever-changing organisation," says Michel, "and we have discovered a methodology that allows us to move and change in line with our customers' needs without compromising on quality, which is critical in a business such as ours."

"Our philosophy has always been to structure projects around small, meaningful deliverables. Agile has helped us reinforce this in a more structured process."

The Challenge

Currently, Specsavers IT teams are working on re-engineering the company's business systems from inventory through to store systems. As the company is expanding internationally, a common standards-based system is being developed, which is then localised for each new country.

Using the Agile methodology, Specsavers projects are broken down into units and their progress can be measured by velocity - the amount of functionality completed and tested to production quality in a defined period of time.

Why IndigoBlue

IndigoBlue was chosen to assist Specsavers in their move to adopt Agile methodologies, after a pilot programme, during which IndigoBlue were introduced to the Specsavers business philosophy.

"There was a two-way evaluation," explains IndigoBlue's James Yoxall "We had to be sure we could work with each other on a long-term basis. The pilot involved numerous trials as well as a series of both in-depth and light-hearted training exercises."

So how does this kind of change affect personnel?

"We believe the department has gelled and individuals are happier. Using Agile has given the team exposure to other elements of the business, real responsibility, ownership, challenges and rewards," says Michel.

"The continued success of Specsavers - as with any company - is hugely dependent on the quality of its staff. Of course some staff initially found it hard to embrace the changes, but we have worked hard with IndigoBlue to integrate the Agile methodology into our philosophy and culture."

"We all now recognise that Agile is the best way to meet our business objectives. We can deliver projects and develop product in a way that gives teams ownership of the project. Regular reviews of progress ensures that projects stay on track and the team derives real benefit from continuous involvement," Michel says.

"In many companies, change management is about limiting change," says Michel, "but this is simply not tenable in a dynamic environment. Specsavers is an innovative organisation, so any process has to provide the flexibility demanded by the business. Agile supports this operating philosophy."

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Michel Kahn
- Specsavers IT Director

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