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Case Study:
Spawn Ideas

We Know How Agencies WorkSM

Background

The State of Alaska is full of pleasant surprises and at least as many superlatives. Alaska is both the northernmost and westernmost state in the United States. At nearly 670,000 square miles, it's more than twice the size of Texas. It boasts more ocean coastline than all other states combined. And it's the home of Spawn Ideas, a forward-thinking organization and Alaska's leading advertising/marketing firm with ambitious sights set on growing its business in the "Lower 48."

Lisa King, CFO/Vice President

"Spawn Ideas has been the leader in Alaska's marketing industry for more than 40 years. We are employee owned so our people have "skin in the game" which, along with free perks such as gym memberships, park passes, and craft beer, offers great reasons for loyalty as well as an engaged and empowered working environment. Spawn has made the list of top places to work by Outside Magazine four years in row, rising to number four in America this year! As a result, we have a very strong team of creative professionals, focused on expanding our presence into the Pac Norwest and Denver, areas, which extends our outdoor-loving company culture"



Situation

Like any company and certainly any service-oriented business in which man hours are the core product, Spawn consistently seeks ways to automate and better streamline its operations. The agency always looks for the most progressive and smartest resources. In the late 80's Spawn moved to an accounting system called Admark but with a focus on accounting details, it was only used by a fraction of Spawn's staff.

It [Admark] was basically just for accounting; it was not a project management system. We had a clerk who keypunched timesheets into our system for billing and accounts payable. And, at billing time, correcting hours or expenses from one job to another meant physical folders, handwritten notes, and more accounting time."

Lisa King, CFO/Vice president
Spawn Ideas.

"The accounting system, of course, didn't include anything extra like a company-wide calendar, project scheduling, or contact management. It was strictly an old-fashioned accounting system that was prehistoric and dying — we knew we had to make a switch. When we thought about change, we believed it would be best to make a more holistic upgrade that would improve the overall life of our business."



Solution

Spawn did a comprehensive search, evaluating six different solutions, among them Workamajig which, at the time, was branded 'Creative Manager Pro.'

In the end, Spawn chose Workamajig. Based on research conducted by King and Spawn's IT manager, they determined that Workamajig was the only vendor that was fully Web-based. This was key to Spawn's decision. Today, the agency has been with Workamajig for 10 years.

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However, with employees and freelancers located in the Lower 48, and a culture predisposed to travel, we wanted to have the system accessible anywhere in the world.

We bought the biggest possible Dell server we could buy. It was so big in size that we had it drop shipped to Workamajig in Sacramento where they loaded the software, before shipping it to Alaska. Managing it this way made it a plug-and-play process for us. We all still laugh about how big the Dell machine was!"



In October 2005, with the training support of a Workamajig consulting partner, Spawn began the onboarding process, integrating its billing, accounts payable, and project scheduling processes into Workamajig. They did preliminary set up and then the conversion process began on a Monday. By midday Wednesday, it was completed, and they never looked back.

"It was fast. We set the system up, added information on all of our accounts, decided whether to import/export our other systems like vendors and clients, and also determined how to set up our tasks and items — all the different pieces to it. In just a few days, every single person in the company was doing their own timesheet on it. It took some time for everyone to get fully on board, but I'm proud to say that we and they stuck with it. It's made a huge difference in our efficiency, in broader access to information and in account management staff's understanding of that same information."

Lisa King, CFO/Vice president
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Spawn was the first among its Alaskan competition to use an all-inclusive solution like Workamajig. In terms of its data/information access/usage rights, Spawn's business is open and transparent. As such, various staff use Workamajig in different ways. Although the company's creative department's most important use might be to track daily priorities, Spawn account coordinators rely on Workamajig to manage a project's status across media, creative, digital and production departments. And, of course, accounting benefits remain foundational to Spawn's use of Workamajig. Company leadership relies on these Workamajig features and functions for on-demand access to information and analysis.

King: "It is part of our company culture to mentor and coach, which fits our use of Workamajig very well, because you cannot own this system by yourself. It is a big system, so everyone has to own system use. To that end, training on Workamajig is a priority for all new employees. We have "power users" in all departments, and a core team that works together to share system changes, training, and offers feedback back to support at Workamajig about issues or upgrade requests.



Additionally, over the last few years, Spawn has put a strong focus on client service leadership's understanding and ownership of client profitability. We have regular meetings to help our leadership team understand and take an active part in the financial profitability of the company".

Spawn Ideas likes to stay on the leading edge of its industry. As such, its investment in Workamajig is one now defined by years of reliability and trust. As a loyal attendee of Workamajig conferences, Spawn stays informed of new features and functions such as Workamajig's new business tracking, changes to its platform (from Flash to an HTML5 base), and the new Platinum Billing Worksheet system, which Spawn has been both testing and giving feedback.

King: "Our team welcomes change and upgrades from Workamajig — we try anything that is ready for Beta and enthusiastically give our input. We love the Workamajig team and enjoy working with them to provide input and specifics on what we don't like or what we need going forward in the system. They [Workamajig] will change things readily for you, give you a good reason why it can't be changed, or offer another option."

Benefits

Almost immediately, data related to Spawn's schedules pollinated the Workamajig system. Each and every project was added and built using system features.. Financials were done in Workamajig by the end of the first month.

"From the very beginning, when we realized the amount of data Workamajig was providing us and the level of control that information gave our client service teams, we leveraged our use of it for bragging purposes because it was an awesome change."

Lisa King, CFO/Vice president
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Today, Spawn's account supervisors use the Workamajig project module dashboard for monitoring as they go through the life of each project based upon a set budget and schedule . And, over the last two years, internal committees within Spawn's business have made big strides in using Workamajig as a tool to measure and grow profitability.

Today, everyone at Spawn self-manages this process so that a clerk, who used to spend all day entering many timesheets on a 10-key system, has time for other important tasks. Because clients did not have access to the previous accounting system, Spawn client teams would print everything. Recipients would regularly receive a two to three-foot-tall stack of paper detailing projects and reports of various descriptions at month's end. However, with Workamajig's easy project communication, the use of all this paper is no longer necessary, a nice benefit to the eco-minded Spawn team, plus a convenience boost and cost-saver for any company.





Spawn also makes use of the "Excel Financials," which allows it to download pre-written Workamajig macros into its Excel spreadsheets in real-time. Doing so enables the agency to directly update spreadsheets with financial information with a click of a button. This easy conversion means the agency can design and model reports to specific needs.

Spawn made the smart move to Workamajig many years ago, and now says it's improved its processes by light years. Lisa King is the first to say, "Workamajig really listens to their clients. They make it a point to stay current with the ever-changing technology and software world. We continue to be excited for more timesaving ways to improve our reporting and analysis, and look forward to the continuous updates and changes Workamajig makes to their great product."



WHAT CAN WORKAMAJIG DO FOR YOU?

We know how agencies work.SM