SAFIRA

Business processes enhancement with LOB systems connection at VdA

One of the most distinguished independent law firms in Portugal, Vieira de Almeida & Associados had accumulated various disconnected line-of-business systems throughout the years, each serving a certain department and causing communication gaps across the company. SAFIRA helped them break down the siloes and improve productivity with a Business-Critical SharePoint solution that uses line-of-business data, introducing automation, self-service, and company-wide transparency.

VIEIRA DE ALMEIDA
& Associados Sociedade de Advogados, R.L.

Industry	Legal
Solution	Business-Critical SharePoint solution that uses line-of-business data, introducing automation, self-service, and company-wide transparency - Portal@VDA
Highlights	● 250 users
	● Business process reengineering
	● Communication and productivity improvement
	● Single point of access to information
	● Seamless integration between all disparate line-of-business applications
	● Workflows creation to previously ad-hoc processes
	● Same user-friendly look and feel for all apps
Technology	SharePoint

The Challenge

With over thirty years of law practice, Vieira de Almeida & Associados (VdA) is one of the most distinguished independent law firms in Portugal. In an environment of heavy and austere mahogany desks, one would imagine business conducted via ink pens and hand-written memos. But the reality could not be more different when one enters the headquarters of VdA in Lisbon. "VdA went through a phase of rapid growth and enhancement of services which forced us to rethink our IT systems." says Fernando Resina da Silva, a partner at VdA responsible for information technology.

Over time, several stand-alone applications supported business, including Microsoft Office® for lawyers, Microsoft Dynamics® NAV for Finance, and other custom-built legal applications. Since the systems were not talking to each other and presented different interfaces, causing duplication of effort and putting the lawyers doing extra work in administrative tasks rather than focusing on the core of their business. The employees using the applications also faced communications gaps when they had to work with people outside their departments. The application ecosystem also was not prepared and lacked flexibility for the firm expansion to other geographical markets.

The Solution

"The truth is that lawyers are not always sensitive to technology", acknowledged Fernando Resina da Silva. "The challenge was to create a simple portal, which is intuitive and dynamic, because this is the only way we could ensure that even those employees would work with it who are not used to these type of portals," continues Jose Sousa de Macedo, Executive Director at VdA. "The next step was to develop a solution that offers a new working environment for everyone."

"Information sharing and increased communication between different departments are clearly some of the immediate benefits of this solution. Now we have motorways with 3 lanes."

Fernando Resina da Silva
Partner | Vieira de Almeida & Associados

Same User-Friendly Look and Feel for All Apps

There is no need to individually log into the various applications, instead all line-of-business systems are accessed from the user-friendly SharePoint portal. According to the Head of Internal Processes and quality, Muriel Faden, "The interface is very important because we wanted to somehow 'marry' the diversity of applications used in the firm." The internal employee satisfaction increased in a recent survey with the ease of accessibility for information.

Surfacing Hidden Information

The solution has also improved transparency and brought data to light that were either stuck in information siloes or in systems that needed special training for a small group of experts. Portal@VdA "improved the access to a variety of applications that many people do not know existed or have forgotten by now," says Fernando Resina da Silva. Now any authorized employee can get into Microsoft Dynamics NAV and pull data on a self-service basis, instead of depending on an NAV expert.

Cost Savings with Automation and Process Integration

To Muriel Faden, another less obvious benefit was that this project was not limited to automation and integration of previously dispersed processes. Instead, "the solution also led to a business process reengineering; we took advantage of this solution to perfect internal processes that would otherwise be difficult to implement," says Fernando Resina da Silva. He explains that "before the implementation of the portal, one way to avoid conflicts of interest was to send e-mail messages to certain key lawyers. Now, through process reengineering, this is done through the portal via a specific tool." The flow of email has diminished dramatically and now more used on external communication with customers. As a result the lawyers increased their productivity by putting more effort on billable working hours.

Security with Role-Based Access

VdA created a new customer relationship management process where lawyers get role-based access to their customers' sensitive, real-time information. One of the future projects is to integrate a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system with Portal@VdA.

To achieve this vision, VdA hired SAFIRA, a Microsoft Business-Critical SharePoint (BCSP) partner that suggested to use Microsoft® SharePoint® Server for more than a traditional intranet.

The implemented solution acts as a single point of entrance and communication between all line-of-business applications by VdA employees. It provides access to a set of daily and recurring type of tasks, such as administrative, operational, human resources or financial and supported with the appropriate processes workflow built in the solution for a seamless integration between all this disparate line-of-business applications.

It became a natural platform integrating the line-of-business applications used for core business processes.

The Benefits

The Business-Critical SharePoint solution, called Portal@VdA has added workflows to previously ad-hoc processes and improved communication and productivity among 250 people working in different departments across the company.

- Same User-Friendly Look and Feel for All Apps
- Surfacing Hidden Information
- Cost Savings with Automation and Process Integration
- Security with Role-Based Access

Business-Critical SharePoint (BCSP) is a Microsoft partner program that includes top solution and service providers who focus on LOB integration with SharePoint.

VIEIRA DE ALMEIDA & ASSOCIADOS (VdA)

With over thirty years of practice, VdA is the leading Law Firm in Portugal and a reference for legal advice, for its values, innovation, rigor and compromise with the client. Pursuant to the diversity of its clients and the growing expansion of Portuguese companies abroad, a significant and ever increasing part of its work is international. VdA teams up regularly with the global firms and the best practices in each market acting for Portuguese clients abroad and international clients in Portugal, Africa, South America and Asia.

More info at **www.vda.pt**

SAFIRA

Founded in 1997, SAFIRA develops Information Technology Solutions and offers Consulting Services to leading companies all over the world. The company reached an outstanding reputation and acknowledgement in sophisticated and high demanding market segments through its focus on excellence of service, customer satisfaction, and innovative solutions that produce tangible business results.

More info at **www.safira.pt**

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