



Partner: Sierra Atlantic
Web Site: www.sierraatlantic.com
Partner Size: 2,300 employees
Country or Region: United States
Industry: Professional services

Partner Profile

Fremont, California-based Sierra Atlantic helps customers optimize investments in enterprise business applications. The company operates in 16 countries across North America, Europe, and the Asia Pacific regions.

Software and Services

- Microsoft Office
 - Microsoft Office Professional 2007
 - Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007
- Technologies
 - Office Business Applications

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Partner Solution Extends Enterprise Systems, Reduces Training Fees by 30 Percent

“Putting a user-friendly front end onto complex systems results in greater adoption, more-timely access to business-critical data, and smarter business decisions.”

Scott Ciccone, Director of Marketing, Sierra Atlantic

Sierra Atlantic developed an Office Business Application, known as Sierra Atlantic OfficeNet, so that companies can extend their line-of-business systems to customers, employees, and partners. OfficeNet makes valuable back-end data available through the familiar user interface of the Microsoft® Office system. It helps companies reduce costs while increasing employee productivity. And it puts Sierra Atlantic in a position to serve a larger market.

Business Needs

Companies around the globe make considerable investments in enterprise resource planning (ERP), customer relationship management (CRM), supply chain management (SCM), and other enterprise systems. These systems make it possible for employees throughout an organization to update contact information, view up-to-date details about customers or vendors, and track the progress of a variety of business processes.

But user experiences with these systems are not always optimal. Because the systems tend to be quite complex, employees must undergo significant training to use them,

which is both time-consuming and expensive. Even after training, some employees are still reluctant to use these systems, which can translate into underutilized systems that therefore deliver less value to companies because the systems do not contain complete, up-to-date information.

For example, if an account executive feels uncomfortable having to log on to a CRM system to record and track opportunity-related information, he or she may skip that step and keep the information elsewhere. Even if willing to update the CRM system, he or she may put off doing so until the end of a sales trip, rather than entering information



after each call. This delay is often exacerbated by the fact that many enterprise systems demand too many computing resources to run effectively on mobile devices. Because of the delay, the information that is eventually added will tend to be less detailed and timely than if the account executive had entered it immediately.

Additionally, others within the company will not benefit from this information in a timely way, which may lead to confusion and duplication of sales efforts. Companies run the risk of similar inefficiencies regarding access to inventory information, updates to employees' performance information, and any other time that employees seek to add or retrieve accurate data from an enterprise system.

Solution

Sierra Atlantic seeks to improve the experience for those using complicated ERP, CRM, SCM, and other enterprise systems. The company, a Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner, has 15 years of experience in building end-to-end product development life cycle solutions and business process-integration solutions. For instance, the company's PORTALnet product makes it possible for employees to gain access to critical business information from a portal home page.

Recently, Sierra Atlantic developed an extension of PORTALnet. Called Sierra Atlantic OfficeNet, the solution extension is considered an Office Business Application (OBA) because workers can interact with enterprise systems directly from such frequently used productivity software as Microsoft Office Word 2007, the Microsoft Office Outlook® 2007 messaging and collaboration client, and Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007. This familiarity encourages employees to contribute to

enterprisewide knowledge bases and helps them retrieve critical information.

"We saw a tremendous opportunity in building on Microsoft Office programs," says Balaji Gangishetty, Director of Engineering for Sierra Atlantic. "Microsoft Office programs are becoming ubiquitous. By integrating with those programs, we're increasing our company's ability to reach new customers and help them derive greater value from their existing enterprise systems."

With OfficeNet, the account executive no longer needs to wait until the end of a sales trip to contribute important updates about various customer prospects; instead, he or she can enter information into the solution from within Office Outlook 2007. Furthermore, he or she can do so either when connected to the corporate network or in disconnected mode, in which case the information will automatically sync with the account executive's opportunity-tracking system when he or she logs on to the network.

Benefits

For Sierra Atlantic, building an OBA has created a greater market opportunity and helped make it possible for customers to enhance productivity, reduce costs, and increase user acceptance of enterprise systems. "Putting a user-friendly front end onto complex systems results in greater adoption, more-timely access to business-critical data, and smarter business decisions," says Scott Ciccone, Director of Marketing for Sierra Atlantic.

Lower Operating Costs and Improved Productivity for Customers

Sierra Atlantic believes that building products that take advantage of the familiar Microsoft Office user interface reduces

customers' training costs and encourages fast adoption. "If you move away from an enterprise application-based user interface to one based on Microsoft Office, you can see a reduction of 30 percent or more in training costs," says Gangishetty. "Employees aren't intimidated by solutions in which they can use a Microsoft Office program to get or submit information, so they're more willing to use the solutions. That improves productivity and increases the value of the company's investment."

Fast Development

Sierra Atlantic used the OBA framework and tools to expedite development of OfficeNet. "It took us just three months to create this integrated extension because there were so many plug-in applications available, which meant that we didn't have to build from the ground up," says Gangishetty.

Expanded Market Reach

Sierra Atlantic is increasing its potential customer base by integrating its solution with Microsoft Office products. "We expect an increase of up to 10 percent in market reach derived from our close partnership with Microsoft and by developing on Microsoft Office products," says Ciccone. "Developing the OBA is helping us clearly differentiate our offering and showcase our core Microsoft technical skills for a wide audience."