

# *E.J.'s* **Journal** **Adventures in Technology**

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*This is part eight of an ongoing series.*

**A**s with any project involving multiple players spread over a geographic region, staying abreast of project developments on a day-to-day basis is essential.

Our project development team has two members in Montreal, one in New York and three in Sandy Hook, Conn. Each week we have a conference call lasting from 30 minutes to several hours. The call helps clarify issues noted on our Project Status database.

The project status database is central to our daily development interaction. It is a fairly comprehensive management tool from the Relavis Corp., our contracted development provider. The database has 14 Lotus Notes views and serves as the central electronic filing cabinet for our overall project. Files include project plan, assigned tasks, task status, hourly analysis, status reports, project time, open issues, project documents, design documents, weekly timesheets, daily, all documents, upgrade methodology and keywords.

The project plan and project documents files are used to confirm or clarify issues regarding the overall scope of the project. In this section are our project budget, our business requirements document (the blueprint) and other communications related to the project.

Each day, programming teams from each location may raise questions in the "open issues" area. This area is organized to closely follow the actual structure of our project's OverQuota® database. Programmers can post a question or issue in a specific category area. For instance, if there is an issue dealing with "organizations," they simply post their message under that heading. They can set a level denoting urgency at high, medium or low. This information is synchronized with other team members as frequently as one wants—hourly or at least daily. In our case, we synchronize once a day, which means we electronically send all users or scheduled recipients a set of updated files where changes have occurred. If our company's sole job was software development and we had to link various regions, we probably would synchronize hourly.

As project director, I frequently visit the sections on status reports, task status and weekly timesheets. These sections provide an overview of how tasks relating to the development are progressing as well as a way to monitor our budget at weekly intervals.

Because the project status database is used exclusively by the development team for managing

its communications, a second database, "team talks," is used for communicating between users and program developers. It provides a conduit for team members to report bugs during the Acceptance Testing phase of the project as well as a forum to express general observations about the look and feel of the system. This layer of communication is also synchronized daily. The synchronization configuration is set to share the contents among all beta users and the development team. Users can compare their comments with those submitted by others and developers can query individual users directly regarding remedies or to clarify an issue noted by the user.

The only caution in using this database is if users are not clear in their communications, you can quickly spend programming hours, especially if you are being charged on an hourly basis. In our case, we have modified this part of the communication. While we provide an open forum for all users, our director of IT filters comments and issues into two groups. One group is for those areas that can be quickly addressed and fixed. The other group is used to compile issues needing an off-site developer's attention. The director clarifies and confirms issues before sending them to the next level. In essence, by filtering the comments, we can reduce off-site budget hours by

doing some of the work internally and by translating users' comments into "programmer-speak." The translation allows the off-site developer to concentrate on a fix instead of spending time linking a comment to a specific action.

Communication throughout all phases of the project is imperative. By taking advantage of the tools provided by our vendors, we have been able to communicate relatively easily with members of the team regardless of their location. By using the power of Lotus Notes synchronization, we can effectively issue updates on any files changed within a defined period of time. The benefit is that all team members can monitor the sections of the project at any time, knowing that all members are viewing the same content.

Next month we will look at software testing. ▲



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