

# Attenda

## Managed Services Firm Uses Collaborative Framework to Gain Efficiency, Cut Costs

### Overview

**Country or Region:** United Kingdom

**Industry:** Hosting

### Customer Profile

Headquartered in London, England, Attenda has provided managed services solutions for mid-sized companies since 1997. It employs 235 people.

### Business Situation

Attenda did not have a collaborative framework to effectively manage projects and resources across the organisation. This situation impeded resource management, budgeting, and operational efficiency.

### Solution

Attenda chose Microsoft Office Project Server 2007 and created a centralised, collaborative infrastructure and project information repository to manage its companywide portfolio of more than 100 projects.

### Benefits

- Increased operational efficiency
- Improved resource management
- Reduced costs
- Increased competitive advantage

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Attenda is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner based in London, England, and a growing managed services provider in Europe. At any time, Attenda has approximately 100 projects in progress, with employees maintaining project-related information in data silos on their PCs. Executives and resource managers did not have global insight into the project pipeline, and without a centralised repository for documents, it was difficult for staff to collaborate efficiently on projects. To solve these issues, Attenda deployed Microsoft Office Project Server 2007 and created a collaborative framework for managing projects and allocating resources across the organisation. Attenda cut project cost overruns, achieved an estimated 10 per cent improvement in operational efficiency, and boosted its reputation for excellence in project management—a key differentiator the company is using to win more clients.



Enterprise Project  
Management Solution

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## Situation

Since its inception in 1997, Attenda has focussed on achieving excellence in managed services for business and brand-critical applications on behalf of mid-sized clients throughout Europe. In short, Attenda designs, builds, secures, supports, and optimises the performance of Internet and enterprise application infrastructure for clients, irrespective of their physical location. While the company's consistent 20 per cent growth per annum follows the trajectory of the outsourcing market overall, its success rests on an unwavering commitment to ensuring 100 per cent uptime for its clients' IT operations.

To maintain industry-leading service-level agreements with clients, Attenda developed Attenda M.O., a shared operations platform of process, people, and technology to generate cost efficiencies at superior levels of availability, performance, and security. Furthermore, the Attenda service management framework, a core component of Attenda M.O., is based on the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL), which is used for all service management activities. The company's stringent compliance with ITIL processes—on average, it undergoes one audit per week—has earned Attenda an International Standards Organization (ISO) 20000 certificate, a rare distinction among global managed services companies.

A key component of Attenda M.O. is the efficient, cost-effective management of projects. The company uses Microsoft Office Project 2007 to manage the work, schedules and finances for an average of 100 concurrent projects. The majority of these are client-facing projects that are used to manage each client's hosted infrastructure solution from design, through testing, implementation, and application optimization. Internal projects

focus on implementing internal operational efficiencies, such as adopting new Microsoft technologies to deploy and optimize for clients.

## Resource Management Challenges

Attenda resource managers used different spreadsheet-based resource plans to allocate and track resources from its engineering, networking, architecture, client infrastructure, and research-and-development resource pools. “We have used [Office] Project 2007 since its inception and are familiar with the benefits of the Gantt charts and other tools for project management, but we were lacking an overall structure to join everything together,” says Tom Needs, Director of Client Services at Attenda. “Poor understanding of our portfolio made resource management challenging. It was difficult to assess current resource allocation and costs, and it was even more challenging to forecast resource plans for proposed or anticipated projects.”

## Collaboration Barriers

Attenda lacked a centralised, collaborative framework for project-related workspaces and document management. Instead, project managers stored their individual projects and often the associated documents on their PCs, which inhibited collaboration across the organisation.

“We were disjointed in how we worked. If a project manager asked a system engineer to complete a task, the project manager would have to talk to that engineer to ensure the task had been done before he could kick off the next one,” says Needs. “Staff didn't always know where to find documents and poor versioning processes compromised the quality of our service. We wanted to mitigate the risk of making mistakes in our implementation process, for

example, using the wrong document for a solution build.”

### **Inefficient Manual Workarounds**

Without a central infrastructure to manage concurrent projects, Attenda was forced to devise manual, paper-based workarounds. For example, to maintain accountability for every component of every project, Attenda required the completion of a “work package”—a spreadsheet that itemised tasks to be checked upon completion. Each project manager had to create and manage dozens of work packages per project, distributing them to the right resources and collecting them when they were finished. This process was an inefficient way to prove ISO 20000 compliance.

For Attenda, the business ramifications of these issues were significant. Reduced efficiencies, reactive resource allocation decisions that led to increased overtime or resource shortfalls and project delays, and inaccurate budgeting, did not match the company’s goal for superior operational efficiency and client service. “Attenda aspires to be recognised by clients, competitors, and industry experts as the beacon of project management excellence and we want to go to market with project management as a core strength,” confirms Needs. “Not only do we think it could save us money and improve competence, but it could be an enabler to win new clients.”

Attenda needed to create a centralised, collaborative project portfolio solution to better visualise, plan, prioritise, and determine risks for its projects. Needs and his colleagues decided to find a solution Attenda could use to meet its challenges.

### **Solution**

In April 2009, after evaluating several project portfolio management vendors including Primavera, Compuware, and Plan

View, Attenda chose Microsoft Office Project Server 2007 because it offered excellent capabilities for strong team coordination, standardisation in managing projects and programs, and centralised resource management.

Employees gain access to the capabilities of Office Project Server 2007 through its client applications: Microsoft Office Project Professional 2007, already deployed across 50 Attenda computers, and Microsoft Office Project Web Access. Staff can also access familiar Microsoft Office productivity programs from Office Project Professional 2007 to view, update, and analyse project information. The solution also interoperates with Windows SharePoint Services, a feature in the Windows Server operating system with which Attenda employees were already very familiar.

Taking advantage of how these work together, Attenda staff can centrally store, link, and share project-related issues and documents for collaborative project management. By using out-of-the-box enterprise templates, employees can standardise on best practices to improve project management throughout the organisation. For example, the company could retire its manual project work packages and use templates that are linked to each project’s task lists and are easily accessed and edited online. Now, when a resource completes a task, he or she would also be signing off on the work package.

“While the solution’s compatibility with our infrastructure and expertise was a big factor in our decision, for me the turning point came when I saw Office Project Server in action,” says Needs. “I was particularly impressed with the graphically rich reporting suite and analytics, but the process and workflow functionality was also key. Suddenly, it became clear how we

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could implement this solution and benefit from it."

In June 2009, Needs and his business stakeholders, including the head of project management and the company's resource managers, worked with a systems integrator to gather business requirements and mock up a solution with workflows and a high-level implementation of Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007. "This was a beneficial exercise, because while we were configuring the solution, we were also re-evaluating and optimising our business processes to take advantage of the new technology," says Needs.

Then Needs and his team loaded test data and projects into Office Project Server 2007 and worked through different user scenarios, tasks, and workflows to ensure that the project was configured to meet their requirements. After testing it with a few projects in the production environment, Needs began a gradual rollout across the company.

"Once the stakeholders saw how Office Project Server would improve resource management, budgeting, and project-related collaboration and document management, they were eager to get started," says Needs. "By November 2009, 50 per cent of Attenda employees were using Office Project Server 2007 daily."

Attenda has gradually rolled out additional functionality within Office Project Server over the subsequent months and plans to finish the rollout across the company by October 2010.

### Benefits

Today, Attenda more effectively manages its entire portfolio of projects to gain operational efficiency, reduce costs, and improve resource management and

collaboration. The company also showcases its higher standard of project management excellence in marketing collateral to drive new business.

"Since deploying Office Project Server 2007, Attenda is well on its way to achieving our vision to be a leader in project management excellence within the managed services industry," says Needs. "With a central repository of all project information, we can plan, manage, and report on projects across the enterprise in a way that wasn't possible before."

### Increased Operational Efficiency

Using Office Project Server 2007, Attenda staff can access all project-related data from their PCs at work, or via a browser anywhere they have an Internet connection. With information and documents easily accessible from centralised, online workspaces, collaborating with colleagues on project tasks and other related activities has never been easier. Now that employees can use the centralised project-related document management system in Windows SharePoint Services, document versioning issues are a thing of the past.

Needs describes this improvement in productivity as removing the "white spaces" between project tasks; all the stops and starts that occurred as people had to confirm with each other that project tasks were completed on time. "The project manager is no longer the pivotal point for communicating actions. We are far more collaborative and we have better visibility into the entire portfolio," says Needs. "We feel confident that we are already achieving our goals of a 10 per cent increase in operational efficiency across the board."

Perhaps the most popular improvement in project management came with introduction of templated work packages in

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Office Project Server 2007 to replace the company’s paper-based work packages. “I’d estimate that our project managers are saving 15 per cent of their time now that they’re no longer chasing resources to ensure accountability.”

#### **Improved Resource Management**

Attenda resource managers are using Office Project Server 2007 to gain visibility across the corporate portfolio to manage resources wisely, ensuring that resource capacity and capabilities align with current and future needs. “With Office Project Server, we have revolutionised the way we do resource planning. We’ve gone from reactionary resource assignments to proactive forecasting,” says Needs. “Using graphs and resource charts, we can be scientific about our planning, analysing current projects, and forecasting for proposed projects. Right now we have confidence in exactly where our resources will be required and deployed three to four weeks out, and a far more certain forecast stretching out three to four months. Previously, we were sometimes forced to make resource allocation decisions using the rear-view mirror.”

Attenda uses its improved resource management to more accurately prioritise its projects. The company strives to maintain a balance between resources allocated to client-facing projects and internal ones. “Obviously, we need to focus on our clients, but we also need to keep on top of our internal projects to stay competitive and improve the business. Managing this balance is very complex,” says Needs. “But now we can use Office Project Server resource management tools to compare the costs for client and internal projects and prioritise them based on predicted revenue streams.”

#### **Reduced Costs**

Using Office Project Server 2007 to increase employee productivity means that Attenda is paying less in labour costs to get the same tasks done as it did previously. Needs is confident that Attenda employees are bringing projects to a successful conclusion faster than before. “When you look at our efficiency gains across the project management team and how we implement client solutions, they all add up to thousands and thousands of pounds in salaries and revenues recognised earlier than before,” he says. “Not only are we delivering projects more quickly today, but we’re doing so with less effort and cost. We’ll also save money by not having to grow the headcount of the business as fast as we expected. We’re already seeing savings from not having to recruit as many people as we thought a year ago, despite following and exceeding our forecast growth trajectory. I estimate that we will see at least £100,000 [U.S.\$149,000] in savings from not having to hire as many people to deliver a growing workload over the course of 24 months.”

Using tools to trace the source of project issues, test alternative scenarios, and see the effects of a change, project managers can maintain optimal resources throughout a project’s life cycle. With these capabilities, Attenda can save overtime expenses and reduce cost overruns due to issue resolution. “With better visibility into what resources we will need for proposed projects three, four, five months out, we can make sure we negotiate the right contracts for the right amount of time to trim our budgets,” says Needs. “I would say that we are 10 per cent more efficient today than we were before Project Server.”

#### **Increased Competitive Advantage**

By using Office Project Server 2007 to gain excellence in overall project management

## For More Information

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[www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)

For more information about Attenda products and services, call 44 (0) 1784 211 100 or visit the website at:

[www.attenda.net](http://www.attenda.net)

for the entire company, Attenda can bring Needs' vision to the market. While the system itself is invisible to the company's clients, the increased quality of project communications and improved efficiencies have been noted. "We have seen a steady increase in client satisfaction," says Needs. "Typically, clients now feel that the project manager has more time to communicate rather than chasing actions around the business—and we are working more productively overall."

Based on these positive impacts, Attenda has raised the profile of its project management excellence to use in its marketing collateral as a competitive differentiator. "To win and keep clients, it's imperative that we gain their trust as they make that difficult transition from managing their IT in-house to handing that responsibility over to us," says Needs. "With Office Project Server, we can build clients' confidence in our capabilities by demonstrating that our project management function is a centre of excellence underpinned by a first-class system. At Attenda, we think one of the most important, long-term benefits of using Office Project Server is that it will help us win business."

## Microsoft Office System

The Microsoft Office system is the business world's chosen environment for information work, providing the programs, servers, and services that help you succeed by transforming information into impact.

For more information about the Microsoft Office system, go to:

[www.microsoft.com/office](http://www.microsoft.com/office)

For more information about Microsoft Office Project, go to:

<http://office.microsoft.com/en-gb/project-help/?CTT=97>

## Software and Services

- Microsoft Office System
  - Microsoft Office Project 2007
  - Microsoft Office Project Server 2007
  - Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007
- Windows Server 2003

## Technologies

- Windows SharePoint Services

## Hardware

- Dell Latitude D Series 2.2-gigahertz desktop computers
- HP DL380 G5 server