

Case Study: Anaplan, June 2011

Overview

Why did the CEO of an international start-up fly his chief architect halfway around the world to meet with ClearPoint based solely on a colleague's recommendation?

Read below how ClearPoint's reputation secured them the challenge of building the Service Delivery Platform for business analytics innovator Anaplan and how, by engaging and delivering with Feature Driven Development (FDD) methodologies, ClearPoint met key milestones, exceeded client expectations and positively impacted Anaplan's own development processes.

Coming in at a strategic level ClearPoint brought their unique philosophies and processes to impact the project from the outset, a critical factor in the overall development being successful.

"The team had a depth of skills, experience and a working style that was just brilliant.

They delivered the project on time, within budget and bug free."

Guy Haddleton, Anaplan Inc. CEO

The Engagement

When casting about for a business to take on a significant software development project an organisation can traditionally spend many months and much money searching for the best candidates. But Guy Haddleton, Anaplan CEO, is not your traditional executive. An instinctual operator with many successes already behind him, Guy places great store in the right people, so when someone he worked with recommended someone he should work with the engagement window narrowed appreciably. He explains how Anaplan came to engage with ClearPoint.

"A trusted colleague recommended their work. It was enough to convince me to spend an air fare for my chief architect Michael Gould to fly down from San Francisco and to meet with them." Upon first meeting, ClearPoint were transparently suitable, and the engagement process began.

The fact that the business was based in New Zealand had no impact on the decision, says Guy, a Kiwi ex-pat, nor was he fazed by their being a relatively new organisation. He liked and trusted the people, and that was that. The initial meeting took place on a Friday: by the following Monday ClearPoint had a team in place, ready to engage.

The Project

Anaplan is described by Guy as a "Next generation Business Intelligence platform." Rather than data being contained in spreadsheet silos, core Anaplan technology enables the various channels of a business – finance, sales, executives, analysts – to store and share their business data in the cloud. Guy had successfully developed a similar concept 20 years ago, which he sold to COGNOS for US\$160m cash in 2003. Advances in technology – particularly the idea of working in the cloud – encouraged him to "get the original team back together" and create the next generation business analytics technology that was to become Anaplan.

ClearPoint were tasked with developing the Service Delivery Platform (SDP) that allows Anaplan clients to interact with Anaplan's next generation core technology via a modern Software as a Service (SaaS) model. "We were the platform and they built on top of that," Guy explains. "They were responsible for developing a lot of the client-facing tools as well, log ons, authentication and so forth." Not just impressed by their work, the process which ClearPoint brought to the table was, Guy says, "very attractive," working with them quickly becoming "very, very comfortable."



The Process

ClearPoint engage the flexible Feature Driven Development (FDD) process, something that Guy says was critical to the success of the engagement. “In fact,” he continues, “it was such a brilliant way of working that we’ve adopted it for our team in the UK.” This involved scheduling and delivering the project in rolling fortnightly blocks, ensuring complete transparency, clear and achievable milestones and a healthy momentum to the overall development. The adaptable nature of this way of working and ClearPoint’s strategic agility proved critical to a project where, at one stage, features were being moved around every week.

The People

A process is only as good as those executing it, and Guy has nothing but praise for the ClearPoint team: “My experience has always been that it’s the quality of the individual people that you assemble around you that will make a project succeed, and these guys built a team with a depth of knowledge, expertise and experience that was exceptional.” ClearPoint pride themselves on experienced, professional software development teams that apply a real sense of craftsmanship to their work. “A lot of developers at the moment, particularly up in the States where we’re based, would start a project like this then get lured away by the latest Facebook or Google-type development,” says Guy. While Guy understands the attraction of that type of work, he recognised the depth, focus and commitment of the ClearPoint team to deliver completely on Anaplan’s requirements, and that clearly impressed him. For Anaplan, ClearPoint favoured building on existing technology including both cloud-based “best-of-breed” Software as a Service (SaaS) providers and industry standard Open Source components. This reflects ClearPoint’s core philosophy of “best-fit for the client” and allowed an integrated solution to be developed quickly, leveraging the elasticity

of cloud services. Additionally, ClearPoint developed an infrastructure design that was vendor independent, technology agnostic, and IT Architecture-led. As Anaplan grows, the software technology and infrastructure platform is ready and available to grow with them.

Conclusion

Coming in at a strategic level enabled ClearPoint to bring their unique philosophies and processes to impact the project from the outset, a critical factor in the development being successful. Key, also, was the flexible approach and adaptive strategies undertaken by what Guy considers to be a highly skilled team with great depth of knowledge and experience. “I’ve got the guys doing another piece of work at the moment that’s very important to our business and that flexibility of approach is why they’re there. They can scale right down and back up again as we need it.” While that endorsement speaks volumes, Guy augments it with a final comment:

“ClearPoint put together what was required on time on budget and without bugs. I can’t think of any greater recommendation than that.”

About ClearPoint

ClearPoint is an independent, highly trusted international IT services company. Recognised in the 2010 Deloitte Fast 50 and Asia Pacific Technology Fast 500, ClearPoint combines thought leadership in IT architecture with world-class software integration and development to construct high quality IT systems.

