

REALIZE GREATER VALUE from your IT investment



Project Highlights

Customer

Canada Post

Challenge

Rapidly develop, test and modify a secure online file storage service

Project Duration

13 months (design to beta to deployment)

Innovative epost Vault Service Brings New Customers and Revenue to Canada Post

User feedback and an agile development methodology enable Canada Post and Innovapost to deliver an online service that is the first of its kind in the postal industry.

To offset declining letter-mail volumes, Canada Post is continually looking for new ways to extend the use of existing assets and diversify its revenue. In 2010, Canada Post identified its epost service – an online mail and bill payment service – as an excellent source of potential subscriber and revenue growth.

“The epost platform is a key Canada Post asset that features bank-grade security and close to one million active users,” explains Anthony Austin, Vault Product Manager, Emerging Services, Transaction Mail Line of Business at Canada Post. “We realized that if we added a highly secure and private storage service to the existing epost offering, where users could also securely share documents, we would be able to add a great deal of value and attract new subscribers.”

Acting on opportunity

Canada Post envisioned an online “vault” that would enable users to upload, store and share important documents in a secure online environment within their epost accounts.

“The service would leverage Canada Post’s trusted brand and target two main user groups: heads of households responsible for organizing bills and important documents, and tech-savvy users looking for a secure way to share documents across a variety of devices such as mobile phones and tablets,” says Austin.

Canada Post believed that it had an innovative idea on its hands, but wanted to ensure that epost users felt the same way. To conduct the business analysis and provide application development assistance, Austin and his team turned to Innovapost, Canada Post’s dedicated IT partner.

Taking an agile, iterative approach

“As the product manager, I normally take feedback from customers, analyze market data, and deliver product requirements to a group like Innovapost who then translates those into detailed specifications for the development team,” Austin explains. “But in this case, Innovapost helped us to do something new – we worked as a collaborative team from the get-go to

INNOVAPOST CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

epost Vault Highlights

Scope

Deliver a secure online document management and sharing service for epost customers

Benefits

- Delivered a fully-functional, user-tested service months ahead of schedule
- Changed the organizational mindset about product/service development
- Introduced a new revenue stream and dramatically enhanced an existing service

develop and test the application in short iterations, gather user feedback and make changes on the fly.”

Using an agile development methodology, the team built and tested the application incrementally with daily participation from all team members. This approach accelerated development by allowing the team to test functionality throughout the process and apply upgrades as needed.

“The agile approach is the opposite of the waterfall method, in which we would spend months writing requirements and lock ourselves away for development and testing,” Austin explains. “The agile philosophy is based on the idea that code is better than documentation – you don’t want to document requirements and start development only to find out seven months later that one of your major assumptions has changed.”

In a daily scrum lasting 30 minutes or less, members of the business and development teams reported on the work done to date and discussed the work ahead. “Innovapost would come in each day with suggestions that we could evaluate,” recalls Austin. “At the end of the week, we’d look at the latest piece of code and get a realtime view of how the product was evolving. That allowed us to ensure that things were on track and address anything that appeared to be going off course or was no longer appropriate.”

Gathering user feedback

After just 14 weeks of development, the Canada Post/Innovapost team had created a working beta service that was ready for release to select epost customers.

“We felt that it would be better to put out a working – although incomplete – version of the Vault to epost customers to get their feedback,” says Susie DeFranco, General Manager, Multi-Channel Customer and Consumer Solutions. “We let them try the service for almost ten months and used their input to add important functionality and make the interface more intuitive.”

For example, the team learned that many users were interested in upgrading their account to receive additional storage space but weren’t sure how to do so. “We had developed three different Vault storage categories for users to choose from, but we quickly saw that users became confused when they tried to access additional storage space,” Austin recalls. “So, we added a prominent ‘upgrade’ button on the homepage and that really helped to increase the number of account upgrades.”

The beta testing also validated a number of Canada Post’s assumptions – including the desire for users to store important “life management” documents such as wills and health records. “Users were very interested in receiving reminders about important life events, such as a passport renewal or an upcoming immunization

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Susie DeFranco, GM of epost at Canada Post

appointment, so we incorporated an alert management feature that sends out reminders when an important date is approaching,” says Austin.

Not only did the user testing gather valuable information that was used to develop the initial public release, it has also shaped the roadmap for future versions. “The life management reminder feature is a natural fit for a mobile app, so the beta gave us the confidence to begin development of an app that will allow users to access that kind of information securely via a smartphone or tablet.”

Faster, better, cheaper

Following the beta testing, Canada Post was able to launch a fully-functional version to all epost users almost six months ahead of schedule. “The agile approach not only allowed us to have more confidence in our first release – it let us launch it early and with more features than planned,” says Austin. “In short, we were able to operate more efficiently and that allowed us to test and add a password storage feature that was originally planned for a 2.0 release.”

Susie DeFranco echoes Austin’s enthusiasm for the agile method initiated by Innovapost: “The iterative software development methodology was a bit of culture shock for both the project team and the executives following it,” says

DeFranco. “We were accustomed to explicit plans that define the outcome we want and the sequential steps to get there. But, we’ve actually been more productive and efficient with this style of development and deployment. Gathering feedback from real users and potential customers – and having the chance to make changes on the fly – allowed us to deliver a more robust service than planned.”

Rolling out the Vault

To date, more than 2100 users have signed up to use epost Vault, and Canada Post expects this number to grow exponentially when the service is actively publicized and promoted in early 2012. Canada Post also plans to incorporate the successful agile development approach introduced by Innovapost into future online service development projects where appropriate.

“We’ve proven that this development method is effective, so we will continue to expand and improve the Vault going forward in this fashion,” says DeFranco.

Canada Post also plans to keep Innovapost close by as the service evolves. “Innovapost wasn’t just a company that came in, did their work and left – they were a true partner that worked hand-in-hand with us on a daily basis,” DeFranco concludes. “We learned, we fixed and we developed this service together – and we will continue to do so.”

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