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Thanks To OptimizedNow, Eskel Porter Scores \$1M In Sales Leads

California Consulting Company Transitions To SaaS Business Model

By Heather Bowser *OptimizedNow Writer*

ROCKVILLE, MD — Until about a year ago, executives at Eskel Porter were sitting on a sleeping goldmine. Sure, they had a hunch that a money-making treasure was down there someplace, but they lacked the tools to plow through the strategic dirt and unearth it.

For years, Eskel Porter, a software consulting firm in Sacramento, Calif., spent most of its efforts repackaging ideas and software based on the Microsoft Dynamics software platform. The 30-year-old company didn't make a product, per-se, but tailored the Dynamics CRM platform to help their clients in the public sector keep track of requests for information.

Their intellectual property was high in demand, company officials said, but the problem was that delivering it was slow and expensive.

All of that changed in October 2008, said John Schloemann, Eskel Porter's Vice President of Software Solutions. That month, he said, OptimizedNow, a consulting firm based in Rockville, MD., offered a solution.

"Use Software-as-a-Service to do your business," the company told him. "You'll reduce costs, access more people and make more money. We can help you do it."

Under the guidance of OptimizedNow, in October 2008, Eskel Porter unearthed a software product called "Public Records Tracker," an online, on-demand program that now reaches potential users across the entire globe.

After Public Records Tracker™ debuted in March 2009 at Convergence, a Microsoft Dynamics-focused convention, interest in all of Eskel Porter's services — and not just its shiny new website — soared, Schloemann said. Since then, the California company has added three new full-time positions to its workforce. As of this month, Eskel Porter's sales pipeline for Public Records Tracker has grown from \$0 to more than \$1 million in solid sales opportunities from more than 25 companies. More than 2,500 unique visitors have visited the new website.

And, Schloemann added, all this growth happened during a slumping economy, which has essentially squashed or flatlined other software companies across the globe.

"[OptimizedNow] helped us realize that we had something much better than we thought," Schloemann said. "It's really exciting."



ESKEL PORTER'S CHALLENGE

For the last three decades, Eskel Porter delivered their IT solutions to their clients using traditional methods. "The problem with this," Schloemann said, "is that it costs lots of time and money and they only reach one client at a time."

"People thought [the service] was great, but we didn't know how to take our specialized knowledge of government records and reach the masses," Schloemann said. "We were only one company and we had a limited bandwidth of resources."

Meanwhile, "Software-as-a-Service," an emerging on-demand business model, was increasing in popularity. Invented around the turn of the 21st century, SaaS (pronounced "sass") allows customers to rent software online, rather than buy it. Companies only use what they need and only when they need it. They also don't have to buy expensive servers, manage data centers or deal with upgrades.

SaaS solutions have spread like wildfire in recent years, mostly because of widespread access to broadband and confidence in online security, said Andy Ridinger, OptimizedNow's Business and Marketing Manager.

Although Schloemann and the Eskel Porter executives said they knew SaaS was "the next big thing," they didn't have a clue how to make it compatible with their business plan, Schloemann said.

But this is common for most software companies, OptimizedNow executives reassured them. Billing, provisioning, security, marketing and handling the subscription revenue all have to be changed, addressed and understood when switching from traditional on-premise delivery to SaaS.

"Changing to a [SaaS] solution is much more complicated than just putting up a webpage," Ridinger said. "You can be the most successful company in the world, but this model is totally different. You'll still need help dealing with the change."

OPTIMIZEDNOW'S SOLUTION

That change is OptimizedNow's specialty. The Maryland company specializes in helping software companies using Microsoft's Dynamics CRM platforms to grow, improve and expand. They've grown up, so to speak, dealing with major industry changes such as SaaS.

"We've seen it. We've done it. We know the potholes," said Reed Overfelt, the CEO of OptimizedNow.

The road around those potholes, Overfelt said, happens in four parts, beginning with an extensive online assessment to "benchmark" a company and assess its maturity. The assessment analyzes eight key factors to measure a company's maturity across several important strategic and go-to-market factors. It also measures the likelihood that a given solution can successfully change from an on-premise to an on-demand model.



After an in-depth “tele-consultation” to review the assessment results, answer questions, provide some foundational education around SaaS and prepare for the next step, OptimizedNow meets with the company for step two of the journey. This step, a two-day workshop, is held about two weeks after the assessment.

For Eskel Porter, this part of the process happened in October 2008. For two entire days, the top executives and marketers from both companies camped out in a room at the Eskel Porter office in Sacramento. Hour by hour, OptimizedNow pushed the other executives through a variety of exercises, geared to identify Eskel Porter’s target market, target buyers and “many other important strategic factors.” Essentially, OptimizedNow shows their clients a mirror, identifying all the places for improvement. They also help company officials self analyze their own markets and customers and create a solid plan of action.

“The journey these companies go through during the workshop is very interesting,” Overfelt said. “At the end of the first day, [our clients] can sometimes look like they got ran over by a truck. We typically don’t get invited to dinner that night. They’re not mad, they’ve just never thought about their business that way.”

By halfway through the second day of the workshop, however, things change as they “see the light,” he said.

THE GOLD MINE

For Eskel Porter, that light came in the form of what would become PublicRecordsTracker.com, a website that offered the company’s original services, but faster, to the entire world and without the financial burden of on-premise software or servers.

During the workshop, OptimizedNow helped Eskel Porter figure out how to package and sell their software as a subscription. As part of step three of their service, OptimizedNow helped them build a target persona — they called her “Barbara.” OptimizedNow also gave suggestions for the pricing, messaging and positioning of the site.

“People with problems will first look to an internet search for their answers,” Ridinger said. “The key is to make sure people can find you when they’re looking.”

With 44,000 searches a day for the phrase “public records,” OptimizedNow suggested the obvious: Call the site and product what it is, a public records tracker. And it worked.

“Instantly we had people from all over the country contacting us. It was really exciting,” Schloemann said. “Before then, we worked off of referrals to receive leads.”

Meanwhile, Lady Luck smiled on the California company. As his first act as president, Barack Obama signed an executive order strengthening the laws around how government agencies report and keep track of public records. And with tightened budgets, the “Barbaras” of the nation needed an instant way to be compliant.



"I have been in the software industry for over 19 years and this was the first time I've ever found a software company with such a massive market and no apparent competitor," Overfelt said. "It was amazing."

Over the months, OptimizedNow is continuing step four of its service, an ongoing procedure called "Guided Execution." Since the site launched, OptimizedNow has helped Eskel Porter build and update their financial model, plan and execute strategic partnerships, and given general assistance and advice where needed.

"Without Public Records Tracker, things wouldn't look as good as they do for us, that's for sure," Schloemann said. "Our name is out there now. By the time [SaaS] catches on, we will be one of the more experienced firms in the business."

About Eskel Porter

Since 1978, Eskel Porter Consulting (www.eskelporter.com) has been providing information technology solutions and consulting services to the public and private sectors. The Sacramento-based company focuses on meeting its clients' business objectives throughout the IT lifecycle, from planning through deployment and into maintenance and operations. Eskel Porter's philosophy is to do what it takes for its clients to succeed - providing the expertise and resources to make technology work. Eskel Porter is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, Eskel Porter's Public Records Tracker is powered by Microsoft Dynamics CRM.

About OptimizedNow

Strategic Consulting from the Founders of Microsoft Global Hosting and Rackspace. OptimizedNow is the first consulting firm to provide a proven end-to-end solution – from strategy to execution – designed to drive measurable results through clear product positioning. We offer simple solutions, expert knowledge, proven results for software and cloud computing companies. And, unlike other consulting firms, we do more than talk. We help our clients execute – through guided execution and venture capital funding. Our clients includes Microsoft, Lockheed Martin, RightNow Technologies, as well as numerous other smaller software companies. www.optimizednow.com

