From Multitasking to Synchronized Product Development

By conquering this hidden killer of productivity in new product development, a digital camera manufacturer was able to double the number of new products and meet 100% on-time launch.

Client Background and Business Situation

Our client, one of the world's leading suppliers of digital cameras, had to improve its New Product Development (NPD) performance to:
- Increase its output of new cameras to offer multiple price points to the market
- Increase on-time performance to meet the market window of sales seasons/events

The Multitasking Problem in NPD

Work schedules had to be synchronized for more than 100 engineers and experts, as well as marketing and manufacturing facilities spread around the world. Moreover, engineers were working on multiple launches at any given time, and also resolving production issues on previously launched products.

Working with Realization, the client identified the following opportunities to increase engineering productivity and reduce cycle times:
- A detailed schedule had been created at the beginning of every program, with start and stop dates for every task. The schedule, however, became obsolete within the first few days of execution. Each department and location then resorted to local priority lists that were not aligned with each other, causing engineers to be pulled in multiple directions.
- When engineers multitasked, the experts also could not focus on solving one problem at a time because the engineers were asking for their help on numerous items. A vicious cycle resulted, in which engineers started even more work while waiting for experts.
- The multitasking further increased when engineers had to fix bugs in the prototypes already developed, or had to produce something for marketing to present at trade shows.

Achieving Synchronization in NPD

To reduce cycle times and increase the engineers' productivity, Realization implemented a synchronization system that replaced all local schedules in the company with a single set of priorities for everyone. Primary elements include:
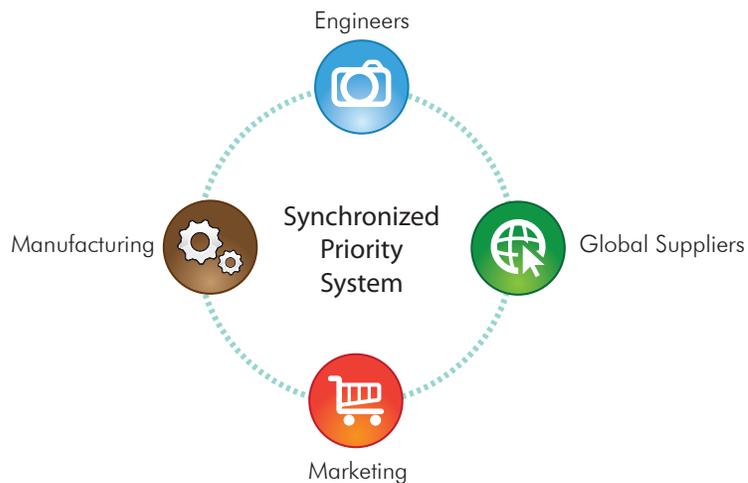

Results

More than doubled its new products while achieving all-time record in hitting seasonal windows of opportunity.

6 New Cameras   **15** New Cameras

BEFORE   AFTER

- A flexible schedule to account for uncertainties in execution. Priorities are kept current and aligned across departments and levels in the organization. Trade-show dates are incorporated into the schedules as high-priority milestones.
- The list also batches low-priority tasks into higher levels (for example, a set of designs for an area) so that engineers as well as experts can focus on the same work and issues.
- As engineers have become more productive, they have been able to focus on fixing bugs in prototypes.

Engineers can now finish their work with less multitasking, greater speed and higher efficiency.

Final Results
- New cameras launched increased from 6 (2004) to 15 (2005).
- Cameras launched in the spring window increased from 1 to 7.
- On-time launches increased from 1 in 6 to a perfect record of 15 out of 15.

If doing projects 20-50% faster is vital for your organization, contact us at +1.408.271.5100 to get started.