OnePlace—The power of a platform

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I had the privilege of presenting at PGRI's SmartTech Conference in New York last year and talked about 3 decisions we made when we began to build OnePlace, the world's most widely used lottery sales force automation solution. During the talk, I focused on three big decisions we made which were:

1. **To go native**—rather than building just a web-based system, we decided to build a system that would use a native iPad app for users in the field and a great web app for users in the office. Of course it would have been easier to just build a web-based system, but we were betting our company's future on this new system, so it was much more important to do the right thing—the best thing for our users.

2. **To start with a blank screen**—when we started building OnePlace, the clear market leader for lottery sales force automation was OrderPad, which our company launched in 2004. We could have simply copied screens from OrderPad when we created OnePlace. It would have been the easy thing to do and the safe thing to do, but it would have been the wrong thing to do. We

had learned so much about the industry and the needs and use habits of our users that we knew we should start with a clean slate and build a user experience which would be much better than OrderPad; and that's exactly what we did.

3. **To build a platform that was configurable**—OrderPad had been customized for each jurisdiction and we learned that when solutions are heavily customized, they aren't easy to add features to and are difficult to upgrade when new technology becomes available. To add a feature, each jurisdiction's code-base must be manipulated individually, which can be a very laborious, time-consuming and expensive process. With OnePlace, we wanted to be able to add great new features that lotteries could start using immediately.

This article dives deeper on the last of those listed above, the choice to build a true software platform that is constantly evolving and improving.

Using Resources Wisely

Rather than spending our time and resources maintaining custom "consulting-ware" and working on features for one Lottery while squashing bugs for another Lottery, our development team works to make OnePlace better for everyone. We add features, we make things faster, we tweak existing features to make them better; we do these things to help move the sales needle; we do these things to help make sales teams more effective and efficient. Our customers spend less time testing new releases and more time getting results.

An Evolving Platform

As mentioned above, OnePlace is constantly improving and evolving at a very rapid pace. When new versions of OnePlace are released, they are immediately made available to all OnePlace lotteries. With OnePlace, there's no need to manually upgrade or hand-weave in customizations like there is with consulting-ware. For example, within the last 16 months, Hudson Alley released versions 5, 6, and 7 of OnePlace, along with several minor releases. Each of these new versions had several major new features along with tons of smaller improvements. The new feature list of OnePlace 5, 6, and 7 is too large to include here,

many of us still follow that same routine? Most of us get our news from the national media, cable news channels and the news websites that are national, like CNN, MS-NBC, BBC, The Wall Street Journal, etc.

Before the Internet, the local media we followed would be the primary vehicle for merchants to get exposure for their messaging. Local newspapers and TV stations were filled with advertising and promotions and coupons and such. Those media channels have been completely disrupted by the nationalization of news and information dissemination caused by the Internet.

Lotteries continue to focus most of their resources on local media, even though the consumers are tuned into national media. Of course, a reason for that is that we all operate within the boundaries of our own states and provinces. But we have evolved our products to appeal to the multi-state markets. And even though we all operate locally, our customers are not tuning into the media on which we rely so heavily, at least not nearly as much as before. For all these reasons, we need to change with the times and evolve our multi-state game and beneficiary advertising and promotional strategies to fit with the new realities. ∎

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but some of the biggest impact features for our customers included:

• Advanced Search to allow users to do powerful ad-hoc queries.

• Saved Searches to allow them to save those searches.

• Retailer Tags to allow users to create static groups of retailers.

• Retailer Photos to allow users to use the cameras on their iPads to take photos of retail locations and save them with the retailer record in OnePlace.

• A fully featured planogram system to provide lotteries with a powerful way to planogram instant games and share those planograms.

• A robust forms solution to allow lotteries to reduce paper and improve business processes.

• A powerful project management system to track and report on tasks for new initiatives.

• And much, much more.

OnePlace 8

Exciting new features for OnePlace 8, to be released within the coming months, include Silent Background Syncing, Retailer Quotas, POS Ordering, and a native Windows 10 app to provide lotteries with a wider choice of devices and operating systems.

Yes, OnePlace 8 will include a great new Windows 10 native mobile app!

OnePlace was initially released in 2012 with a great web app and a great native iPad app which is optimized for off-line use. At the time, some lotteries asked us if we would also offer a native Windows client; at the time our answer was "not yet." As a Microsoft Certified Solutions Provider, Hudson Alley had begun testing Windows 8 pre-release versions as soon as Microsoft made those versions available to partners. We also began testing Microsoft's latest development tools. Based on this testing, we felt that Windows 8 was poised to be one of the worst versions of Windows that Microsoft ever released and that there was no way that we could develop software on that platform that we'd be proud of and that our customers would enjoy using. History has proven us right; Microsoft has already ended support for Windows 8, just a little more than 3 years after it was released. Within a year after the Windows 8 release, Microsoft released Windows 8.1 which was marginally better. But even with Windows 8.1, the development tools still didn't exist for us to build a great experience for our users, so we continued to wait.

Windows 10 and Universal Windows App development tools changed everything

Windows 10 was released in July 2015 and is a great operating system. Microsoft had a great line of hardware in its Surface Pro tablets and with the release of Windows 10, it now has an operating system worthy of this hardware. Additionally, Microsoft released development tools that would allow its partners, like Hudson Alley, to build outstanding user experiences on this platform.

In Summary

It's impossible for us to choose which of the three decisions has been most important to the success of OnePlace, but we know that the choice to build a true software platform will be the key to our ongoing success as well as the ongoing success of the lotteries that use it. We feel very gratified that we can deliver great new features to our customers because of the investments we've made in the platform. ∎