

Microsoft OEM Marketing



EMC Consulting helps improve Jumpstart Elements System for better user experience, streamlined management, and infrastructure flexibility

Through its Microsoft Innovation Jumpstart Program, Microsoft funds marketing activities for its OEM partners that generate demand for PCs pre-installed with genuine and premium versions of Microsoft Windows®. To support an easy, efficient process for creating online, print, outdoor, or retail advertising materials that qualify for Jumpstart funding, Microsoft provides creative assets such as logos, messaging, and graphics of the Windows UI via an online tool called the Elements System.

“Rather than putting content on a DVD and sending it in the mail, or posting it on an FTP server, we’ve chosen an online delivery system,” says Nadine Kano, a senior director in the Microsoft OEM Marketing group. “Our partners tell us that it’s easy to get what they need from the system, which saves them time.

“However, now they want more, for example assets for products in addition to Microsoft Windows and assets localized into more languages. While the tool currently serves our top 45 OEM partners today, we have literally thousands more who could benefit.”

The OEM Marketing group needed to figure out how to expand the Elements System in a manageable, cost-effective way.

“We needed a seasoned team of professionals to help us with a one- to three-year software development roadmap,” says Kano. Through an RFP process, the team selected EMC® Consulting, a trusted, long-time partner with demonstrated expertise in developing solid, innovative business solutions using Microsoft technology.

EMC Consulting began its engagement by conducting a series of discovery sessions with stakeholders in the Elements System to define business objectives for enhancing the tool. Three key goals emerged: better performance to ensure an exceptional user experience, simplified site management to improve efficiency of uploading new assets and lower overall costs, and an expandable and scalable system framework that could support more assets and more users.

An onsite EMC program manager was assigned to oversee all aspects of the engagement to help ensure project milestones were consistently met, issues addressed, and budgets kept within specified parameters.

“Having a dedicated EMC program manager onboard has proved quite valuable,” says Kano. “Careful oversight and regular reporting keeps us up-to-date, so if we need to show results to our executive staff, we can be ready at short notice to present it in a professional and credible way.”

Improving the user experience

EMC Consulting improved the design for filtering assets by product and type in order to address performance lags. To test the possibility of achieving much faster response times by using Microsoft Silverlight, which delivers higher quality media experiences and rich interactive applications to the web, they implemented a feature called “the Configurator,” that enables users to preview combinations of assets by dragging and dropping them onto an interactive “scratch pad.” When compared with the SharePoint-based implementation, filtering assets using Silverlight proved considerably faster. This convinced Microsoft that they should eventually transition the UX layer of the Elements System from SharePoint to Silverlight.

“One of our goals for the Elements System has been to demonstrate innovative use of Microsoft technology,” says Kano. “We want our successes to help drive greater adoption of our products.”

EMC Consulting also helped improve performance and protect against data loss by transitioning the Elements System to a new hosting infrastructure. By leveraging existing business relationships with hosting providers, they were able to negotiate a two-year hosting agreement for the Elements System.

“Not only are we saving money, but we’re also getting more value for our investment,” says Kano. “We now have clustered SQL servers, 24x7 helpdesk support, monitoring, redundant backups, increased bandwidth, and the reliability of an EMC SAN.”

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Nadine Kano, senior director of Microsoft OEM Marketing’s Elements Team

Simplified site management

“For our Elements program to be most effective, we have to make creative assets available to our partners as soon as we get them,” says Kano. “Therefore, we needed the ability to upload the assets and make them accessible faster than we could before.”

The process for uploading Elements into the system was originally manual, requiring several hours to create the SharePoint page and related details just to publish a single asset. EMC Consulting automated parts of the process, such as generating details pages and thumbnail previews of images, reducing publication time from hours to minutes.

Expandable and scalable framework

While development efforts were underway, EMC Consulting worked on a roadmap for upgrading the existing architecture to achieve better performance and scale. Because the Elements System was originally built under a very tight timeline (six weeks), the Microsoft OEM Marketing team had selected SharePoint as the foundation for the solution. With the number of assets and users growing, the system was reaching the limit of SharePoint’s ability to scale. Doing all filtering and retrieving of assets using SharePoint interfaces slowed the system down, particularly for users outside of the United States.

EMC recommended an n-tier architecture with multiple SharePoint sites to make room for a large number of additional assets, SQL Server for storing the assets, and Active Directory for authentication, so that users would only have access to the assets they need. Most of the data processing would be moved from SharePoint to other system layers to greatly improve performance. EMC also designed a more effective hosting architecture and proposed a replication strategy that would reduce asset retrieval times for users in Asia and Europe.

Some of the key Microsoft technologies, products, and tools employed would include the following: Microsoft .Net 4.0, Microsoft Silverlight™ 3.0, Microsoft SharePoint® Server 2010, Microsoft SQL Server® 2008, Windows Server 2008 R2, Microsoft Expression® Web Designer, and Microsoft Patterns and Practices Composite WPF.

Positive feedback and growing interest

Since its deployment, the system's popularity has been gathering momentum, and Microsoft OEM Marketing is fielding an increasing number of inquiries about gaining access and expanding functionality. Although currently focused on the Jumpstart Program, Microsoft OEM Marketing has at least two other programs in mind for the system.

"We had high expectations for the project and the site's popularity has been a welcome affirmation of the work we've done," says Kano.



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