
Printed from LocalTechWire.com
Posted: 07/01/2004 07:32 AM

Whipping Up Sales: Salesman Starts a Company To Fill Project Tracking Needs

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Editor's note: RTP Beat is a regular feature on Thursdays.

DURHAM — Fritz Gartner, a sales professional for 15 years, says he always wanted a better way to keep track of sales projects.

Gartner came to North Carolina from Houston to work at Reichhold Chemicals as vice president of global sales. He left the company last July to start Wavoka Inc, which he self-funded.

This July, Wavoka launches the first version of SalesWip, a web-based service that helps organizations prioritize commercial projects, track their progress and forecast their financial impact.

“Basically, I always wanted a better way to keep track of my sales projects to evaluate what they’re worth based on the probability of success and a way of communicating it to management so they won’t bother me about it,” Gartner says.

A management view

Then, when he joined Reichhold Chemicals in management, he saw the other side. “I wanted my guys to bring me this stuff.”

So, he had a rudimentary version of what he had in mind developed at Reichhold, which was implemented on the company intranet. After leaving the company, Gartner sub-contracted coding to programmers and developed a much more sophisticated Internet version.

“It’s significantly different than what we did at Reichhold. It’s like the difference between a Model T and a Ferrari,” he explains.

Gartner says keeping the wild overspending that doomed so many software and Internet companies following the economic downturn in mind, he has intentionally focused on keeping expenses down. “No one can believe how little money we’re spending,” he says.

Gartner says the web-based service will cost smaller companies with a few users \$1,200 per person a year.

“It uses a video quality flash interface that’s “smooth, easy to look at and use,” he says. The service automates processes Gartner and other sales professionals find time-consuming and complex to do otherwise, he adds. “Our goal is to exceed the expectations of the sales person in terms of usability and of management in terms of getting useful information from the system.”

Slice and dice

The service helps both answer questions such as which projects are most important, who is responsible for closing them, what needs to happen next, what they are worth, and when the revenue hits. “It lets you really slice and dice the pipeline,” Gartner says.

“Other sales systems like SAP let you know what happened in the past and enable analysis of that data, but Saleswip keeps you current,” says Gartner. “It helps answer questions about the immediate and longer term future so you can make the right decisions about resource allocation, budget and forecast and evaluating the sales force.”

Gartner says Wavoka has a verbal commitment from another major chemical company to Beta test the service starting in July. He expects version two to launch early in 2005.

He says the company plans to hire sales and support people and look for funding later this year. “We’ve also presented this to many large companies and they seem authentically interested, so we’re encouraged,” he adds. Gartner says his sales contacts help him open doors.

The company web sites, Wavoka.com and Saleswip.com are still under development.