



## Australian Partner Enters New Markets with Office 2010 Project Management Solution

### Overview

**Country or Region:** Australia

**Industry:** Software Development

### Partner Profile

IPM Global is a software development company based in Australia. With 20 employees and two decades of experience, IPM Global develops customized solutions for project-related industries.

### Business Situation

IPM wanted to develop a solution that increased productivity for project managers, key users in the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction industries, who spent hours in Microsoft Outlook.

### Solution

IPM Global built its solution by leveraging Microsoft Office and Dynamics CRM technologies, resulting in a popular product that deploys in Outlook and is poised to help it enter new markets.

### Benefits

- Huge Microsoft Office Install Base
- Outlook a Market Differentiator
- Ease of Development
- Collaboration via SharePoint

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Miree Le Roy, Director, IPM Global

IPM, a software development company based in Australia, focuses on solutions for the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction industries. Struggling against antiquated industry standards and searching for a forward-thinking and relevant solution for its end users, IPM found the perfect partner and answer to its market’s needs in Microsoft Office technologies. The IPM Global Project Management Software suite, which deploys in Outlook and helps users save time and create efficiencies, is poised to grow the company’s bottom line as it enters new markets.

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Reef Fielding  
Systems Architect  
IPM Global

## Situation

IPM Global, a non-selling ISV based in Australia with 20 employees, focuses on solutions for project-related industries—specifically the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction space (AEC). Previous successes have included the sale of IP to Sage Timberline in 2001, two modules of which are still implemented in the company's offerings to this day.

Having existed under various banners since 1992, IPM Global's focus for the last three years has been the development and promotion of its flagship product, the IPM Project Management Software suite.

Having noticed that many of the solutions offered to the AEC industry were not user-friendly and built on antiquated platforms, IPM Global set out to develop and offer an end-to-end solution based on a platform that was already well-known and relevant in the space.

## Solution

### **Huge Microsoft Office Install Base**

According to Reef Fielding, the Systems Architect for IPM Global's application, a key focus in the development of the solution was avoiding mistakes they had seen repeated again and again in the AEC space; namely, solutions that were developed with "an accounting back-end approach," rather than around the needs of project managers and their staff.

"Our approach was to look more at what the project managers wanted to use, and then look at how that might interact with an accounting back end," says Fielding.

IPM Global's assessment of the average workflow of project managers brought up one distinguishing factor again and again—the importance of email to a PM's daily operations.

"Over the last 10 years, managing projects has changed dramatically," says Fielding. "Now everything is done through email. A project manager will spend eight hours a day working in his inbox."

Miree Le Roy, Director at IPM Global, underscores this, adding that Microsoft solutions were more often than not involved. "The way they work is they sit inside their Outlook. They're either using their email or Excel."

Given the popularity of Microsoft Office in the AEC space, IPM Global made the decision to build its Project Management tool in the Microsoft Dynamics XRM Development environment.

"By choosing the [Microsoft] platform," says Le Roy, "we were able to let them work in an environment they're comfortable with."

This also created a relevance to the solution, a critical factor in an industry "littered with solutions," according to Fielding. Leveraging the popularity and usability of Microsoft Office in IPM's solution was the answer. "Software programs can do a lot of wonderful things," asserts Le Roy, "but if people don't use them, they're a waste of time."

### **Outlook A Marketplace Differentiator**

Even more significantly, partnering with Microsoft has given IPM Global's solution a significant differentiator in the AEC marketplace.

"The whole paradigm of how you use the product is quite different," says Fielding.

Customers noticed right away. "By using the Microsoft XRM platform as a development environment, we have put project management squarely in that Outlook space," Fielding asserts, "That is

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Director  
IPM Global

probably the thing that opens most doors for us.”

Le Roy concurs, “People can see that that is a huge difference. As soon as we tell them that it runs through Outlook and that it interacts with Outlook and that it’s Web-based, that gets their attention. There’s nothing like that out there.”

#### **Ease of Development**

The ease of developing in the XRM space was a huge plus for IPM. “One thing about the development process with the platform that we’re using is that it tends to be rapid,” states Fielding, “so we can develop a huge amount of functionality in a short amount of time.”

The team was really pleased with what Microsoft’s platform brought to the table. “We’re using the standard features of the [Microsoft] platform, so it’s highly customizable, Web-based. It has a very powerful work flow engine,” Fielding tells us.

These features helped make IPM a standout in its niche, according to Fielding. “We certainly use those to differentiate ourselves from our competitors.”

Developing in the XRM space has given the solution the flexibility and advanced compatibility it needs. “Our solution is currently compatible all the way back to 2003 and Microsoft tells us that it will be compatible with Office 365,” Fielding says. “Because our application is built on the XRM platform, we just take advantage of all that.”

Microsoft has eliminated guesswork and problems, he continues. “It really hasn’t been a challenge at all to have that compatibility.”

#### **Open XML Key to Development**

Open XML was also a key factor in facilitating the development process. XLSX files, critical to IPM’s “Import Data” tool, were an obvious choice, being newer and more open in comparison with older, closed binary formats.

By using Open XML, IPM also avoided having to buy complex and expensive third-party components for .NET development, since XLSX files can be read using standard .NET framework.

It was a simple matter of unzipping the XLSX to get a few XML files with a known, constant structure that could then be easily read and processed.

#### **Collaborative Function via SharePoint**

Of IPM Global’s competitors, one branch of solutions had given them some pause—collaborative systems.

“The documents around these projects can be posted on the systems and then accessed by a number of organizations,” says Fielding. There are some downsides to these collaborative solutions. “If [contractors] are not a subscriber to that system, they can be cut off,” he adds.

Nonetheless, the presence of these collaborative options had set a bar in the industry. IPM Global had ignored the problem for some time, mostly because they had not been able to find a comprehensive solution in keeping with the high standard they set for their company. SharePoint 2010 changed that.

“Right now we’re going through an upgrade cycle to the SharePoint 2010 platform,” says Fielding. “Once we’ve finished that, our next project is to then develop some collaborative tools and functionality with SharePoint so we can really provide a full project management

## For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers in the United States and Canada who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to:

[www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)

For more information about IPM Global, visit the company website at: [www.ipmglobal.net](http://www.ipmglobal.net)

system including collaborative functionality."

### Plans for the Future

Having already deployed their solution to 300 seats and 20 to 30 sites in Australia, IPM is happy with the business results of its Microsoft-based solution so far.

"Given the economic climate for the last two years," Le Roy says, "we're thinking that's not a bad effort."

Mid-range to long term goals will involve penetrating the North American market and eventually Europe, as well. South America is also looked to as a potential area of growth. "In the United States, especially that sector, it's really down. It's a bad time to launch a product, but we deployed in 20 sites here in Australia. We are finding that the market is loosening up a bit."

All in all, Le Roy describes IPM's outlook for the future as one of "enormous opportunity." This is due in large part to the ease with which the Microsoft elements involved facilitate end user's uptake of the solution. "They can see the productivity gains," says Le Roy. "When you put in a pure accounting system, it often takes a very long time to see the productivity gains. The whole point of the system is that it's designed to be a rapid implementation. Because the environment is familiar it's easier for their staff to actually start using it, since they're already using Outlook. That's half the battle."

This has led to a lot of positive feedback from end users, bringing with it the promise of long-term relationships and significant ROI. "One of the things that has changed is that we're developing a different relationship with our clients," states Fielding. "Customers who have bought this solution end up liking us."

She adds: "Ultimately we would like to get into the large construction firms, Fortune 500, government departments. There is no reason why we can't with this solution."

## Microsoft Office 2010

Microsoft Office 2010 gives your people powerful, timesaving tools to do their best work from more places. With new capabilities and insightful updates to Excel, PowerPoint, Word and Outlook, Office 2010 offers the complete package — with familiar, intuitive tools. Now you can express ideas, solve problems, connect with people, and create amazing results — in the office, at home, or on the go. For more information about Microsoft Office, go to: [www.office.com](http://www.office.com)

## Software and Services

- Microsoft Office 2010
- Microsoft Outlook
- Microsoft Dynamics CRM