

Introduction

Chute Gerdeman is a full-service retail design firm, serving some of the best-known retailers, manufacturers, and service providers worldwide. National and international retail brands turn to Chute Gerdeman to enhance their image, differentiate their position, and contribute to their growth and success. Services range from developing brand strategies and designing store environments to implementing complete merchandising programs. As principals Elle Chute and Denny Gerdeman explain, "We're here to increase sales and create brand buzz, and that only happens when we make the consumers' experience more memorable."

The Challenge

In the Internet economy, where what used to be an hour is now a minute, projects for clients like Red Lobster, Sara Lee, Stride Rite, Eddie Bauer, and CompUSA became more deadline-intensive than ever. Chute Gerdeman's success has always been based on close client communication and the ability to work intimately closely with project teams in a timely manner. Now, these relationship practices were even more crucial. With clients and extended team members (contractors, lawyers, designers, etc.) often thousands of miles apart and in multiple time zones, traditional communication channels -- meetings, fax, voicemail, and e-mail -- were no longer enough, especially when rapidly changing documents were involved. And because the work shared with clients is typically creative and visual, these forms of communication could not handle the kind of review cycles necessary to make timely decisions. A much faster and more efficient workplace was needed, one that facilitated collaboration and kept projects on track. Moving from a physical workplace to a digital workplace was essential to success.

The Solution

Chute Gerdeman used eRoom to set up "virtual war rooms" for individual clients. Previously, these war rooms were actual physical locations at Chute Gerdeman head quarters (like conference rooms or offices for example) where internal and external Chute Gerdeman team members -- account executives, project managers, graphic designers, and production designers -- met to collaborate and contribute to different areas of the client project. The rooms became repositories for all relevant information pertaining to a project -- documents, images, materials, artifacts, etc. Chute Gerdeman transformed these physical meeting rooms and their content to virtual eRooms, bringing the client team members into the development process much earlier than was possible before. The room was now available to Chute Gerdeman contributors and their clients through an internet browser at any time, from any place.

Virtual war rooms closed the gap between Chute Gerdeman and its clients while putting projects on the fast track and reducing cost-of-business expenses. Early-stage concept visuals and sketches were shared quickly and easily with all internal and external team members. Worldwide customers accessing eRoom could now engage in immediate review cycles, a process that previously had been drawn out due to overnight shipments and time zone changes. Key project documents -- leases, design layouts, specifications, and contracts -- now resided in a single, easy-to-access location, ensuring that everyone was literally on the same page. With client revisions in writing, Chute Gerdeman minimized the miscommunication that had occurred with reviewing marked-up documents the next day via overnight mail. Now the client revisions were right in the document. With client revisions in writing, Chute Gerdeman minimized the potential for miscommunication to occur by limiting the number of marked up documents sent via overnight mail and reviewed the next day - now the client revisions were right in the document ready for review at any time via an internet browser.

When a client requested a new brand and packaging for 135 different products, Chute Gerdeman simply downloaded .PDF files of its designs to an eRoom for easy review and approval. Before eRoom, these some graphical files were exchanged via e-mail, quite often slowing down the network and mail application performance of both the client and Chute Gerdeman. Additionally, capturing client feedback from several contributors required Chute Gerdeman to find and locate the most current document and coordinates this feedback with all of the contributors - clearly a logistical challenge. Now, with eRoom, meeting time, travel time, color copies, FedEx's -- all routine expenditures for Chute Gerdeman -- have been reduced or eliminated. In the case of the project involving 135 products, Chute Gerdeman saved approximately 10% of the originally slated project time.

The Benefits

Because of its ease of use and flexibility, team members at Chute Gerdeman adopted eRoom immediately. Clients embraced it, too. According to Account Manager Wendy Johnson, "eRoom is easy to use with clients because it's so straightforward. They don't require any hand-holding." Opening an eRoom is simple -- anyone with a browser can use it immediately from any location. Functionality is intuitive, while management is team-based -- no need to bother internal IT groups.

Because eRoom was adopted immediately, it produced immediately. For Chute Gerdeman and its clients, this meant more efficient day-to-day communication, faster-track projects, a reduction in cost-of-business expenses, and better overall project management.

"We literally saved two months on an 18-month project because we could post things on-line rather than send them by FedEx," says Johnson. "I don't know how much money that alone saved us but I'm sure it was substantial. And we're not spending time photocopying things or traveling for meetings, which not only saves time, but creates a less expensive product for our customers."

"Using eRoom, we can deliver the kind of service which allows us to stay ahead of the competition," points out Chute Gerdeman CEO Denny Gerdeman. "eRoom virtual war rooms have become the benchmark for how Chute Gerdeman gets work done with our customers." Adds Wendy Johnson, "As a percentage, we save approximately 15-20% on our expenditures in each client engagement."

Next Steps

After testing eRoom successfully in selected client relationships, Chute Gerdeman plans to roll out the "virtual war room concept" to the majority of their customers. The company is also establishing a best-practices protocol based on its eRoom model.