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When it comes to software development, businesses can focus too much on features. The issue with this is that it doesn't always solve specific pain points.

Adapting to Agile Software Development

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Seven Peaks Software's agile approach to software development sees them partner with companies to build products that provide real value.

Now in its eighth year of operations, Seven Peaks Software has built up capabilities in software development, design and digital transformation consulting among other areas. It has created solutions for numerous enterprises primarily in Scandinavia, and Thailand as well as clients throughout APAC.

One of the most unique aspects of the company is its desire to be a trusted technology partner as opposed to a vendor. For some clients, Seven Peaks Software needs to explain the differences in mindset or approach to software development.

Traditionally, an organisation wanting a new software application or to digitise certain processes, but without the in-house capabilities usually approach these projects with a very linear mindset.

They list their needs, vendors bid on a project, one is selected, the winner starts work and eventually it is handed over.

This makes sense in theory. But the reality often ends differently as businesses eye features as opposed to solving specific problems.

"One issue with a project approach or mindset is that you have a linear timeline and a focus on features, not solving specific pain points. The downside to this is time gets spent building things that may not be needed," Mr Jostein Aksnes, Co-Founder and CEO of Seven Peaks Software, says. "We firmly believe that it's a mistake to look at big software investments as one-time projects. In many cases, they should be considered product development where there are ongoing improvements taking place. This way the investment made

into building the solution will provide a much higher return of investment."

Moving from project development to a product development mindset can be challenging due to many aspects of a business.

"Too often in project development, clients think about how something is done. In reality, they should be thinking in terms of what. What is the problem they need to solve? What pain points are users facing? When those are answered, we can then look at the how." Mr Roy Ivar Moe, Seven Peaks Software Co-Founder and CTO, points out.

He continues, "When you develop a technology solution under the project mindset, there is no promise what is being built is good. You don't take the time to measure if it works. Instead, you always want to be scoping and deliver value in product increments. We need to be looking at the impact and effort of each feature and laying it out in a roadmap instead of just immediately trying to address a huge set of features in one big delivery".

Viewing Results

Seven Peaks Software supports clients with both traditional waterfall projects and modern agile software development projects. The company recommends the best approach based on the client's needs.

"Agile development allows you to set more frequent release milestones

which provide value to the client and users sooner. We can also start learning how the users interact with the software earlier in the process,” Mr Moe points out. “We are making incremental improvements that can be tracked and measured as things progress.”

To accomplish that goal, Seven Peaks works closely with its clients as a partner. Together, they define a roadmap that solves specific problem statements for specific users. This differs from taking a wish list from a client and working through it.

“If you develop using a roadmap, clients see value in what is being done. Not only that, but it ensures stakeholders gain a clear idea of what’s happening early in the process,” Mr Moe states.

Mr Aksnes adds the product mindset allows software to be developed in a much more valuable and cost-effective way. Time usually spent in the dark wondering what’s happening can now be used to make improvements.

“Attention and investment can be directed towards solving issues or making things better when you have a roadmap and visualised product,” Mr Aksnes says. “We also find that there tend to be non-essential items that slow down project development. Too many companies get caught up in things that aren’t essential or relevant when focused on an entire project.”

Testing and time aren’t aspects businesses always consider when starting a product. Using a traditional project approach where every last feature needs to be built from scratch takes months or years depending on size. Companies are then left playing catch up.

“Time to market is incredibly important when it comes to business. The more time you spend developing something, the more opportunities that have been lost,” Mr Aksnes explains. “You can save cost by clearly defining a

Minimum Viable Product (MVP) and focusing on getting that shipped with the key features first. Not just in terms of financial costs, but opportunity costs as well. At the end of the day, it is all about speed. The sooner you can validate your core concept, MVP or idea, the sooner you can start building out a more extensive product or solution.”

Both Mr Aksnes and Mr Moe admit that not all companies are comfortable or ready to work in a modern agile way. This can be due to company policies, procurement departments or just the lack of trust in paying for a service without knowing entirely what will be received.

To help mitigate risks and concerns, Seven Peaks provides free scoping workshops to advise clients on how projects could be split into multiple milestones and releases through a more agile approach.

“For businesses which do not yet have a clear overview of all their requirements, our free scoping workshop is a great starting point,” Mr Moe reports. “From there, we can take them through the next steps. Even if they are not able to proceed with that specific project, it shows potential clients our integrity, capability and mindset.”

Saying No

For a lot of companies, saying no to a potential client is incomprehensible. Seven Peaks sees it differently. The firm positions itself as a trusted technology partner which requires total honesty and a willingness to forgo short-term gain for long-term relationship building. Sometimes saying no leads to a better result than saying yes.

“You can’t say yes to everything. And we don’t want to say yes to everything. It is more beneficial to explain why a project is not viable as opposed to doing something we may not believe in,” Mr Aksnes notes. “Clients are paying us for

our expertise as a consultant. A good consultant is someone you can trust to do what’s right for your business.”

This is only half of the equation. From Seven Peaks’ perspective, the focus is on creating products that make a difference for clients. Pursuing win-win scenarios means the best possible results for all parties.

“From our side, we are passionate about building good products. We are passionate about making a difference. Saying no may close one door, but it can open another. The only reason we turn down a project is because we care,” Mr Aksnes says.

Mr Moe points out that Seven Peaks goes over why it can’t do something with most clients being understanding. He adds a lot of these companies appreciate the approach and even come back looking for opportunities to work together.

Of course, it was not always like this. Seven Peaks has been careful to balance its desire of becoming a trusted technology partner with creating a sustainable business.

“In the beginning, we were more opportunistic and chased many different types of business opportunities. During the last year, we have been more selective and focused on the type of projects and clients we take on,” Mr Aksnes explains. “A lot of companies are after a more modern approach to technology solutions even if they don’t always know exactly what that is. Working with us showed them a different way forward.”

As the company has matured and business has grown, Seven Peaks has come into a position where it works more with clients more as a partner than a vendor. This allows it to build long term relationships that benefits everyone.

“We have never wanted to be just another vendor. While that is how we started, we always aimed to be more than that. However, you need to gain the trust of the local market,” Mr Moe states. “Gradually, as you gain that trust, you evolve what you do. Taking on projects in the early days allowed us to sit down with clients and show them how our approach could benefit them.” ■



PHOTO: SEVEN PEAKS SOFTWARE

Above Left: Mr Roy Ivar Moe, Seven Peaks Software Co-Founder and CTO (left) Mr Jostein Aksnes, Co-Founder and CEO of Seven Peaks Software (right) launched the company in 2014. Above: Seven Peaks Software moved into a new office that is capable of supporting up to 100 employees in 2020

Facts

- Seven Peaks Software was established in 2014
- Services the firm offers include software development, design and digital transformation consulting
- Agile software development is an approach focused on launching a product and then making incremental improvements over time
- The company offers free scoping workshops to clients interested in learning more