

7 Steps to Profitable Project Management, Many Projects at a Time

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Wouldn't life be easier if you could manage or contribute to just one project or focused effort? For you, like most people, work is likely to be more complex.

With responsibilities in more than one initiative, you have multiple deadlines and milestones to meet. You have more clients, more vendors, more requirements, more costs to track, more information to share and more documents to file.



Single project tools and techniques usually lack the overall work view and other features you need to see and manage priorities and progress. To avoid getting dragged down by multiple-project chaos, you need to know and see more.

Managing multiple projects? Methodology matters.

Systems engineered for multiple-project management and collaboration can help. Still, methodology and culture, not software and technology, are the keys to success when you regularly participate in more than one internal or client project.

We've managed more than 2,500 projects for clients since 1989. Along the way, we developed a methodology that has enabled us to grow to nearly 150 people (and climbing) and earn repeat business from some of the world's largest and most demanding companies.

Seven steps are essential to success in organizations that simultaneously manage multiple initiatives. Effectiveness begins with good pre-project planning plus an understanding of what a project is and what can be at stake.

What is a project?

Some people call them projects. Some call them jobs. Some call them contracts. Others just see it as their work. Whatever you call what you do, managing it almost always involves:

- Applying technical knowledge, people, communications skills, and management talent.
- Attempting to meet contract requirements and customer commitments on time and within budget.
- Trying meet customer expectations.

Skillfully balancing time, resources and scope is often not enough. To stay ahead, teams and companies frequently must beat schedules, improve costs and exceed expectations. This requires much more than pretty Gantt charts.

Where good *projects* management can take you

For organizations of every size, the benefits of getting work management and collaboration right can be seen in staff morale and customer satisfaction. It also shows up in your financials: According to a study conducted by Pitney Bowes, Inc., and published in *Automation World*, good project management practices saves 25 to 35 percent in time to complete a project.

Given today's salaries and related expenses, that adds up to a lot of money.

In our experience, companies or teams that cannot manage multiple projects are unable to grow past a certain point, usually about 15 people and \$1 million in revenues. If you consistently miss deadlines, blow budgets and fail to deliver complete solutions, others will not want to give you new work or referrals.

Standard project management tools might not help. They tend to be rigid where your work is fluid, resource rather than task oriented and lacking in communication and collaboration functions.

Every project is an opportunity

Every project is an opportunity to produce something new, to make a real difference. You can introduce change, increase productivity, enhance capabilities of your company or of a client or build new relationships.

If you get it right.

What commonly goes wrong? No communication tools, unclear or poorly communicated goals, no agreed milestones, inaccurate staffing, missing deadlines, surprises, inconsistency from project to project.

Consistently following these seven key steps can directly improve your operations, profitability and sanity.

1) Define scope, deadlines and goals before you unleash your team

Leaders should clearly define each project before bringing in the full team. If you are unsure of the objectives, scope and deadlines, the effort will begin in confusion. Responsibilities and even resources can be worked out at the first meeting, but not without a firm grasp of what is to be achieved, when and for how much.

The internal kickoff meeting is an opportunity to energize and unite the team to work for a successful project outcome. It serves notice to all team members that the project has begun. Have an agenda that includes a clear exchange between sales and the project team. Communicate the project requirements.

Ensure everyone understands the work to be done and their part in the effort. Nodding heads do not mean message received! Ask each member to state their responsibilities in their own words before adjourning. No one should be guessing at what the client and management want!

2) Communicate, communicate and collaborate

Lack of communication derails even the most brilliant teams and shining projects. Ensuring key messages are received and understood as a matter of routine is the single most important factor in a project's success.

There cannot be enough communication among team members and with the client. You must talk, chat, discuss and exchange ideas.

Communication should not just float off into space or rely on individual recollection. Every organization can benefit from a tool that enables you to capture all material information. E-mail is unreliable, particularly when unacknowledged or lost in the spam. Investigate a projects library and collaboration system.

A systematic approach to communication can be a boost to individuals or groups reluctant to interact, like engineers and software programmers. An automated, accessible and mandated communication and collaboration tool can be a wise investment!



3) Meet deadlines even if you must reduce scope

"Time is becoming the new corporate metric," says management consultant Peter Drucker. In an ideal world, you'd completely finish every project on time. When forced to choose, the best bet is usually to get something demonstrably done by deadline.

Improving time management

- Most meetings are unnecessary or mismanaged and result in wasted time.
- Effective meetings have an agenda, a time constraint and minutes to document resolutions and actions.
- Meeting productivity is inversely proportional to the square of the number of participants!
- Scope creep is reduced by the time and money available to do the work.
- Rational people will make reasonable scope decisions to meet a critical time frame. Given more time, team members like engineers will always over-design, test excessively and worry.

Today, time is as important as cost and quality. Time to market is critical. Time to respond to a client request is critical. Time to incorporate change is critical. And time to install a finished system is critical.

In addition, work expands to fill the time available for completion. When under a tight schedule, which you should be, keep in mind that clients remember meeting schedule commitment, NOT reduced scope.

Communication matters here too. Involve the entire team in establishing and maintaining schedules. Keep your milestones to ones that matter. It is better to have a few you meet than many milestones you don't!

4) Run every project the same way

When it comes to projects, consistency is quality. It builds efficiencies, reduces costs and improves quality.

Consistency is the most cost-effective, least capital-intensive route to profitability. Have a common methodology you follow for every project, regardless of the project content. Invest in technology that supports standards and your methodology, as this will reduce ongoing costs.

With or without a project application system, your project methodology should include:

- A known location for communication, updates, documents and changes.
- An acknowledgment system for important communications like change orders.

5) Chose proven projects technology, deploy it properly

Technology for projects management and collaboration should be field-proven. This sounds obvious. Yet many of us learn the hard way the importance of avoiding unproven technology with 1.0 serial numbers.

Teams with few projects of experience often overemphasize technology. Seeing some application as a primary driver of their solution, they lose focus of the primary purpose of the technology: improving project delivery and completion.

Selecting projects management tools by technological parameters instead of functionality is a mistake. Remember that advanced features are seldom used. You want stable technology that improves, not hinders, your work.

Make sure you also request sufficient training and implementation services at start-up. Typically the biggest investment in application deployment is staff time. Good installation and proper training accelerate the learning curve.

6) Monitor real-time costs

Many project managers are flying blind on project costs. Perhaps they don't see it as part of the job. Perhaps the accounting system doesn't produce reports until month- or project-end when it is too late to make adjustments. Perhaps they have a latent desire to change careers!

You'll want to avoid surprises. Put in place a project management system that lets you see individual project costs at any time. Move cost-tracking responsibility into project team rather than leaving it up to accounting. This is easily done with the right system and speeds up overall project execution.



Let all project members see and understand project costs to help you work within budget. A system that allows you and the team to track project costs in real-time keeps more projects on track.

Remember the old adage "Time is Money" rings true.

7) Manage the client as much as the project

You get hired as the expert. This is good and bad.

The good news? The client wants you to take a leadership position. The bad news? The client wants you to take responsibility when the project goes awry. The client's perspective can include:

- The project team can figure out what needs to be done.
- Anything that needs to get done was part of the IMPLIED scope.

- "My project is the most important, if not the only project you're organization is working on."
- "If I change my mind, the project team **MUST** accommodate the change in my time frame"
- "If the project is running over budget, I expect my partner to share the cost."
- The client never remembers the voyage; just the destination.
- Perception **always** wins over reality and good intentions.

Make sure you learn what the client **perceives** to be the scope of the project. Then double-check progress on a regular basis. Communicate.

Conclusion: record, record, record, record

As implied in each of the seven steps, to effectively exchange information, you will need to record it in easily shareable format. When your information is real-time "in-flight" data, you can:

- Quickly show the client each change order he or his team acknowledged and approved.
- Move key people in and out projects without a loss of momentum.
- Review ongoing projects to more accurately price and staff new ones.



You can do all that and more if with a project knowledge base. Ad hoc systems break down: E-mails get lost, overlooked, deleted or eaten by Spam filters. You need to automatically capture project correspondence, contracts, drawings and other documents in one secure location.

A project library or knowledge base can be available for reference by all approved new team members and client staff. With the right system, you'll have an audit trail of the entire project which could be handy for a variety of reasons, including pricing disputes. The right system

will even allow you to see who changed a milestone, when and why.

Brilliant execution of short-term assignments can sacrifice the project mission. Regularly review the major goals. Communicate. Record and exchange information. And enjoy project success.

About Tom Dormo

Tom Dormo has managed client projects of all sizes for The RoviSys Company. He has also managed internal initiatives, including the development and marketing of the GrandView projects management and business solution. He can be reached at 330-562-8600 or tom_dormo@rovisys.com.

About GrandView Business Solutions

GrandView Business Solutions is a division of The RoviSys Company that develops and markets business solutions for value-added services and other companies that manage multiple client or internal projects. You can find more information at www.grandview2000.com.

About The RoviSys Company

Founded in 1989, RoviSys has 150 employees and more than \$20 million in sales. We've completed more than 2,500 process automation projects worth from \$5,000 to more

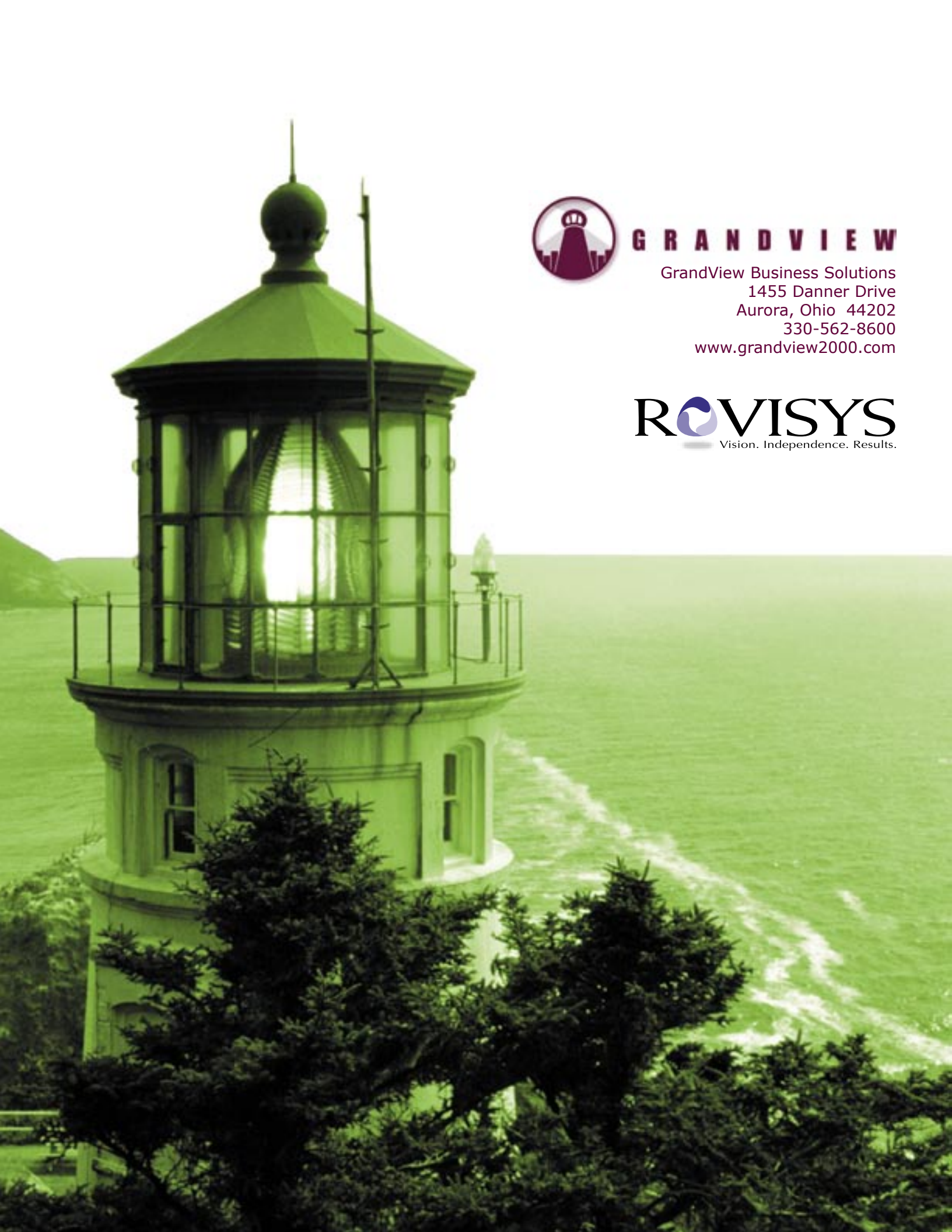
than \$5 million. This would have been impossible without our project management and collaboration methodology embodied in GrandView. Learn more at www.rovisys.com.



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