Breaking Collaboration Silos

Dowco Saves over $200,000 a Year and Achieves Real-time Global Collaboration with Panzura

Dowco Consultants Ltd was established in 1970, and has become a recognized leader providing steel detailing, BIM services, and other technology services for the construction industry. The company has always focused on improving productivity through technology investments and innovative strategies. It was an early adopter of CAD in the 1980s when the systems still ran on punch cards, and was the First Tekla customer and re-seller in North America in the 1990s.

Today, Vancouver, B.C. based Dowco has over 170 employees in 3 offices across Canada. The company opened operations in Manila in 2013, which quickly grew from one to 80 personnel. Dowco is re-establishing an operation in India and anticipates hiring 50 staff there by the end of 2015, many of whom previously worked for the company. The company's projects include landmarks such as Safeco Field in Seattle, the Disney Concert Hall, and the Denver Art Museum.

A Follow the Sun Model

"We use a follow-the-sun model for production that helps us stay competitive. It's one of the reasons we have high speed network links between our offices," said Ron Cuthbert, General Manager at Dowco. But, users had to work on local copies of Tekla Structures project files during their work hours, then transfer large files daily between locations. Additionally, Dowco had invested in high-end CAD workstations, fast networks, and a significant amount of storage to support this workflow.

Slow File Transfer Meant Lost Productivity

Dowco deployed FileCatalyst, a file transfer solution that was more efficient, but ultimately couldn't keep up with demand. CAD

Situation Snapshot:

- Steel detailing firm with three offices in Canada, one in the Philippines, and one which will soon be up and running in India.
- **Key applications:** Tekla Structures.
- **Key challenge:** Slow file transfers were hurting productivity for distributed project teams who need to regularly access the same CAD and BIM files.

technicians would often come in as early as 6:00am to catch up on project work, only to find the model wasn't available because the Dowco offshore offices were still working on the model.

"We wouldn't get the model back until 10:00am, and we'd have highly paid technicians not necessarily twiddling their thumbs, but not moving forward with their projects," said Cuthbert. "It could take hours to send the file between Vancouver, Toronto, and Manila or India, and as we got more projects, the delay became longer and longer."

A Cascading Effect

The problem was only getting worse. Dowco's IT staff wrote scripts to automate many tasks, but it was still a slow and manual process. "We had to assign a staff member at each location to oversee the file transfer process," explained Phillip Young, IT Manager at Dowco.

"People ended up working overtime. It had a cascading effect, which meant the model didn't get back to the other office in time," said Young. "Each office also had their own file servers so we'd have to mange four sets of files."

"All of our offices were really working in silos. The only way another office could work on a model was to transfer it," said Cuthbert.

Breaking the Silos with Panzura

Dowco's Executive Vice President (EVP) Brian Pyper heard about Panzura from a customer that was working with another steel detailing firm who were in the early stages of Panzura implementation. "I immediately went online and researched what this Panzura was all about. Shortly thereafter I approached the CEO of Dowco, Ewen Dobbie, and requested that we seriously look at investing in this technology."

Right away Pyper realized the potential of Panzura's approach to model and resource sharing. Together with managers and system technicians, Dowco has now developed applications, workflows, and processes to get the most out of their investment in Panzura. "As with any technology, there was a lot of resistance and doubt from our front lines. However, several months after we introduced Panzura into our operations, everyone realized how much time they now save in production," said Pyper.

"We had looked at WAN optimization seriously, but decided it just wouldn't work the way we needed it to," Young said. "We needed fast, local file access at each site with the ability to synchronize between sites in as close to real-time as possible."

Ideally, Dowco wanted to have two people at different sites working in the same model at the same time – something they'd never been able to do before. "When we heard this was possible with Panzura, we got pretty excited about it," said Young. "Sharing data in the cloud with a single file system was the kicker for us – but as far as the user is concerned, it's a local file, which is a big benefit."

"This has really helped us achieve a major part of our strategic initiative – to create a multinational working environment. In essence, we have one big office with real-time interaction." Said Pyper.

Productivity Improvements that Really Add Up

"The majority of contracts in the steel detailing industry are fixed price, so productivity improvements can have a direct impact on profit. Competition these days is fierce and relentless, so continuously researching and implementing new technology wherever possible lets North American organizations such as Dowco maintain a global competitive presence," said Pyper.

The IT team even generated an internal ROI analysis and concluded that conservatively, between the direct IT savings and improved productivity, they were saving $200,000 a year with Panzura.

With Panzura, Dowco was able to:

- Improve CAD productivity significantly.
- Have multiple users in different offices work on the same project files simultaneously.
- Consolidate project and file storage to the cloud for only $300/month
- Increase security and minimize emergency recovery time.

Simpler Infrastructure

Dowco was also able to simplify its infrastructure by phasing out the file servers in each office and consolidating backup to the cloud. With Panzura in place, Dowco's monthly bill for Google Cloud is only about $300 a month. "It's probably less than the company's daily coffee bill," Cuthbert said.

The company had been doing nightly backups to tape at each site and relying on those to restore corrupt files or lost work if files were accidentally overwritten, but it was a cumbersome process. "We were down, at one point, to just 2 weeks of backup, and we could lose a day of work sometimes," Young explained. "With Panzura, it's simple for us to keep a year of snapshots and not worry about it."

Dowco's customers demand project data to be located in a very secure and safe environment. "With the introduction of Panzura we now take advantage of state of the art security systems, without having to continuously re-invest, through the process of storing all our data on the cloud. We have also reduced our emergency recovery period from two weeks to a couple of hours," said Pyper.

Managing the project data and infrastructure is also much simpler. "It's as if we're managing one office instead of four," said Young.

With Panzura, the cloud – public or private – not only serves as every tier of storage, it becomes the fabric that enables globally distributed teams rapid file access and easy collaboration. Panzura delivers one distributed cloud file system across hundreds of offices that allows users to work together as if they were in the same room. For more information, visit www.panzura.com.

About Dowco

Dowco Consultants Ltd is one of the leading service companies in North America that specializes in 3D Modeling, Steel Detailing, and other Pre-Construction services. Dowco Consultants uses highly-developed processes and global infrastructure, supported by experienced staff to meet project requirements and exceed client expectations. Dowco likes to say "Some say it can't be done – but we think different!"

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