

Disclosure: The names of company, as well as its' employees, have been swapped for non-disclosure reasons.

Client questions:

- **What do you do?**

- We specialize in providing custom web apps, mainly for environmental science shops. Those web apps are usually internal, but as they are used by a lot of both engineers and newcoming interns, they have to have quite polished UI and often contain a lot of complex operations.
- Hence the challenge for web developers is quite high - we mitigate that somehow by having really experienced IT architects, but due to high demand, we outsource most of web development work constantly.
- We need the incoming developers to have strong skillsets overlapping front-end (even dabbling into UX) and back-end. Also, as most apps are intranet-based and many client information highly confidential, networking and security are paramount. Again our IT architects supervise that such criteria is met, but new developers need to be highly adaptive to our workflow and methods - we strongly encourage DevOps principles and Agile. As for internal testers, we totally promote MVP model and begin testing and optimizing ASAP!
- Furthering that, many of our final apps resemble MVP in appearance, as the UI does not have to be beautiful or trendy - but it has to be highly functional and flawless. Due to fluctuation of people and projects, we cannot really afford to explain how everything works and why some obvious function or method is hidden under four menu levels down.

- **When were you founded?**

- We were founded back in 2001, after dot-com bubble exploded. Thanks to this, it was quite easy for us to get started, as lot of IT positions rearranged themselves. Some of the key staff comes from this era and we stay loyal to each other. They usually understand deeply our customers' problems and not only IT, but environmental science to the bone marrow.
- **How many people work for you?**
 - We have staff about 50 people with some freelancers dabbling in from project to project. I would say that our core consists of about 20 people - those are the IT architects mostly, but also - surprisingly for some - HR, as we see good people relations as investment that mitigates further trouble and minimizes risks.
- **Do you have any awards or special interests?**
 - Yes, we got Global 500 Roll of Honour. Our interests concern mostly nature - lot of our staff are avid hikers and we do quarterly (yes, you read that right) hike team-building overnighter, where we do barbecue under the stars. Yes, that means winter, too!
- **What were you using before?**
 - Our constant issue was with new developers. A lot of new faces are just in to make quick money and experience and see themselves in some fintech startup in Manhattan year after the "internship" at our place. It's not that we're hesitant to pay top dollar for top talent - but our onboarding and culture takes a lot of time that we simply don't want to waste. Of course we don't hold people ransom - we like those who like to stay on their own. By now, we're all pretty stoked on our vision!

- We really try to make the outsourced devs feel at home, implement them in our company as much as they like to. Also, env-sci is not about quick money. Yes, there is quite a lot of it, but first you have to gain some deep understanding of the niche. Lot of people think it is either similar to non-profit work, or super-cool humanitarian niche. It is neither, frankly - there is lot of cool stuff, but also lot of hard numbers to meet, numbers to crunch and niche overlaps to understand. Hence why it is challenging, yet very rewarding area to be in.
- We tried some outsourced developers from various agencies and downright freelancers, who sometimes recommended their friends also. What was the most surprising for me was that oftentimes the latter were clearly better. Agencies tend to have their own workflow and processes, which are not always flexible enough. Freelancers know what it means to live in constant change and often (the better ones) are expensive, but sacrosanct in deadlines and have vast experience across the whole IT - not just specialized roles of it, like people at agencies (and agencies as a whole for that matter).
- **What issues were you having?**
 - Oh, don't even get me started. From the obvious issues like deadlines and budgets not met (in env-sci we can relate to that), to really horrible experience with one agency. Their security auditor left open the firewall to filter outside traffic and we got several bots mining the data from our site! Granted it was just staging with proxy data, but the pre-prod server did have real data just around the switch. Luckily we found out soon enough.

- We told the agency and were met with not only basically denying their part, but outright aggressive behaviour: “Well, if you cannot maintain your security, why it has to be second thought to be done by us?” From that time, we not only have clear SLAs, but vet new people (especially those in critical positions) more carefully. This was well before GDPR, but you can imagine our horror!
- So, it was either agency which filled the capacities more or less but had inconsistent quality and time budget, or freelancers which were usually great but too scarce to build whole team with.
- **What other solutions did you consider?**
 - We got referrals for couple of boutique agencies. Understandably, many of those had bigger projects as one of must-haves, or minimum contracting time simply too high. We cannot effectively estimate when we will need couple of IT architects (which is the most often and reason we have those in-house) and when team of developers, data miners, UX designers or even marketers!
- **Why / how did you decide to go with us? What Reservations Did You Have?**
 - We liked that you leased people via bodyshop - this suited us as sometimes the workload is much higher and we do not have problem with paying more - we just have to cover our needs and not talk in months or years time when talking availability. We've neither corporate nor startup workflows.
 - We were a bit skeptical as your niches were clearly somewhere else and also as you were a smaller shop - we estimated your experience a bit.

- But as it turned out, you had a good experience in choosing your team, mostly from freelancers, which you leased well thanks to promising them some minimum of MDs and also providing them with experience in new tech, which is where we meet. Our UIs are done mostly in ReactJS and our websocket needs mean NodeJS. Hence it is pretty much Javascript stack through and through, which suits many new freelancers trying to get into current hot markets. You also provide them such markets in other projects, so they do not need to change places. That's win win for everyone.
- **What Would Have Happened If You Had NOT Made The Purchase?**
 - I guess we would still change our staff frequently. The long-term cost would be we would lose competitive edge - env-sci is a field where your name is built over a long period of time but can be lost quickly.
- **What Risks Did You Consider?**
 - Well, we have seen it all - we have more stories like the one with opened firewall, so our biggest risk would be to stay somehow comfortable with high fluctuation of employees, which is where such "accidents" tend to happen.
 - Also, we would lose many a big opportunity on interesting projects we simply could not book with capacity. Our biggest risk is to simply be complacent and miss out and at the same time slowly lose our ground that we have maintained for so long now.
- **When did you deploy our solution?**
 - We thought we had it managed well in advance - but we found we really didn't. We still could not pick the right

contender when there was this *huge* project we acquired. We thought we had time to prescreen our candidates for service provider, to evaluate and maybe even test them with some smaller jobs first. It turned out we had to roll all this in one go. In the end, we went with you - which, to be honest, at the time seemed not as conservative as we would like (to be really 100% sure you have us covered).

- **How did it go?**

- But it turned out to be exactly that - you guys are not *that* old-school, yet you maintain sort of gracious attitude toward the client and most importantly, the task at hand. Even though your engineers (and our single-point of contact, the project manager) are nice people, we really only begin to feel at home when discussing actual tasks at hand.
- Then it was as if something clicked - and we realized that we do not have to jump through the hoops like we used to in the past. Funny thing is, we were so accustomed to this we at first felt something was missing and this is not really going to work. I am glad you proved us wrong.

- **Were there challenges?**

- Yes, as I have said, we were at the start of big opportunity and also your company was so different, we could not pinpoint it and felt like losing our ground.

- **How did we address those challenges?**

- After brief moment of hesitation, I have realized that I might get fired over this if it does not work out. And even if not, I mean - I love my job. I love my company. And there was this huge opportunity - one that could also send us back had it backfired. I wanted my company to success

- regardless if I get promoted over it or not. I'm not saying I didn't care if they fire me, but it really wasn't just that.

- So the stakes were pretty high. And I decided to talk to your project manager. I expected excuses, or reasons why I am not seeing it as you view it. I was wrong again - your project manager (amazing guy, by the way) - Ian - told me he totally understood and showed me the process. I remember him telling me "Do you have two hours for meeting over a lunch?" and I had this deadline and thought: "Two hours for lunch? Are you guys lucky."
- And Ian explained - over the lunch - the whole process, how you work and why and *how* this is going to actually work out. He even offered to share the work docs and spreadsheets with me. "We do not normally do this, but since you are under a great pressure, if this eases your mind..." I realized I am dealing not only with one professional, but with company of them. I did not vouch for the offer (though admittedly a bit for time reasons at the time). And luckily I was not wronged in my notion.

- **What advantage did our solution give you?**

- Well, I can sugarcoat it, but at the end of the day, we all have to give some facts and numbers to our bosses (or, if we are the bosses, all the worse, as there is no one to hide the truth from).
- We have managed to complete the project with about 80% of our former costs - you might say that is not such a big deal. After all, sometimes we hired new company who saved us even 50% (yes, really) in costs. But the revenue? That is whole another story. And long-term one - don't forget that, as happy long-term creditworthy clients are the pillars to not only base, but also grow your biz on.

- And we made it! The client was super-thrilled. She was basically dealing with the same issue - consistent quality. We were just one more company in the long row of previous experiences ranging from decent, “meh” to plain horrible. I am happy to say we are still working together and they are our second biggest client to date.
- **How did it make your work life better or easier? What Measurables Have You Seen?**
 - The ROI went higher still after few months - I felt all three sides clicked - your developers, our architects and the company’s product owner. We started to complete the tasks in 75 and then 70% of the former time - but mind you, more complicated tasks than in the beginning. It turned out that the huge project we were starting with was just pre-screening one to see if we can handle it - the same way we try to prescreen our new staff.
- **What are the top three reasons you would recommend us?**
 - I would definitely say professionalism - no matter what happens, or which emotions (this happens sometimes) wind up, it seems you always understand and continue to focus on the problem.
 - Also, the long-term revenue you are so set upon - you do not do short-lived projects, but have evolution of your partners in mind. This was well reflected in the quarterly “Objective meetings” you hold, where we discussed where we are heading and what can be bettered, how we can grow. This really IS NOT a standard in agencies, to care for their client’s long-term opportunity to grow. It should be, right? As it means more job for them. But it is also a lot of overhead.

- Then I would say the creativity. We were dead-set on doing the project in JAVA mostly, but you proved us that ReactJS can be not only efficient, but also “legacy” stable for the lack of better term.
- **Bonus: Can You Provide Creative Assets?**
 - Sorry, this app is, as most of ours, confidential. However, we consider posting the CRUD on Github for similar projects to be forked from.

The resulting case study:

How we helped Softnaturous complete their most challenging project ever in 70% of the time and onboard their second biggest client.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our new client Softnaturous were onboarding on new challenging project, which was their biggest opportunity to date.

We helped them with staffing and choosing the right technology stack for development workflow.

They not only acquired the client, but we eventually lowered their timeframes to about 70% and further help with their business growth via quarterly check-ups.

Softnaturous - the environmental science's best-kept secret

In ever-changing landscape of environmental science app development, which merges nature and tech, Softnaturous might be the household name not much businesses really know of.

They do outstanding apps for environmental science shops, win prizes such as Global 500 Roll of Honour and work for some of the biggest names in the industry, such as Ecobee and Indigo Ag. Why do they keep kind of a low profile, then?

It turns out they choose their clients just as well as the clients do choose Softnaturous - for long-term and highly specialized work.

"We rather try to keep few core clients with whom we can maximize the value we can provide, rather than losing productivity over never-ending cycle of onboardings, scope creeps and prospecting."

- Rachel Stetson, CEO of Softnaturous

Struggle with delivering consistent quality due to outsourcing

Softnaturous were in recurring pain to deliver consistent quality work and meet deadlines, as they rely on external development work due to the ever-changing requirements in the env-sci field.

"There is no such thing as established expert in this area. The experienced workforce fluctuates a lot and is not always business-focused. We really were shooting for freelancers that can do a lot, but that also like to change places a lot."

- Anthony Burke, IT architect at Softnaturous

After trying out many boutique agencies and freelancers alike over the years, they maintained their core engineers and IT architects as a full-time staff, but still had to shop around for developers and engineers based on the project scope and size.

"The thing is, agencies have their processes and workflows and are seldom willing to adopt to very different and changing one in this field. Oftentimes, solo freelancers were more flexible, but then again unreliable over the long-term - and of course, we needed more staff than a few solopreneurs."

- Jackson Tyke, Head of HR at Softnaturous

Can we meet the KPIs? Let's meet in person first.

We work in digital, but env-sci can get very personal (and it should), hence why we insisted on meeting with Softnaturous first.

They were in a rush and we did not go through their usual prescreening methods. We knew they needed help fast, so we identified their pain points and tried to address them.

I remember Ian, your PM, telling me "Do you have two hours for meeting over a lunch?" and I thought "Damn you know I don't," but somehow I knew it was the right thing to do.

And Ian explained - over the lunch - the whole process, how you work and why and how this is going to actually work out. He even offered to share the work docs and spreadsheets with me. "We do not normally do this, but since you are under a great pressure, if this eases your mind..."

I realized I am dealing not only with one professional, but with company consisting of them.

- Rachel Stetson, CEO of Softnaturous

The new workforce.

We use kind of a weird, but working workflow - our team consists of at least 70% of freelance developers, but we assign them in multiple projects of their own choosing so they get a lot of stable work, which is interesting and experience-rich, thanks to the variability they themselves choose.

It turned out that this combined Softnaturous' good experience with solo professionals while alleviating the pain with fluctuating or bored workforce.

Challenge overcome in 80% of the time estimate. And onboarding of the second biggest client.

The client was super-thrilled. She was basically dealing with the same issue - consistent quality. We were just one more company in the long row of previous experiences ranging from decent, "meh" to plain horrible. I am happy to say we are still working together and they are our second biggest client to date.

- Rachel Stetson, CEO of Softnaturous

Also, we raised the ROI of our solution by lowering the time needed to more-or-less constant 70% - on more challenging projects. Still, we focused on raising the value by doing quarterly check-ups and Softnaturous eventually invited us over to their strategy and we helped them secure several key clients.

We like to not only be viewed as outsourced work, but as a core business partner.

We discussed where we are heading and what can be bettered, how we can grow. This really IS NOT a standard in agencies, to care for their client's long-term opportunity to grow. It should be, right?

- Audrey Stoddard, CFO at Softnaturous

We are happy to agree. And happy that there are clients opened to opportunity to grow our respective businesses together. After all, B2B was always about this - not decentralizing one from each other, but cooperating in mutually beneficial ways.