

**REGULATORY****Can We Talk?**

*A Vancouver-based company offers web-based software solutions to stakeholder relation management headaches*



EVERY DAY, THROUGHOUT Canada's oilpatch, countless plans are underway for new pipelines, oilsands plants, drilling programs and a host of other energy-related projects. Despite their huge diversity, there is one thing they all have in common; they must gain regulatory approval before starting. And to do that, operators must show

the authorities that they have consulted with affected stakeholders.

Communica Public Affairs Inc., based in Calgary, is a stakeholder engagement consultancy that works for a dozen resource sector clients, including major petroleum, pipeline and oilsands firms. Communica's job is to develop a consultation plan for

a proposed project, then go out into the field and speak to stakeholders about their concerns. For a big project, the work can take several years and involve thousands of contacts, generating a mountain of paperwork that must be collated and evaluated to meet regulatory requirements.

Alan Roth can attest to the

**news briefs**

geoLOGIC systems ltd. has attained Gold Certified Partner status in the Microsoft Partner Program with a competency in Independent Software Vendor/Software Solutions, which recognizes geoLOGIC's expertise and impact in the technology marketplace.

Petris has acquired ZEH Software, Inc., which provides enterprise plotting and montaging solutions for oil and gas companies worldwide. ZEH's seismic data management offering, SeisInfo, organizes customers' 2D and 3D seismic surveys into a spatially aware database so they know what assets they have, where they are located and how to retrieve them. Petris said these features, coupled ZEH's seismic QC functions and ability to support and convert data in multiple projections and datums, are a good fit with PetrisWINDS Enterprise, which solves the problem of making data available from multiple, disparate sources on an enterprise scale.

difficulty of the task. A partner with Communicata, Roth has been working for over a decade in the stakeholder consultation field. "In spite of our best efforts with spreadsheet tables, when it came to getting documents together for regulatory hearings, the term 'nightmarish' comes to mind. I remember one particular instance trying to pull 700 e-mails together in one day — it was a mad rush." Now, however, Communicata uses SustaiNet, a software suite that automatically sorts and analyzes stakeholder input. "It has saved us hundreds of hours."

#### CENTRAL REPOSITORY

SustaiNet software efficiently sorts and analyzes the myriad of data collected during the regulatory review process for major projects, formalizes commitments made to stakeholders and maintains a central data repository throughout the life of the project.



SustaiNet Software Solutions Inc., based in Vancouver, is a web-based service that allows companies to efficiently maintain accurate records to demonstrate that the interests, issues and objections of landowners, stakeholders and government agencies are identified, considered and addressed.

"[Oil and gas] companies have to report on their interactions with stakeholders to regulators for such circumstances as development applications to the ERCB," says Colin Ellis, manager of SustaiNet's stakeholder relationship management (SRM) software. "In the case of a new pipeline, for instance, the company needs to go out and speak to the general public, aboriginal people and landowners along the ROW [right-of-way] and nearby communities. You record these communications: how, when, what issues, what needs to be done. Then you can enter actions and follow-ups. You can do analysis of statistics, the number of people consulted, the number and type of issues — you have data that supports your consultation report."

SustaiNet is the brainchild of Howard

Adam, a 51-year-old civil engineer from South Africa. Adam's early career involved building dams and water systems; he gradually gravitated toward selling environmental equipment. He came to Canada in the late 1980s and, in the late 1990s, developed a joint venture company which marketed environmental data management software. "We soon realized that the industry needed a lot broader service than just environmental," recalls Adam. "At the time, corporate environmental concerns were merging with health and safety responsibilities to create EHS departments."

A fourth component, the community, also entered into the field. "Several cases arose in the early 2000s between pulp and paper companies and First Nations in which the

Manager, handles stakeholder relationship management.

While several companies now offer stakeholder consultation services, SustaiNet differentiates its product on usability. "Consultation people like to talk face-to-face to people, not use technology," says Ellis. "When we put our service together, we asked what it would take to introduce technology to people who haven't used a lot before. We brought in experts to make it extremely user-friendly."

SustaiNet first consults with a client to determine its needs and how the software should be configured. The software itself can be installed on site or is available through a web server. Software, training and support for a single project is in the \$10,000 range, but many oil and gas companies have several projects on the go at once and take a multi-project package that costs \$60-70,000.

During a consultation project, field advisers seek out the concerns of stakeholders in a variety of venues, from coffee shops to formal town hall meetings. Information gathered is then catalogued into the SustaiNet service under the appropriate information headings. The service is web-based and can be accessed by any authorized person. "Everyone can share information and manage entries," says Ellis.

SustaiNet's analytical function is both user-friendly and broad-based. Reports can be broken down into community groups or issues. Issues include environment, local business development, employment, training and public interest, each one with multiple sub-groups.

"Our software is customizable and does statistical analysis to back progress reporting — it's a snap to generate reports," says Ellis. "The time it takes to report used to be a huge burden. We can alleviate that." SustaiNet also contains a GIS component with the ability to display information on maps. "Maps increase communication, and you therefore have more meaningful consultation."

In addition, SustaiNet formalizes promises made to those affected by the proposed project. "When you make commitments to stakeholders, you need to track them," says Ellis. "For instance, some farmers are worried about contamination of their soils, so you may commit to wash trucks before entering their property. Those types of promises need to be managed; otherwise, stakeholders can report to regulators, and it could affect the progress of your project."

Finally, SustaiNet provides a central data repository. "The service can be extended through the project lifecycle, from the pre-application phase to application to project

Supreme Court [of Canada] came down and said, 'You have a duty to consult, and you need to prove you've taken local community concerns into account,'" says Adam.

"As part of any environmental assessment application, you now need to show that you consulted with the community and public and their concerns have been taken into account." Unfortunately, there were no formal systems in place to meet those requirements. "People had consultation information on spreadsheets and [in] little black books. There was no way to control this information — if your landman left your company, his little black book went with him."

Adam formed SustaiNet in 2004 to become North American distributor for three main specialty software products. MonitorPro is an environmental monitoring data management package. IsoMetrix is an environmental health, safety and quality management system that covers permit management and incident and spills management. The third suite, Consultation-

development, operations and reclamation," says Ellis. "A project can go on for decades; the body of knowledge survives any employee."

Communica started working with SustaiNet in 2006 when it took on a proposed big-inch pipeline in Alberta. The project had six to 10 land agents and company representatives working in the field. Input was done remotely when field representatives had access to the Internet. The process took 18 months and, in the end, Communica had a database in which 5,000 stakeholders were entered. "Some had questions about the line, other cases involved people who had the ROW passing through their property and wanted it shifted to another location on the property so it wouldn't affect pasturing," says Roth. "We documented all the interactions and concerns."

Communica is about to launch a new pipeline infrastructure project, and is looking forward to applying the knowledge it gained from previous work with SustaiNet. "It took two days to learn how to use the software, but there is some learning as you go along about how to set up the database for analysis," says Roth. "As an example, you might set up the environment as an issue, but then, 10 months down the road, you suddenly realize, was the environmental concern about wildlife, or air quality? We're working on setting up a more sophisticated database so that we'll get better reports at the end of the process."

SustaiNet's future looks promising. Since its inception in 2004, growth has exceeded 50% annually. "We now have over 30 clients in Canada," says Adam. "They include mining companies, consultants and electricity companies, but about half are O&G, such as CNRL [Canadian Natural Resources Limited], ASOP [Athabasca Oil Sands Project], BP and Enbridge [Inc.]" In spite of the recent downturn in the economy, the company expects to see 100% growth in its customer base in 2009. "There's no real limit to the market; governments handle a thousand projects a year," says Adam.

If nothing else, they can rely on word-of-mouth from satisfied customers. "SustaiNet is very good with ongoing advice and service; they're very responsive and helpful," says Roth. "I would recommend it, and I have." • **Gord Cope**

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