

Case File

The Godfather falls for Notes and Domino

The Challenge

Award-winning movie director Francis Ford Coppola knows only too well the amount of collaboration and co-ordination needed to make a good picture. So, within his San Francisco-based film production company, American Zoetrope, he uses Lotus Notes and Domino to aid workflow and to provide an efficient communications and information management system.

Profile

Company	American Zoetrope	Head Office	San Francisco, USA
Type of business	Film Production Company	Solution required	Information Management System
Website	www.zoetrope.com	Product(s) chosen	Lotus Notes and Domino
Founded	1969		

The Business Solution

The director of such American cinema classics as *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now*, Francis Ford Coppola knows that making a good film depends upon a lot of things that the average moviegoer would never dream about. Behind the scenes of every movie, there is an overwhelming amount of organizational detail to be managed. From finding, rating, and developing scripts, to scheduling shoots and organizing crews and casts for filming at a variety of international locations, making a movie requires an enormous amount of collaboration and coordination.

Indispensable

Always on the cutting edge of technology in his creative ventures, Coppola also frequently looks to technology to help him creatively solve problems at American Zoetrope the San Francisco-based film production company he founded. But it wasn't until he saw Lotus Notes and Domino in operation at a technology trade show that he found a solution that could meet all the information management needs of his business.

Coppola was so impressed that he immediately instructed his IT staff to get Notes and Domino. Since then, there's been no turning back. As Charlie Lamm, IT Manager of Coppola's growing group of companies, says, Notes and Domino have become an indispensable part of how the company does its work, linking offices and mobile workers in an efficient communication and information management system. To Coppola and company's delight, Notes and

Domino have proven to be as reliable as they are powerful. And as a result, American Zoetrope has been shooting full speed ahead.

Scripting the Right Scenario

Scripts are the lifeblood of the motion picture industry. At any one time there may be hundreds of them circulating around a film production company like American Zoetrope. Traditionally, Coppola and crew passed around piles of paper-based scripts and treatments for review. If a script was liked by one of the staff, it would be passed on to someone else in the chain of approval. Eventually, a script might get enough positive response to warrant consideration for optioning.

Although this method proved partly successful, it was very inefficient. Scripts got lost or forgotten on people's desks.

And perhaps more importantly, there was no way of tracking everyone's comments on a script or to pinpoint its location at any given point or time. So too often, a promising script would go unread.

Coppola wanted to empower people to share information and opinions about scripts. And he wanted to make sure no potential blockbuster slipped through the cracks. Now, all scripts received at American Zoetrope are put into a Domino application.

Directing the Traffic

Not only does Domino make it easy to keep track of scripts, but when a script is readily available to more people, that provides more opportunities to focus in on the script's true potential. As Lamm says, "We don't want to tell people not to send scripts. We want to tell people yes. The more stuff we look at, the more chance we have of finding something good." Notes and Domino have helped American Zoetrope keep up with the incoming traffic, ensuring that no script gets overlooked.

Notes on Location

As Coppola would be quick to tell you, the movie business is all about traveling. People are on the move all the time, whether to on-location shoots, business meetings, or film festivals in Cannes and Venice. In the past, this travel meant that people could not access the most up-to-date information about a film project. As a result, projects slowed down or stopped while staffers roamed the globe. Today, Notes mobile support lets American Zoetrope staff

work with up-to-date information no matter where they are. When staffers go on location, they simply replicate the production applications to their laptops before boarding the plane, then use Notes to work offline. Once they land, they can access their network and replicate their work once again. And because Domino only replicates updated documents, the replication process is quick and easy. As a result, the world has become American Zoetrope's office. And the company's productivity has increased.

Screening the Screenplays

According to Lamm, American Zoetrope sees an increasing role for Notes and Domino technology in the future. In 1998 Coppola began soliciting screenplays through an online writer's workshop for story and screenplay writers. Since then, more than 1700 screenplays have been submitted through the American Zoetrope Web site. Once again, Notes has helped manage and track the increased flow.

Lamm sees this as an exciting new edge for the company. "The industry is changing right now," he says. "There are great things flowing in from outside the Hollywood system. And we don't want to limit ourselves to what comes through the traditional channels." Notes, Lamm says, can provide access to these new channels - and provide unique new ways to improve how American Zoetrope does business.

Helping the Plot

As Lamm points out, anything that can allow people to spend more time on the creative part of their job is an advantage to the company.

The Technical Solution

All scripts received at American Zoetrope are imported into a Domino application. There the production staff can easily access them through Notes, record their comments, and send "heads-ups" to others in the company.

After a script reaches a certain threshold of positive comment, it goes on to the next step -consideration for option. The script now moves to a new Notes view for option prospects, and appears on a new form that includes details such as financial and schedule information. Because much of this information is confidential, Domino controls who can access these documents.

When a script finally gets optioned and goes into production, it is moved to a different set of databases. With these production applications, American Zoetrope can co-ordinate every phase of production, ensuring that filming goes smoothly.