Muckleshoot Casino bets on Sensei IQ for IT Project and Portfolio Management

The IT Department at Muckleshoot Casino, the Northwest's biggest and best casino, was having issues with every phase of their project management processes, from intake to prioritization to execution to reporting.

"The Casino business is 24-7," says Jamal Wilson, Executive Director Information Technology for Muckleshoot Casino. "It does not stop; that is just the nature of this business. Things move quickly in this type of environment, and our department needs to react quickly to business needs."

Being a 'Microsoft shop', the newly established Project Management Office (PMO) selected Sensei IQ to get up and running quickly with the best practices, turn-key PPM solution they needed to manage projects and portfolios in their highly regulated industry.

Sensei IQ is a Microsoft Preferred Managed Solution that is fully integrated into Microsoft 365, enabling Muckleshoot Casino to have a single cohesive view of projects and portfolios across the IT department.

MUCKLESHOOT
C A S I N O

AT A GLANCE

CLIENT NAME
Muckleshoot Casino

LOCATION
United States

COMPANY SIZE
1,500+ employees

INDUSTRY
Entertainment

Client Challenges

Casino games are sometimes referred to as "games of chance," and players know that there is risk involved; that's a major aspect of the fun of gambling. But running the casino that provides those games cannot be left to chance, and one role of the IT Department is to mitigate risk. The IT Department introduced a PMO to provide guidance on initiating and executing technology initiatives for IT projects that affect the entire organization. They had tried Microsoft Project Online with Project desktop for managing projects, but struggled with adoption. "The tool was not really utilized," says Wilson. "People did not understand the power or complexity of the tool."

Managing projects using spreadsheets and email, they were not able to prioritize the right projects and had to improve every stage of the process. They struggled with resource allocation and capacity management because they couldn't visualize demand. Project execution failed. "We had a string of projects that were initiated but never completed because new initiatives were introduced," says Wilson. To top it all off—and unsurprisingly—their status reporting was not consistent.

Issues with project management are common in all types of businesses, as is the need to solve such problems; Muckleshoot Casino is far from alone in this regard. But the stakes are much higher in the gaming industry. "Gaming is a highly regulated industry," says Amervis Lopez-Cobb, Director of IT Project and Change Management. "Lapses in regulatory compliance leads directly to business disruption, and regulatory shutdown would kill our business. It was crucial that we find a way to prioritize important initiatives, effectively manage our resources, and provide the status reporting that we needed," says Amervis Lopez-Cobb.

While they recognized that no tool would automatically solve their problems unless they had good processes in place, they also knew that they needed a tool that would help them apply best practices and provide the required structure. So they turned to Sensei Project Solutions and Sensei IQ.

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Solution

Sensei IQ is an adaptive project and strategic portfolio management solution that aligns, optimizes and tracks work in an organization. Deployed securely in the client's Microsoft 365 tenant, Sensei IQ utilizes Microsoft Project for the web, Microsoft Teams, and the Power Platform to enable collaboration and provide organizations meaningful insights into projects, programs, and resources across portfolios.

Wilson was drawn to Sensei IQ's pre-configured design and ease of deployment and use. "I really liked the fact that Sensei IQ is built on best practices," he says. "We did not have to reinvent the wheel. I looked at our organizational maturity and realized we needed a tool that was scalable, that would both meet our immediate needs and grow with us."

And Sensei IQ was a great addition to their existing Microsoft 365 deployment. "One of the things that drove me to Sensei IQ is that it uses the native Microsoft stack that people already had," says Wilson. "That made for easier onboarding and 'selling it' internally to ensure adoption. It seemed like a natural extension of what was being used." Wilson also likes Microsoft's latest execution tool, Project for the web. "It's a really good step between Planner which does not have the organizational views of portfolios that we need, and Project Online, which was too complex and heavy for what we need. The combination of Microsoft Project for the web and the Sensei platform has worked out well for us."

Lopez-Cobb also points to ease of use as an important benefit of Sensei IQ. "I have worked extensively with other project management tools, and Sensei IQ is much more user friendly. It is instrumental in minimizing the amount of administrative work that comes from managing with disparate tools or harder to use tools. And with Sensei IQ and Project for the web, we can pull necessary reports in a more efficient and effective manner."

Muckleshoot Casino not only likes Sensei IQ as a tool, but they also appreciate working with Sensei as a partner. Sensei is an official, government-approved vendor, so it was easy for Muckleshoot to purchase Sensei IQ through Sensei's GSA contract. Wilson says, "When we reach out or have questions, I feel like we are talking to other project pros who understand our space. Other partners may sell a tool but may not understand our space. But with Sensei, I know everyone I talk to understands our space and has done the same type of work themselves."

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Client Benefits

For the IT Department, the benefits of rolling out Sensei IQ in the organization are many and tangible at every stage of the project management process. "It has allowed us to standardize project proposal intake for initiating project requests and allowed for role-based access to create and view requests," says Lopez-Cobb. "We have introduced project prioritization at the executive level using defined criteria to approve and execute the work that is the highest priority and the highest value, which is vital for resource allocation and capacity management. We have created transparency and visibility with centralized tracking and reporting of project proposals and active projects, providing a single cohesive view into the portfolio and mapping to an approach that provides strategic initiative alignment." She continues, "It has allowed us to implement a crucial technology risk mitigation process."

One aspect of this is having their document library accessible via Microsoft Teams and SharePoint. "Being able to 'marry' Teams and SharePoint was a huge win for us, because those are familiar tools so there is a limited learning curve. It has allowed us to standardize project status reporting and updates because each project is monitored. This ensures that scope, cost, and schedule changes with material or cross-functional impacts are communicated." Wilson adds to the point about reporting: "Previously we used a lot of spreadsheets to manage and organize projects, and people began to lose trust in the data. Now all the information is in real time, and our internal business partners know the snapshot they see is recent and relevant."

The solution has allowed the organization to gain both tangible and intangible benefits. "Sensei IQ has helped IT have smarter conversations at a leadership team level," says Wilson. "Now everyone is able to visualize how much value a project provides, and that facilitates much more cohesion across the entire organization."

It is safe to say that Muckleshoot Casino is very glad they made the decision to go with Sensei IQ and work with Sensei Project Solutions. "It goes back to working with a trusted partner who understands the space very well," says Wilson.

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