



Heritage Log Homes

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Josh Blair
Coordinator, IT Department
www.heritagelog.com



Heritage Log Homes Builds Strong Customer Relationships with GoToMeeting

Founded in 1975, Heritage Log Homes is a leading producer of log homes with an international customer base. The company is headquartered in Kodak in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee, where it also operates a state-of-the-art mill. Heritage Log Homes sells primarily to consumers and also partners with communities on housing development projects. The company employs 30 people and has a network of more than 70 independent dealers across North America.

The challenge: streamlining the design customization process

Heritage Log Homes offers a wide range of standard layouts in each of its five styles – Classic, Legacy, Arts & Crafts and Coastal, as well as Timber Frame – but most customers make modifications to their chosen floor plan. “Ninety percent of our projects are custom homes,” said Chris Webster, marketing manager. “The customization process involved mailing engineering drawings back and forth between our design team and the home buyer. The customer would mark up the drawings, mail them in and receive updated drawings. This cycle might be repeated several times until the plans were just what the customer wanted.”

This procedure was cumbersome, expensive and time-consuming. Because each revision could take as long as two weeks, a house plan might require months to finalize. Each iteration added more hours of engineering services to the total cost. Another drawback was the lack of real-time communication between the design team and the home buyer. “For example, the customer might sketch in a modification that wasn’t feasible, but wouldn’t find out until his request had been mailed in to our offices,” Webster said. Even more important, this impersonal process could not create the close relationship with the design team desired by many customers.

Heritage recognized the need for real-time collaboration in the design phase. Further, the company faced another collaboration challenge – this one involving its dealer network. Webster explained, “Our dealers are located all over North America, and it’s too expensive to get them together more

Key benefits

- Streamlines house design process to save time and money
- Improves communication with dealer network
- Builds strong relationships with customers and dealers
- Provides a competitive differentiator

than once a year. Therefore, when we launched a new product we had two choices – wait until the annual meeting, which might be months later, or send out an e-mail and have the project manager spend a week on the phone with dealers, answering the same questions over and over.”

To solve both these issues, Heritage decided to adopt Web conferencing and evaluated several leading products. “We needed a solution that was easy to use because some of our dealers aren’t computer-savvy. We also wanted an affordable price, and some of the products we considered cost an arm and a leg.”

Implementing GoToMeeting

Webster and Josh Blair, coordinator for the IT department, were part of the evaluation team. When they found Citrix® GoToMeeting®, it was “love at first sight,” according to Blair. “It’s simple and easy to use, has an intuitive interface and is very cost-effective. Also, it has many features that we didn’t know we needed, such as session recording and switching presenters.”

Using GoToMeeting, Heritage Log Homes has created its Interactive Design Service. During a session, the architect and customer can view the house plans together and take turns as presenter to point out design ideas or issues and draw on the document – all in real time.

To keep its dealers informed about new products or processes, the company hosts GoToMeeting sessions, frequently by region. “We keep the groups small so that it’s easy to handle all the questions,” Webster said.

Optimizing business processes saves time and money

GoToMeeting has enabled Heritage to optimize two key processes. Blair noted, “With GoToMeeting, we’ve drastically cut the time required to finalize a custom design. In fact, it’s frequently possible for the architect and customer to complete a house design during a single session.” In addition to speeding up the planning process, real-time collaboration saves the customer a significant amount of money because fewer hours of design work are needed.

“Working with the architect online gives our customers the satisfaction and thrill of helping to create their dream home. Customers love GoToMeeting and its great interactive features.”

GoToMeeting also allows Heritage to communicate with dealers across the country in a timely fashion without the cost of on-site meetings or time spent on multiple phone calls. Webster said, “Small group meetings are efficient because the product manager presents the same information to everyone and only has to answer questions once. This helps ensure a consistent message and makes the best use of everyone’s time. Plus, there’s no delay in getting the word out.”

Building stronger relationships with Web collaboration

Web conferencing is helping the company to strengthen its relationships with customers and dealers alike. Blair said, “Designing a new home is a major undertaking and can be stressful. By working one-on-one with GoToMeeting instead of just exchanging paper documents, customers get to know our architect and develop a higher comfort level with our company. This leads to greater satisfaction. The architect likes it too – he receives a lot of cookies from happy customers during the holidays.”

Similarly, Web conferencing has helped forge stronger bonds across the dealer network, which Webster describes as “one big family.” With only a single meeting each year, it was difficult for dealers to keep in touch. Now, with frequent online meetings, they can maintain important business and personal ties, share ideas and provide feedback to each other, as well as to Heritage.

Constructing a competitive advantage

The Interactive Design Service powered by GoToMeeting is providing a competitive advantage for Heritage. “People often think of log homes as traditional, but there is a tremendous amount of technology involved,” Webster explained. “A tool like GoToMeeting reinforces our position on the cutting edge of technology. Also, our competitors are still working with customers the old-fashioned way. Blair concurred: “GoToMeeting is one of the best tools in our arsenal.”



Citrix Online Division

6500 Hollister Avenue
Goleta, CA 93117
U.S.A.
T 1 805 690 6400
info@citrixonline.com

Citrix Online Europe Middle East & Africa

Citrix Online UK Ltd
Chalfont Park House
Chalfont Park, Gerrards Cross
Bucks SL9 0DZ
United Kingdom
T +44 (0) 800 011 2120
europe@citrixonline.com

Citrix Online Asia Pacific

Suite 3201
32nd Floor
One International Finance Center
1 Harbour View Street
Central, Hong Kong SAR
T +852 100 5000
asiapac@citrixonline.com

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