upwork

Championing Innovation at PGA of America

PGA

INDUSTRY: Recreation
EMPLOYEES: 300-500
CATEGORY: Software development

The engineers at PGA of America are typical in that they're hardwired to solve problems and make their products better, but that tendency sometimes led to frustration.

When working on projects, they came up with new ideas but wouldn't have time to build them out after weighing the risks. They were caught in a catch-22: Spend time testing ideas that may impress stakeholders—or risk their timelines if an idea didn't pass proof of concept.

After 10 years of choosing timelines over testing, the engineering team decided to stop following the status quo.

A quest to optimize time

Kevin Scott, Head of Technology at PGA of America, saw their solution in independent talent. He believed the flexible resource could extend his team's capabilities so they could get more done in a day.

But first, he had to convince his team to give independent professionals a try. Scott made it easier by giving his team access to Upwork. The platform made it quick for them to find skilled professionals that could help with anything from shining up a PowerPoint presentation to writing software.

His intent was to boost his team's productivity. But what Scott and his team gained from it was more than they could have imagined.

Take risks without risking the plan

After contracting independent professionals for a couple of small projects, George Whitaker, the company's Director of Software Engineering, understood their potential. Independent talent was his team's solution for rapid prototyping. Through Upwork, his team can find professionals with tough-to-find skills at scale including AWS, CSS, and React.js developers.

RESULTS

3x faster
Project completion times

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3 days
Average time to start projects

50%
Average cost savings

"Independent talent changed how we handle development."

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George Whitaker
Director of Software Engineering,
PGA of America

When his team comes up with a new idea, they engage talent to quickly and cost-effectively test proof of concept. This process is so efficient that compared to the traditional resources, independent talent enable Whitaker's team to **complete projects 3X faster** and **save an average of 50%** on costs. What's more, they can **start projects within 3 days instead of weeks**.

Perhaps the biggest benefit is how the engineering team can explore as many ideas as they choose without compromising their strategic roadmap. Because during testing, staff can remain focused on high-priority projects.

> "Having high-quality talent available lets me focus on high-visibility projects while knowing the other projects are getting done and their stakeholders are receiving the support they need."
> —Liz Elliott, Technical Project Manager, PGA of America.

Unexpected gains

An unexpected payoff from working with outside experts is how the engineering team gained the confidence to try new ideas and opened their minds to what's possible. The process of hiring and working with independent talent also provided secondary benefits as team members developed skills they otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to learn in their current roles. These include soft skills like communication, handling multiple projects, and collaboration.

Results like these inspire Scott to keep challenging his team to focus on tasks that speak to their strengths, then have independent professionals handle the rest. Once the engineering team experienced the benefits of utilizing independent talent, they increased usage by 8X within months and they're setting bolder goals. "Next year, we're overhauling everything," says Whitaker. He's updating the company's full technology stack—from a new data warehouse to accounting software and HRM system.

His advice to anyone hesitant to experiment with independent talent: Find one project you need done within a week, then offer independent talent a smaller project within it. For example, if you have a report due, an independent professional can perform the research. Whitaker says it may not turn out perfectly, but that's ok because what's important is that you give it a try and keep trying. As PGA of America learned, success comes from stepping out of the status quo and doing things a little differently.

> " When employees aren't limited by internal skillsets or resources, they can extend their capabilities and leverage their time. Freeing up their bandwidth enables them to put their energy across what's more valuable, so they can create bigger improvements and changes that help themselves and the team.

Kevin Scott, Head of Technology at PGA of America