

Challengers

How Adaptavist is helping the Sahara Force India Formula One team work smarter and faster

THE CLIENT NEEDED:

- ✓ Access to leading technical Atlassian expertise it could depend on
- ✓ Consultancy on how to optimise the deployment of Atlassian tools
- ✓ Help with developing new and maintaining old functionality
- ✓ Help with performance tuning, measurement and monitoring

ADAPTAVIST SUPPLIED:

- ✓ A 'one-stop-shop' 24/7 service desk which provides support and resolves issues
- ✓ Help with performance tuning and planning
- ✓ Access to the world's best Atlassian expertise
- ✓ Noticeable improvements to performance and development speed



BACKGROUND

To stay competitive with its much larger and more extensively-funded rivals, the Sahara Force India Formula One team has always needed excellent IT systems. This drove the team's first adoption of Atlassian tools in 2008. As Shona Gilchrist, IT Analyst, puts it: "We were looking for something specific to do bug-tracking for an IT helpdesk. We looked at the various options and JIRA, to us, was far and away the best." Subsequently the team also adopted Atlassian's Confluence, Stash and JIRA Agile solutions.

Approximately 20 active projects are now configured within JIRA. These are mainly fault-tracking and request systems covering areas that include the team's IT helpdesk, its CFD (computational fluid dynamics) department, design offices, wind tunnel and, not least, its racing cars. In addition the team's software developers use JIRA to track releases of their latest products.

Confluence, meanwhile, is used to document software releases. It is used by every member of staff as it is the platform for Sahara Force India's intranet. It's a communication tool that is used across the organisation, as well as a document management system which enables effective collaboration.

Stash is used by the Computational Fluid Dynamics and Software Development teams as a code repository. JIRA Agile keeps track of the progress of tickets through the system, giving visibility to activity.

THE CHALLENGE

So far so good. But Sahara Force India has around half the budget and half the headcount of its biggest F1 rivals. As Gilchrist puts it, "We have to work very smartly with every penny we've got in order to compete with the big teams."

Gilchrist knew there was more to be gained from the Atlassian toolset but the question was 'How?' She couldn't afford to significantly expand the team with expertise in say Java, JIRA or Confluence. The agreed approach was to bring a technical partner on board who would supply that expertise and enable the team to run without the need for incremental staff numbers.

Factor in as well that F1 is extraordinary. There is no such thing as 'office hours'. The team operates 24/7, across time zones and continents. The pace of change is extremely fast: a conventional automotive company may take a year to design car modifications, in F1 they get two weeks to identify the problem, design a solution and deliver it.



Deadlines are completely fixed – there’s no question of postponing a Grand Prix until the next upgrade is ready. F1 regulations also dictate what the team can and can’t do, for instance the timing and duration of testing.

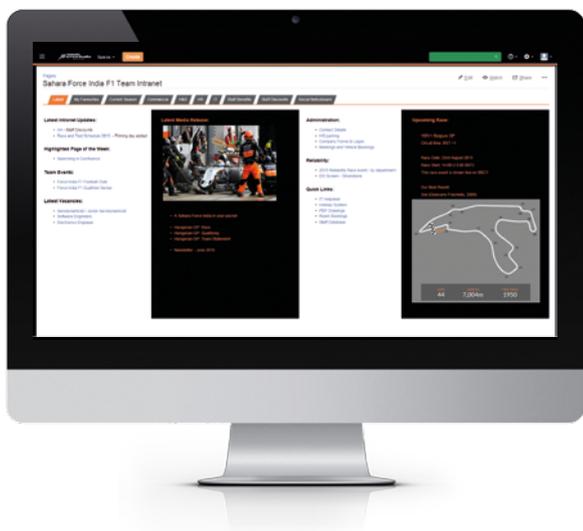
Team members are under unrelenting pressure to deliver quick, accurate work at all times; with the off-season arguably as pressured as the on. The biggest challenge from a software point of view is the scarcity of ‘windows of opportunity’ when equipment can be replaced or upgrades rolled out. This can mainly be done in the two-week ‘shutdown’ that happens every August, which is, ironically, IT’s busiest time.

In this rarefied and highly competitive environment, collaboration and efficiency have to be maximised and the tools fine-tuned to work as effectively as possible. Gilchrist decided to seek some support.

Sahara Force India made a direct approach to Atlassian who unequivocally recommended Adaptavist as being the best fit for its needs. This was due to Adaptavist’s track record in supporting the most complex, mission-critical Atlassian environments. In March 2015, Adaptavist became a Technical Partner of Sahara Force India.

WHAT ADAPTAVIST DELIVERED

The client had a list of aspirations centred around improvements to communication, information integration, performance measurement and planning. Adaptavist’s response was to work with Gilchrist and look closely at the application performance of both Confluence and JIRA. These were reviewed and tuned. Adaptavist advised on how best to set things up, made changes to configurations and improved monitoring, which for Gilchrist is really important because effective monitoring can identify emerging issues before they actually occur.



A more effective Confluence intranet

From the users’ point of view, the biggest impact has been Adaptavist’s update to the look and feel of the team’s intranet. This involved collaborative development with Gilchrist around what was wanted. Adaptavist then developed a basic skin using Adaptavist’s ThemeBuilder (a Confluence Add-On), and provided Sahara Force India with comprehensive user notes so that a uniform corporate ID can be applied as the intranet is developed. Every page now carries the team’s branding – “It makes it ours,” says Gilchrist, “it gives us far more ownership.”

ThemeBuilder also has an impact on usability because it’s reconfigured the intranet, creating tabs on the homepage that allow users to get far more information with fewer clicks. Adaptavist’s user notes have also empowered Gilchrist to continue developing the look and feel of the intranet herself, in the knowledge that Adaptavist’s support is only a phone call away.

Performance review and recommendations

Adaptavist helped Gilchrist develop the means to assess and measure performance and usage patterns within the Confluence intranet. This helps her collect and analyse web activity, page loading and so on. She can see who is looking at what which helps to identify ‘stale’ pages, or those that are very popular. It highlights which pages should be actively promoted, or which need to be accessible via fewer clicks. It shows how users come to any particular page, whether through the search or via different links. All of this enables Gilchrist to refine the site and make it more useful and effective.

Licensing review

Adaptavist’s Managed Services team undertook a licence management review and consolidation exercise. They are now handling all of the F1 team’s renewals and upgrades directly with Atlassian. This, says Gilchrist, they do ‘very, very quickly’, saving Sahara Force India both time and money. Importantly, it also means that the team is always using the latest versions of JIRA, JIRA Agile and Confluence.

Ongoing support and managed service

Finally, Sahara Force India wanted ongoing support to manage and maintain the effectiveness of its Atlassian estate. In response Adaptavist has provided access to its Managed Service desk that provides the team with 24/7 insight and answers. This is now the point of contact for all current and future services, including licensing, service development and support, and issue resolution. Sahara Force India can call the Services desk with any concern, submit a request for help or simply double-check an idea, at any time.



HOW ADAPTAVIST MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Adaptavist makes a difference in part because of its collaborative and flexible approach. Gilchrist finds that Adaptavist's people are approachable, easy to get hold of and they listen well.

She also has great confidence in Adaptavist's knowledge of the Atlassian toolset and feels they are genuine experts. She underlines this by telling an interesting story. Before the partnership was forged, she recalls using the Atlassian forums (Atlassian Answers) and discovering that two contributors in particular – Nic Brough and Jamie Echlin – always gave responses that could be trusted. "I've since found out," notes Gilchrist, "that those two people both work at Adaptavist."

Adaptavist's work "has definitely improved performance to a noticeable degree," confirms Gilchrist. Development has also speeded up. Gilchrist notes that she can do things much more quickly because she doesn't have to spend hours and hours on research, and still wonder if it's the right way to go. "I can spend an hour researching and then put a question in to Adaptavist. It accelerates my decision-making which is highly useful."

At the same time, the quality of what's being developed is higher. "Just having a company like Adaptavist as our partner," says Gilchrist, "is very, very useful. It's not just support of the Atlassian products, it's specifically targeted to us and how we use them. Adaptavist provide focused, relevant advice. It saves us a significant amount of time by not having to work through all the possible options."

She continues: "They are a good fit for us, with their knowledge, their flexibility, their out of hours support and their innovative solutions." On a personal level, she adds, "the individuals are very personable and as a team we get on with them very well. It's a relatively new partnership but we already have ideas for further collaborations in the future." In conclusion, would Gilchrist recommend Adaptavist to others? "Yes, without hesitation."



Drivers Nico Hulkenberg and Sergio Perez from the Sahara Force India Formula One team

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Shona Gilchrist, IT Analyst | Sahara Force India

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ABOUT ADAPTAVIST

Adaptavist, established in 2005, is a London-headquartered IT services company providing premium professional services, support, hosting and licenced products to a wide range of national and international clients including over half of the Fortune 500 companies.

Adaptavist, an 'Atlassian Platinum and Enterprise Partner', is widely recognised as the most technically advanced Enterprise Partner in the Atlassian ecosystem.



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