



Fast-moving creative studio uses Smartsheet to power competitive advantage and growth



Hotopp, a dynamic creative studio working with some of the world's largest businesses and sports organizations, punches well above its weight thanks to its use of Smartsheet. The company increases proactive project management, delivers more frictionless client service, and gains competitive advantage that is helping to fuel its continued growth.



Customer:

Hotopp

Industry:

Live entertainment

Organization Size:

Small (<2,000 employees)

Region:

North America

Website:

hotopp.com



Hotopp wouldn't grow at the rate we are without Smartsheet in place.



Gary Wichansky, CEO,
Hotopp



Hotopp is a dynamic creative studio with teams of talented artists, designers, makers, and producers. It produces televised events for major network and cable broadcast outlets, corporate events, branded environments and presentations for Fortune 500 companies, immersive experiences for attractions, and scenery for shows and concert events.

Background

The NHL Winter Classic isn't your average hockey game. Since 2008, the National Hockey League has taken the sport outdoors on New Year's Day, treating fans to a one-of-a-kind viewing experience. The Winter Classic quickly became one of the league's signature events, and the 2024 installment doubled down on everything new in professional hockey. The league's two newest franchises—the Seattle Kraken and the Vegas Golden Knights—would face off in the first-ever Winter Classic hosted at T-Mobile Park in Seattle.

In addition to building a hockey rink on a baseball field, the NHL needed to provide an awesome fan experience both for those in the stands and for those watching live on TV. That experience would include fireworks, rapper Sir Mix-a-Lot, flying fish to evoke nearby Pike Place Fish Market, a shipwreck in the outfield, and an on-field TNT studio to produce the television broadcast.

Hotopp, the creative studio tasked with the design, fabrication, and installation of all the scenic features outside the rink, had learned a thing or two about the unique challenges of bringing a big hockey game outdoors when it worked on the 2015 NHL Winter Classic. This time around, the NHL needed minds that could weave the ominous branding of the Kraken together with the signature ethos of the Pacific Northwest.

Given their previous experience and their love for their hometown of Seattle, the Hotopp team members fit the bill. They were tasked with managing their own staff, their own in-house fabrication operation, and a fleet of vendors, all while coordinating with the NHL on the various checkpoints along the way. Tracking the associated budgets in real time throughout a fast-moving project was key to putting on a show that would deliver an awesome fan experience.

Customer:

Hotopp uses Smartsheet to gain far greater transparency into its business than was previously possible with spreadsheets and files.

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Gary Wichansky, CEO

You'd think a 17-person company would need superpowers to manage it all successfully.

Solution

What Hotopp has is better than superpowers. It's Smartsheet, which the company began using in 2022. Before that, Hotopp had been managing its business the way too many companies do, via a mixture of spreadsheets and file folders. This had never been ideal and, as Hotopp's business became more complex and expanded from design-only work to also include fabrication and installation, it became even less serviceable as a way to manage projects proactively.

Hotopp uses Smartsheet sheets and reports to get real-time data on its projects and share that information with decisionmakers and managers within the company and at its clients. Employees made their own Smartsheet template to standardize their use of the tool, which quickly became the default tool for project management. Employees use Smartsheet to track all active, pending, pipeline, and prospective projects. They use Smartsheet to track all project milestones, estimates, and actuals against estimates, including internal and external costs.

Employees began their use with a single sheet per project. But as the projects became more complex and the single-sheet approach too cumbersome, they evolved to a multi-sheet approach that includes separate sheets for design, fabrication, and client reporting. Everyone accesses the sheets they need for their work, and top-line managers and executives access all the sheets for any given project. It enables a more fluid approach that the company's employees, particularly its creative staff, prefer.

The company takes an evolutionary approach to its use of Smartsheet, adding platform capabilities as they need them. For example, Hotopp CEO Gary Wichansky now plans to add Smartsheet dashboards to get at-a-glance views of aggregated information from across the company, rather than just project-by-project views.

In a Nutshell:

The greater transparency and collaboration that Hotopp gains with Smartsheet also extends to Hotopp's clients – and helps deliver an awesome client experience to them.

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Gary Wichansky

Better transparency, collaboration

Hotopp uses Smartsheet to gain far greater transparency into its business than was previously possible with spreadsheets and files. Employees use it not just to track project status, but to collaborate on any business process they wish – and to do so more quickly than they could before.

For example, project review meetings that used to take four personnel hours to prepare and run now take 30 minutes. Also, project management and financial data are more easily integrated, leading to more proactive financial management of projects.

“With Smartsheet, anyone in the company can click on a sheet to see what’s up,” says Wichansky. “It’s that simple to do.”

The Hotopp CEO also praises the adaptability of the software. *“We do some weird jobs sometimes, and Smartsheet makes it easy to create one-off modified templates based on our standard template, to meet those needs. We say Smartsheet is the way we control chaos.”*

Departments also use Smartsheet to meet specific needs. For example, Wichansky cites his HR department, which created a hiring sheet to track job applicants through the process of interviews, skills testing, offer status and more.

Awesome client experience

The greater transparency and collaboration that Hotopp gains with Smartsheet also extends to Hotopp’s clients – and helps deliver an awesome client experience to them. Clients are aware of the high degree of transparency and oversight that Hotopp brings to their projects, and appreciate that it makes it easier for them to work with the company.

For example, Wichansky notes that clients will sometimes contact their account managers at Hotopp to discuss project status or raise an invoicing issue. Those account managers can often use Smartsheet to answer clients’ questions in



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those initial conversations, rather than getting back to them days later.

"We use Smartsheet to remove friction points around client service," says Wichansky. "That's how you get more-satisfied clients."

Greater competitive advantage

Removing friction points around client service is also how you increase your competitive advantage. Wichansky says he sees a tie between Hotopp's use of Smartsheet and the company's growth.

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Wichansky also sees the greater efficiency and proactive management enabled by Smartsheet helping to power his company's rebranding. *"How Smartsheet enables us to work with clients is a market distinction and a competitive advantage. We're making sure that prospective clients know this."*

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