

# Critical Mission

FEATURED ARTICLE

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## Both-Shoring: An Offshore Development Model that *Works*

*Using the right model on the right projects, even small and medium-sized companies can take advantage of the economies and efficiencies of using offshore software development resources. It's all about having a process that works. We call it **Both-Shoring**.*

### The Process

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As you would expect, there's more to being successful with an offshore project than simply swapping out American programmers with their equivalents in India, Poland, Ukraine or elsewhere labor costs are substantially lower. That simplistic approach is destined for failure due to a number of factors we'll detail in this newsletter.

Our recommended *both-shoring* process involves a combination of three key elements:

- The right project – not all projects are suitable.
- Division of labor – get the right people in the right roles in the right location.
- Experienced project management – this is a unique process and not something to learn as you go.

Let's examine each key element in more detail.

### The Right Project

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Modern software development takes many forms and uses a wide variety of tools. A successful both-shore project requires a design and architecture that can be easily broken down into separate components that can be implemented, tested and integrated more or less independently, and where specification changes can be aggressively managed.

For example, most SharePoint-based projects are not a good candidates because of the tight interaction of subject matter experts, business analysts and developers. Often all three roles need to be in the same conference room, working out details. The same goes for any project where the specifications are fluid and team members need immediate, ad hoc access to each other.

With that said, Alto was able to use offshore resources in a SharePoint project requiring a complex custom component. Local team members did all the SharePoint UI work while an offshore team built the component in isolation, testing it in a purpose-built test portal. The component was tightly spec'd and was cleanly separate from the rest of the project.

### Division of Labor

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Every project requires careful analysis of which roles should be kept local and which can be located offshore.

Our experience has been that **business analysts** absolutely must be local. They need easy, daytime business hours access to subject matter experts, and must be completely comfortable with American English language and American business culture and terminology.

Similarly, local **project managers** are essential, for much of the same reasons. The offshore company will also have their own project management, of course. The expectation is that the offshore project managers are good communicators, fluent in English, and have office hours that at least partially overlap with local hours.

You might think that **software developers** would always be offshore, and sometimes that's the case. However, our experience has been that for larger projects there's often vital core components that absolutely need to be done right, and require tighter integration with business analysts. We often end up having local developers working in tandem with the offshore team. For example, relational database design and implementation is critical for the success of data-oriented projects. We handle that locally and only use offshore folks when a large amount of well-defined programming is required. Another example is implementing re-usable code libraries that the offshore team will build upon. It's very much worth the extra expense of having local experts handle such components.

**Quality assurance testing** is a good candidate for being done entirely offshore. It is particularly effective for regression testing, which involves fully retesting components when they are changed. So often this gets skipped entirely or only partially conducted due to the expense of local resources.

## **Project Management**

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Not surprisingly, the ability to coordinate a project with people potentially spread all over the world is critical to success. A few key techniques can make the difference between success and failure.

Defining expectations and making sure the client, the offshore team and the onshore team are all on the same page is important. Effective and timely communication is critical and making good use of the e-tools for exchanging data is key to better communication. Tracking status and every milestone, documentation, and periodic code reviews for quality check play an important role in ensuring the delivery of a successful project.

## **On-Site at the Offshore?**

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For larger and particularly important projects, we've used a process where American business analysts and developers make periodic trips to the offshore location, for direct communication with the project managers and developers. There's nothing like being in the same room for hours at a time, during daytime hours for everyone. Contrast that with one side or the other staying up late or getting up early and trying to pay attention in an hours-long conference call.

## **Economy, but also Efficiency**

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You go offshore because you expect to pay substantially less to implement a software solution. What is often over-looked is the built-in efficiency of a process where you effectively have two shifts working every day. Done right, you can cut your development time and complete a project sooner, which also translates into cost savings.

You need to get into a rhythm where your local and offshore teams perform a deliberate and coordinated hand-off each day. This is something that ought to happen in *all* software projects, regardless of onshore versus offshore. In practice, however, the close proximity of team members and informal communication actually results in less structure and more miscommunication when everyone is local.

In this way, a both-shored project can actually experience *improved* efficiency and less project churn. It's all about management discipline.

### **Summary**

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Both-Shoring is a project management technique that makes offshore development work for even small and medium-sized projects. The key is having a partner that knows how to get it done.

Contact Alto if you'd like to learn more about how to take advantage of a hybrid development model.

For more details on Alto's model, see:

<http://www.altoconsulting.com/Software-Development-Consulting-Minneapolis-Minnesota/altos-both-shoring>