



RedLeaf distilled complex content and functional requirements into a program that has brought its client new business – and an industry higher levels of expertise

Training a new generation of managers to succeed in a complex, highly competitive and expanding business environment is challenge enough. Developing software to simulate that environment and radically shrink industry learning curves is another challenge altogether – but one that RedLeaf completed to rave reviews.

The project began when RedLeaf got a call from Peter Starks, managing partner of the Red Global Group, one of the top management training firms for the international hospitality industry. Starks had the vision for a software program that would tap new technologies to bring unprecedented realism and relevance to the training experience. He wanted a simulator that would compress years of on-the-job experience into just two or three days of focused learning.

A tall order

Of course, that meant that the program had to reflect the day-to-day and year-to-year dynamics of the high-end, international hotels that Red Global's clients owned. It was a tall order, readily apparent in the two, three-inch binders it took to contain the project's initial specifications.

Lacking the specialized internal expertise to handle such a demanding task, Red Global put out a call for help to leading software development companies. Six made it to the final level of review, and, after intense scrutiny, RedLeaf won the assignment.

"RedLeaf checked all of our boxes," says Starks, referring to a long list of criteria he used to evaluate and compare the firms. Among the requirements were:

- Proven expertise in open-source programming, particularly with Ruby on Rails
- The ability to translate complex metrics into algorithms
- The willingness to assimilate concepts and content of what needed to be programmed, and also to commit to a year of intense development followed by ongoing support

"We needed a firm that could supply more than code."

- The initiative and drive to keep a complex project on schedule without constant supervision and hand-holding.

“We didn’t want a developer that said, ‘Write it out and we’ll code it,’” recalls Starks. “RedLeaf impressed us with its commitment to understanding what our clients and students needed, and then designing the best possible program to accomplish that.”

Several RedLeaf clients Starks contacted confirmed his initial impressions. One even asked Starks to shake the hand of the firm’s partner and lead developer, Sergei Serdyuk. He said, “I worked with Sergei for well over a year but never met him face-to-face. He was more dependable and capable than some of my own people.”

“That really sealed the deal for me,” says Starks.

Into deep development

Delivering a highly flexible, cost-efficient solution

RedLeaf quickly found itself not only immersed in the project but also in its driver’s seat. After a thorough project briefing, Red Global sent RedLeaf to gather the necessary information from a variety of industry gurus, academicians and in-house experts. The first trip was to the prestigious Cornell School of Hotel Administration. There, Serdyuk met with faculty members who had developed sophisticated mathematical models for successful hotel management – models he would incorporate into the training simulator.

Further input came from a variety of other sources. With so many involved, each with his or her own, independent perspective, a number of inconsistencies cropped up. But RedLeaf took charge of resolving them. Not only did that prevent a very complex project and its sponsor from getting bogged down in the details, it also gave RedLeaf deep insight into the detailed workings of the business the program needed to simulate.

Meanwhile, the firm was keeping a close eye on the calendar. Red Global had promised the simulator to some top clients by a certain date. RedLeaf didn’t have the luxury of waiting for all the background information to come in and for the specifications to be finalized. Programming started on what would prove to be moving target in terms of everything but the deadline.

Steering to perfection

More than a year and 3000 database fields later, programming wrapped up. RedLeaf had improved upon fully half of the specifications in the original binders, producing an easy-to-use, easy-to-maintain simulator consisting of more than 50 screens. By combining its wide-ranging technical expertise with its new-found industry insights, RedLeaf was able to work side-by-side with its client, complementing Red Global’s strengths with its own to produce a highly sophisticated product.

The project then shifted into a fast, very successful beta testing phase. RedLeaf had Red Global's team of trainers put the program through its paces, watching every step of the way for ways to improve the functioning.

A complete commitment to client success

Four weeks of field testing followed. A total of five pilot sessions were set up with hotel managers in Brussels, Budapest and Hawaii. Again, RedLeaf was on-site, noting where anything about the program caused even the slightest slip in the focus of the trainers and trainees. Updates were rolled out overnight. Completely committed to Red Global's success, RedLeaf kept fine-tuning the program day by day, taking the initiative to move it closer to perfection in ways the client team hadn't even realized were possible.

A new "gold standard"

As soon as the program was released Red Global knew it was a winner. It had the technical chops to provide users with a direct line of sight from the decisions made one day to their effects months and years into the future.

In the first year alone Red Global took the simulator to clients in some 30 countries around the world. The top ten international hotel chains now rely on it in their core training curricula. It's also used by noted hotel schools worldwide.

"We couldn't be more satisfied," notes Starks. "We now have the gold standard of industry training technologies. RedLeaf took charge of giving us the solid, nimble platform we needed – despite the complexity of the subject matter and the breadth of service they had to deliver.

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hotel chains
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