

Trebuchet Outsourcing Services



Offshore Outsourcing – The Trebuchet Difference

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Offshore Outsourcing

Over the past fifteen or twenty years there have been major changes in the dynamics of the labor market in the USA and the rest of the developed world. No longer can it be assumed that workers will be local to the facility employing them, or even residents of the same city – or even of the same country. Rapid advances in communication and data transmission have made it possible for many jobs to be done remotely from the home facility. Fierce competition in many industries has motivated numerous employers to seek less expensive venues for their labor forces.

Developing countries have been quick to seize the opportunity and facilities have sprung up in locales where labor is considerably less expensive than it is in the USA to fill the demand for less expensive labor.

This phenomenon is known as “offshore outsourcing”. Countries like India, China and other far-eastern countries, as well as Russia and other eastern European countries have become major centers of offshore outsourcing.

Any work process that can be logically isolated from surrounding work processes is a candidate for offshore outsourcing, at least in theory.

The Downside

Early outsourcing experiences were mixed. It soon became clear that an offshore-outsourced labor pool had to be trained, monitored and managed differently and more intensively than a domestic labor pool – even a remote domestic labor pool. The learning curve would be longer. Quality levels would slip unless carefully watched. Under the best of circumstances productivity would be far lower in an offshore outsourcing scenario and quality measurably lower even with the best due diligence. The additional hand-holding, and the lower productivity and quality, mitigated the cost savings, sometimes significantly, and sometimes to the extent that the viability of the offshore outsourcing model in those scenarios was questioned.

It became clear that offshore outsourcing required more than setting up and equipping a facility and tossing cheap manpower at US work processes. Yet, many offshore outsourcing companies continue to operate in that way, motivated by ignorance and/or greed, and preying on the naiveté of clients new to the outsourcing experience.

It also became clear that not all work processes could effectively be outsourced, even to the best offshore outsourcing companies, for several reasons:

- 1) **Lack of requisite English language skill:** Tasks that require highly nuanced English expression or comprehension are generally poor candidates for offshore outsourcing. Such tasks include language editing, abstracting complex material and the like. Typically mother-tongue English and a US education are required for these skills and these are in short supply offshore.

- 2) **Lack of immersion in Western culture:** Tasks that require a background in the arts, sports, media and common American/Western mores are in this category. For example, categorizing real estate ads in a newspaper is exceedingly difficult for someone who doesn't know what a "condo" is, no matter how good his or her command of English. Transcribing a TV program where the protagonists are discussing names, places and events that are part of the American culture, but unfamiliar to non-Americans, is another example.
- 3) **Lack of specific domain expertise:** For example, the US legal system, and US case law, are second nature to an attorney who graduated a US law school but largely unfamiliar to an attorney with equivalent qualifications elsewhere. Similar considerations apply in finance and other domains.

Many outsourcing companies push the envelope in this respect as well. These factors engendered the now common stereotype of offshore outsourcing as frustrating, second-rate and ineffective. Most Americans, including most employers, envision the nightmare tech support experience – dealing with an operator in India, who doesn't understand the caller, can't make himself clear to the caller and blindly follows a script – as typifying offshore outsourcing.

Yet, it doesn't have to be this way.

Trebuchet – The Proposition

Trebuchet Outsourcing Services was founded by Eli Willner, an executive with thirteen years of experience in the offshore outsourcing industry. His objective was to create an offshore outsourcing company that broke the mold – a company that employs techniques to avoid or mitigate the typical pitfalls of offshore outsourcing, a company that expands the envelope of services that can be effectively outsourced, and that provides clients a pleasant, rewarding and profitable outsourcing experience.

Trebuchet was founded on the following business principles. Individually they are rarely applied elsewhere. Collectively they comprise a nearly unique outsourcing business model.

1) US Project Management

All projects are directly supervised by a mother-tongue English-speaking, US educated project manager based in the USA (or where feasible, in Israel). The PM is the prime or sole point of contact with the client and is available during the client's business hours. The PM directly interacts with non-American offshore personnel, when they are utilized; works with offshore team leads to devise project plans and QC procedures, and oversees the project on a detail level. The PM is responsible for schedules, quality, productivity, profitability, billing and collections, working with other departments as necessary, and is attuned to identifying client needs that can lead to additional work.

Trebuchet's clients never have to contend with unintelligible accents or foreign time zones. They never have to wonder who to call for a particular problem.

2) A Facility Staffed by Americans (and other Anglos)

As noted, language, cultural and educational differences make it difficult or impossible to outsource certain services to far-eastern facilities. Yet, in the current economic climate especially, clients would gladly outsource these services if they could save money without sacrificing quality. The challenge? Finding qualified Americans (and other Anglos) who will work for wages considerably less than the US standard.

The solution? Israel! There is a wealth of American/Anglo émigrés to Israel. Most are highly credentialed, highly motivated professionals with limited job options. Salaries in Israel are generally lower than in the US, demand for jobs is high, and this group, who accepted material sacrifice when they moved to Israel, and with limited knowledge of the local language, are happy to accept work at much lower than US rates. It's a win-win – a difficult to employ group gets challenging work in a congenial work environment while earning a living wage and Trebuchet gains the ability to offer higher end services to its clientele – really, anything that can be done in the US that doesn't actually require physical presence.

Note that Trebuchet also employs a far-eastern workforce which is utilized for work suitable to their skills and capabilities.

3) “Dual Shore” Process Flows

An experienced outsource professional knows that in every work process there are tasks that are more challenging, and that require specialized skills, and tasks that are more routine and can be done by less qualified personnel – provided they are properly trained and supervised. This principle is the cornerstone of Trebuchet's dual shore model. When a project comes in the PMs are trained to “parse” the workflow into tasks that require the specialized level of skill only available at our Israel facility, and tasks that can be done just as effectively in India. For example, a legal project may require research and authoring. Competent Indian attorneys (who are much less expensive than their US-trained counterparts in Israel), properly trained and supervised, might be able to handle the research. The citations they discover are handed to the US attorney-editors in Israel who do the actual authoring.

Or, first-pass categorization might be done in India with a second QC pass in Israel (incorporating a feedback loop to improve the skills of the India team over time).

The benefit of the dual-shore model is that it appreciably lowers the total cost of the project. Often the net cost is very close to what might be obtained using pure India labor – except the result is the equivalent of what would be obtained using pure US labor.

This concept requires skill and discipline to implement correctly. The hand-off between teams – and there could be several in the course of a complex process – has to be seamless. Trebuchet has mastered this discipline and thus can take advantage of this most powerful tool.

4) A Multi-Service, Domain-Centric Business Model

Clients prefer one-stop shopping, especially in relationship-based arenas like outsourcing services. Trebuchet has carefully selected domains that benefit significantly from the previous three principles and offers a full gamut of services in those domains. In publishing, for example, typesetting or XML tagging can often be done by an India-only team. Language editing requires the skills of our Israel-based workforce. In legal services, document discovery can often be done by Indian attorneys or paralegals but drafting a brief can only be done by a US attorney member of our Israel-based team.

The domains Trebuchet has selected are,

- 1) Content services
- 2) Publishing services
- 3) Legal services
- 4) Call center services
- 5) Transcription services

More information on these domains and on the specific services Trebuchet offers in each of them can be found on the Trebuchet website, www.trebout.com.

Eli Willner, Trebuchet Founder – Professional Biography

A native of New York, Eli was a Magna Cum Laude graduate of Brooklyn College with honors in Computer/Information Science, an M.A. Candidate of the same college, a recipient of the Regents College Scholarship, a member of the Dean’s Honor List, and a National Merit Society Finalist. Eli has worn many hats well – he is a seasoned manager, a published author, a veteran programmer, and an experienced public lecturer. Prior to founding Trebuchet he held key positions in several major companies in New York: Vice-President for Research & Development, Pecan Software/Liaison Systems; President, AIM Motherboard/QSI Corp; Director of Technology, Data Conversion Laboratory; Associate Vice President for Project Analysis at Innodata Corporation, and, most recently, President and CTO of Green Point Technology Services. Concurrently with other professional activities, he taught an extensive array of introductory and advanced computer science and computer application courses at several colleges, institutes and high schools including Brooklyn College, where he was rated best adjunct lecturer at a formal faculty evaluation.

Eli was Chief Technologist for the newly created Digital Content Division of Barnes and Noble Inc. In this capacity: he revamped the division’s technical direction; built relationships with key technology partners; set up, staffed, trained and managed the NY-based R&D technology cell; established production procedures and specified production tools for both Manila production facility and NY operations; and served as project manager for the massive MSLit launch conversion project. At Innodata Corporation, Eli Willner served as Associate Vice President, Project Analysis. He coordinated the provision of technical support to the sales team and provided technical leadership to the New Projects and R&D teams. He also served as chief liaison officer between the business development executives and the sales support teams.

At Green Point Technology Services, his most recent position, Eli served as President and Chief Technology Officer. Highlights of his accomplishments at Green Point include

- Re-inventing this publishing outsourcing company, which had been floundering in low-volume, low-end data entry outsourcing for the previous four years of its existence. Brought in new, higher-end customers; initiated intensive training program for staff of production facility in Mumbai, India; hired new offshore managers; put into place new systems for analyzing new projects, project tracking, workflow design and technical support; revamped IT infrastructure to support higher-end, higher-volume business; created new website design and content as well as new sales literature; hired and trained Director of Project Management and Vice President of Sales and Marketing for USA office.
- Opening second facility in Israel to staff for high-end services. Recruited a top-notch Anglo staff with expertise in a wide variety of domains, organized several production divisions, hired division managers and established a modus for multi-shore production (India and Israel) to optimize both quality and costs.
- Working with company owners and VP, Sales and Marketing on coherent marketing plan; introduced company to new markets and service areas outside the publishing realm; participated in the sales process by visiting clients directly, as well as through email and phone solicitations. Established strategic partnerships with key companies and individuals in the publishing and other outsourcing realms.
- Serving as “Chief Solutions Architect”, especially for complex and one-of-a-kind publishing projects. Explored and tested new technology, devised and tested new processes and procedures; interacted with clients on a consultative basis, and “packaged” the solution so that it could be implemented offshore (or onshore/offshore, if appropriate)
- Overseeing production team; devising daily reporting and project tracking mechanisms; architecting online project management and work unit tracking system
- Developing a completely new set of “self-healing” QA processes aimed at nipping production problems early on, assuring that they do not repeat, and assuring that QA itself does not bog down production or substantially increase its cost
- Managing networks and IT infrastructure

Eli is currently Chairman of the XML Forum of New York, and has served on the PRISM Aggregator DTD standards committee, the OEBF metadata standards committee and was active in the ONIX bibliographic standardization effort. He is co-author of "Advanced UCSD Pascal Programming Techniques" (Prentice-Hall) and author of numerous technical articles on outsourcing, data conversion and information management.

For additional information on Trebuchet Outsourcing Services and investment opportunities please contact Eli Willner at eli.willner@trebout.com, or at 917-751-3422.