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**The Home Depot's Communication Makeover**  
**The world's largest home improvement retailer builds better communications with a Web-based workload planning and communication tool.**  
*Integrated Solutions for Retailers, June 2004*  
Written by *Justine Brown*

When you're the world's largest home improvement specialty retailer, communicating with more than 1,500 busy stores and 300,000 associates is no easy task. And ensuring each store has received critical communications and taken the associated actions can be nearly impossible.

Until recently, The Home Depot, Inc.'s (Atlanta) stores were experiencing task saturation and communication overload. Communication in all forms would hit the stores daily, in the form of snail mail, phone calls, and e-mail. The Home Depot corporate office had no way to regulate the flow of task-driven communication to the stores and no way to ensure tasks were completed. Store employees, who were overwhelmed with the volume and constant stream of communication, were having difficulty prioritizing assignments.

"We wanted to create a more consistent environment for the stores," says Shannon Roh, director of store operations for The Home Depot. "We wanted to give the stores one place to go for all corporate communication - a one-stop shop."

**Workload Management Tool Centralizes Planning, Communication**

Roh discovered, through discussions with peers at other retailers, that many stores use workload management tools to centralize their information and communicate it to their stores. Roh felt that a workload management tool would allow The Home Depot to drive consistency throughout its operations as it continued to grow. Several of the retailers Roh spoke with were using Reflexis Systems Inc.'s (Norwood, MA) Task & Workload Management RTM (Reflexis Task Management) program.

Before investing in an automated solution, Roh and her team built and implemented a manual workflow management process they believed would work most effectively in their environment. "We implemented it manually first so we could determine exactly what it was we wanted the tool to do," she says. "Then we worked with Reflexis on implementing its Task & Workload Management RTM."

Reflexis RTM is an online tool that helps corporations manage workload, streamline communication, collectively measure performance, and solicit feedback. The tool enables The Home Depot's corporate headquarters and retail stores to communicate via a Web-based system in which all communication is organized in one place. Managers are able to access all the information they need to manage, plan, and track their assignments, and to report their progress on completing assignments. Information is updated in real time.

**Streamlined Communications Improve Productivity, Compliance**

The Home Depot implemented the Reflexis tool in September 2002. Roh says that, overall, the implementation went smoothly, and she received very few problem-related calls from the stores. "The biggest challenge we encountered was training more than 13,000 users," she says. "The tool covers every store, so we trained people in every store, as well as project leaders here in Atlanta and everyone in the division offices - everyone who initiates tasks in our stores had to be trained on the tool." Training consisted of a 2-hour, hands-on course in a classroom setting. Store managers underwent more streamlined training consisting of a 30-minute video.

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Roh has seen a noticeable improvement in storewide communication since the Reflexis system was implemented. "We've achieved a single pipeline for all managers to receive all action-required communication and we've eliminated duplication in our communication," she says. "Store managers no longer have to read the same e-mail three times because it was sent to them by so many different people."

Better communication has brought other benefits as well. The company has achieved consistency in execution of tasks, which it is now able to measure. Plus, by making product recalls and safety alerts more visible and organized, the tool has helped The Home Depot achieve 100% compliance with such recalls and alerts. The corporate office also now has a clear view of each store's workload, and has used this information to eliminate as much overload as possible.