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## OFFSHORE SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT: THE BENEFITS AND PITFALLS OF VIRTUAL TEAMS

In today's competitive business environment, small- and medium-sized businesses are often edged out by their larger counterparts. Until now, large multinational corporations enjoyed the advantage of having affordable resources spread out across the globe. Their use of offshore software development meant that they could get the custom software they needed at a fraction of the cost of utilizing in-house employees. Times have changed, though, and now businesses of every size can regain the competitive edge by outsourcing software development.

As many executives can attest, however, shepherding projects through to completion using virtual teams can have both advantages and disadvantages. Here is an overview of both:

### Benefits of Virtual Software Development Teams

There are several direct benefits of virtual teams. Because they are global in nature, you can take advantage of high degrees of expertise while paying much less than the prevailing wage. Since all parties come together for a single purpose, utilizing an offshore software development company also leads to shorter project durations and balanced team resources. Further, because the team members work from various locations, the risks are more evenly distributed.

There are also terrific intangible benefits to using virtual software development teams. You can have access to highly trained specialists who not only use their expertise to further your project, but who can also share their knowledge with others in your company. Your project can also conform to best practices by implementing quality standards. In addition, you gain the benefit of increased flexibility by having the ability to add team members as the project becomes more complex or labor intensive. This can lead to extremely agile software development.

### Drawbacks of Virtual Software Development Teams

Virtual teams have unique characteristics. Unlike long-time staff members who work in the same office, the collaboration on virtual teams is temporary and usually limited to specific projects. This can be a benefit, since the team shares a vision and works toward the same goal, but it can also be a project's downfall, since there may be no infrastructure in place to support quality control and intra-team communication. In addition, virtual team members often speak different languages and work in different time zones, which can make effective communication difficult. Cultural differences can translate into project delays when days of worship or national or regional holidays interfere with deadlines.

### Overcoming Obstacles and Maximizing Benefits

While there are both advantages and disadvantages to outsourcing software development, the benefits ultimately outweigh the pitfalls. It's not easy, however, to develop the know-how and management style to successfully supervise virtual teams. In order to do so, it's helpful to look to an offshore software development company that specializes in distributed software development in virtual teams. Their consulting services and training courses can help you develop procedures to avoid problems and increase the effectiveness of your processes. They can also assist you in preparing your employees to become members of virtual teams as well as provide the technical infrastructure to ensure success.

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