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TECHNOLOGY

Citi Works with iRise In Prototyping Effort

■ STEVE BILLS

Citigroup Inc. plans to increase standardization in its global network of Web sites over the next two years by using Internet prototyping tools.

Michael D. Chandler, Citi's director of user experience and product design, said it has spent 66%-80% less time in prototyping and 40%-42% less time specifying and documenting the requirements for an online application in projects in which it has used the tools.

Citi uses software from iRise of El Segundo, Calif., to produce functional prototypes that its 35-member team of Web developers can use to build a working application, Mr. Chandler said.

"This is not a tool you pick up and drop into your processes and it works," he said. "It's a major cultural change."

He said Citi began using iRise as "a process enabler" about 18 months ago to help staff and contractors in its "user-

centered design" team streamline an effort that began four years ago.

"We started to change the process of how we collect requirements," supplementing thick paper reports with on-screen simulations, Mr. Chandler said. Before Citi began using such prototypes, "there wasn't a lot of thought about how the customer or user approached the system," he said. "A lot of the requirements came from the subject matter experts."

Such "requirement failures" could cost time and money, he said. "The business could come back and say, 'That's not really what we wanted.'"

Citi introduced the new development process in real estate lending first, to build online mortgage and home equity applications, then student loans and automotive lending.

Its goal is to have a common interface for Citi's consumer-facing applications, Mr. Chandler said. In business-to-business

applications, such as indirect mortgage lending, Citi wants consistency on style guides, although the interaction patterns and relationships vary. For employees, the goals are to establish common workflows and a consistent look and feel.

The company also is developing a library of standard components in the prototyping system, Mr. Chandler said. For instance, he said, the login process for people with administrative rights or using multifactor authentication should be consistent regardless of the application.

Mr. Chandler cautioned, however, that the price of accelerating the development cycle is an elaborate process that begins with gathering the requirements and setting the look and feel of an application.

"You have to have very good meeting facilitators," he said. "If you do not control the crowd, you can get into very detailed discussion that may not provide a lot of lift to the product." ■



For further information about iRise please call 1-800-556-0399.