Finding the Right Configuration Management Tools

Some months ago I was tasked with finding candidate Software Configuration Management tools for my company. I searched the Internet and found dozens of tools. Then, after a brochure-level review of each tool I performed a first cut and reduced the list to a mere dozen. A summary of my criteria for this first cut looked like this: Issue Tracking, Software Tracking, Remote Users, Merge Tool, Diff Tool, PC Client. Then I started taking a harder look at the tools for the second cut. Five tools made the second cut, including two very prestigious tools, two well known tools, and one I had never heard of.

In my presentation to management I provided product costs, including training costs. During my research of costs I learned that one of the prestigious tool companies generates more revenue from support and training than from tools sales. The tool isn't cheap, and it is less than half of what you will end up spending (but they don't tell you that). The other prestigious company wanted an executive sponsor, VP level, identified to be able to 'lend support if needed'. Someone to sign additional Purchase Orders, I thought.

One company, and only one company, did not try to sell me some sort of consulting package 'to help us get started'. That company was Visible Systems. Visible was also the only company that did not try to get training on the initial Purchase Order for the tool. I was expecting them to mention it, so when they didn't I asked about it. Visible suggested that I wait until my co-workers use the tool and then see if training is needed. That was certainly a breath of fresh air.

Visible was also the only company of the five that made their tool available for download for trial. I downloaded the tool, installed it on my company server, and began evaluating the tool. The download is a fully functional, all bells and whistles copy of the tool. We purchased Razor and implemented it. <u>We have not purchased consulting, and none of the programmers have taken a single training class</u>. We have automatic email notification of task assignments, Issue tracking, software version control, custom builds, and other features such as Issue Required For File Checkout.

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<u>One of the strongest features for us is Issue-related Builds</u>. A project manager wanted 'Version 3.0 with the fix for Issue so-and-so'. Our build manager was able to tell Razor to create that exact build. Neither the project manager or the build manager knew what files had changed to make the fix, but Razor did. Engineering management now wants to put the engineering library into Razor. We will implement that this month, complete with review cycle, sign-offs, automatic email notifications, etc.

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