

FEW Automotive Group standardizes operations and improves visibility, boosting customer satisfaction

With guidance from Lighthouse Consultings, FEW united its projects in Smartsheet. With a 50% time saving and 80% more visibility, it manufactures better products, improving customer satisfaction by 90%.

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Konstantin Gross,
Head of Project Management
at FEW Automotive Group



Customer:

FEW Automotive Group

Industry:

Manufacturing

Organization Size:

Mid-Market
(200-1,999 employees)

Website:

<https://few-group.com/en/>

Region:

EMEA

Founded in 1995 in Germany, FEW Automotive Group dominates its niche market: customised pre-soldered connectors for the automotive industry. Its products are found in vehicles from companies like Volkswagen, Lamborghini, Ferrari, and Porsche.

FEW needs to navigate a complex landscape: a portfolio of over 1,000 articles, 600 employees spread across five plants on three continents, and over 120 projects a year with various customers. Initially, it relied on spreadsheets and email to manage projects. “Every project manager created their own plans, which led to inconsistencies,” explains Konstantin Gross, Head of Project Management at FEW Automotive Group. This caused a lack of transparency, delays, and problems in planning and execution. “The realisation was quite painful, to be honest. A big project failed and we incurred additional costs trying to get back on track. With more complex projects coming in, we needed to change,” adds Gross.

Laying the foundation

FEW realised it had to completely overhaul how it worked. It reached out to Nico Röepnack, Founder of Lighthouse Consultings, who has expertise in both industrial engineering and portfolio programme management, as well as experience in empowering high-performance teams with his pioneering approach, the overall team effectiveness (OTE) framework. “In my past experience in the automotive industry, I developed and implemented programme management systems for other companies, both large and small,” shares Röepnack. “So, I have a deep understanding of how a programme management system should be set up.”

With guidance from Lighthouse Consultings, FEW restructured its staff and formed a dedicated project management team to handle everything from project nomination to mass production. “Next, we worked with Nico for about four or five days to come up with a management plan for all our deliverables. We wanted clear structures for standard products, adapted products, and development projects. Nico helped us build the foundation for that,” recalls Gross. They also came up with a robust reporting structure to gather actionable insights. “At the time, I already had Smartsheet in mind as the perfect solution for this company. But our approach is not just about offering a tool, but also about designing the processes together with the customer and then realising them in Smartsheet,” Röepnack adds.

A centralised, transparent platform

Next, Röepnack introduced Smartsheet to the FEW team, plugging in sample internal data to showcase how it would work. In just seven days, Lighthouse Consultings transferred FEW’s data into Smartsheet and built a comprehensive project management and gate review system. It also created dedicated dashboards for each of the five plants. “I always emphasise that having a beautiful dashboard is one thing, but what’s more important is having a process that allows us to track activities and spot deviations from our targets. This was missing before, but with Smartsheet, we were able to connect the numbers with the activities, making it easy for FEW to compare factory performance globally,” shares Röepnack.



Use cases

- Enterprise PMO
- Business PMO



Capabilities

- Dashboards and Reporting
- Project Management
- Standardize Business Operations

One standard across three continents

Finally, Röepnack held workshops for the entire FEW team. “We showed them benchmarks from other companies’ programme management systems and tailored the system to their needs,” he shares. “We helped them define what was necessary and supported them with our knowledge since not all team members had experience with programme management systems.”

Today, FEW oversees the planning and execution across all global facilities in Smartsheet. “We use Smartsheet for everything from project management and collaboration to reporting and gathering information,” Gross shares. “We have standardised project plan templates that everyone follows, bringing consistency. Tasks and deliverables are assigned directly to the responsible team members through Smartsheet, making sure that nothing falls through the cracks.”

Real-time visibility

FEW also relies on Smartsheet to track key performance indicators (KPIs) from its production plants, everything from on-time delivery to incident reports and quality metrics. “Each plant has a dashboard that tracks several KPIs. Every week, we review the previous week’s performance and compare it to the current week, which allows us to steer our efforts towards reaching those KPIs more effectively,” adds Gross.

With automated, comprehensive dashboards, FEW has cut the time needed for sending emails and assembling reports by half. “By saving time, we’ve lowered our costs by 30%. We now handle more projects with higher complexity with the same amount of people,” shares Gross.

Empowered to impress customers

Thanks to a centralised platform for tracking plans, resources, and schedules, FEW has gained a live view of the entire company’s operations. “We’ve improved project visibility and transparency by about 80%,” says Gross. “As Head of the Department, I now have detailed insights into the health and status of each project, along with budget information. I can compare targets to the current status and allocate resources where they’re needed. It’s a big improvement.” Other project managers also claim that Smartsheet helps them keep track of their activities and focus on what’s important without missing anything.

Meanwhile, C-level executives have a clear view of the entire strategic roadmap of the company. This enables them to track the progress of regional initiatives, ensure that all project components align with strategic objectives, and immediately resolve issues across all plants.

But the ultimate winners are FEW’s customers. “Smartsheet saves time, keeps track of information, and provides structure. These three things make it easier to deliver a good product,” shares Gross. “As a result, we have improved our customer satisfaction and retention by 90%.”

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Continuous improvement

Gross expects that more employees at FEW will start using Smartsheet, starting with the marketing team. “We’re also always improving our processes and bringing more automation into tasks like document signing and approval. There’s so much potential,” he says. Whatever FEW decides, it has a reliable partner to lean on for guidance. “Lighthouse Consultings has been very professional and hands-on,” Gross concludes. “Nico understood our challenges and provided ideas to address them. He’s always available when I need assistance or have questions. Even now, if I come across something new, I can call him, and he’ll guide me through it.”

Looking back, Gross offers a piece of advice to those embarking on a similar journey. “Smartsheet is very easy to use, but when dealing with a big challenge or a complex organization, it’s best to consult an expert from the get-go, it will save you a lot of time,” he shares.

