

The Whittle Story

A Live Book

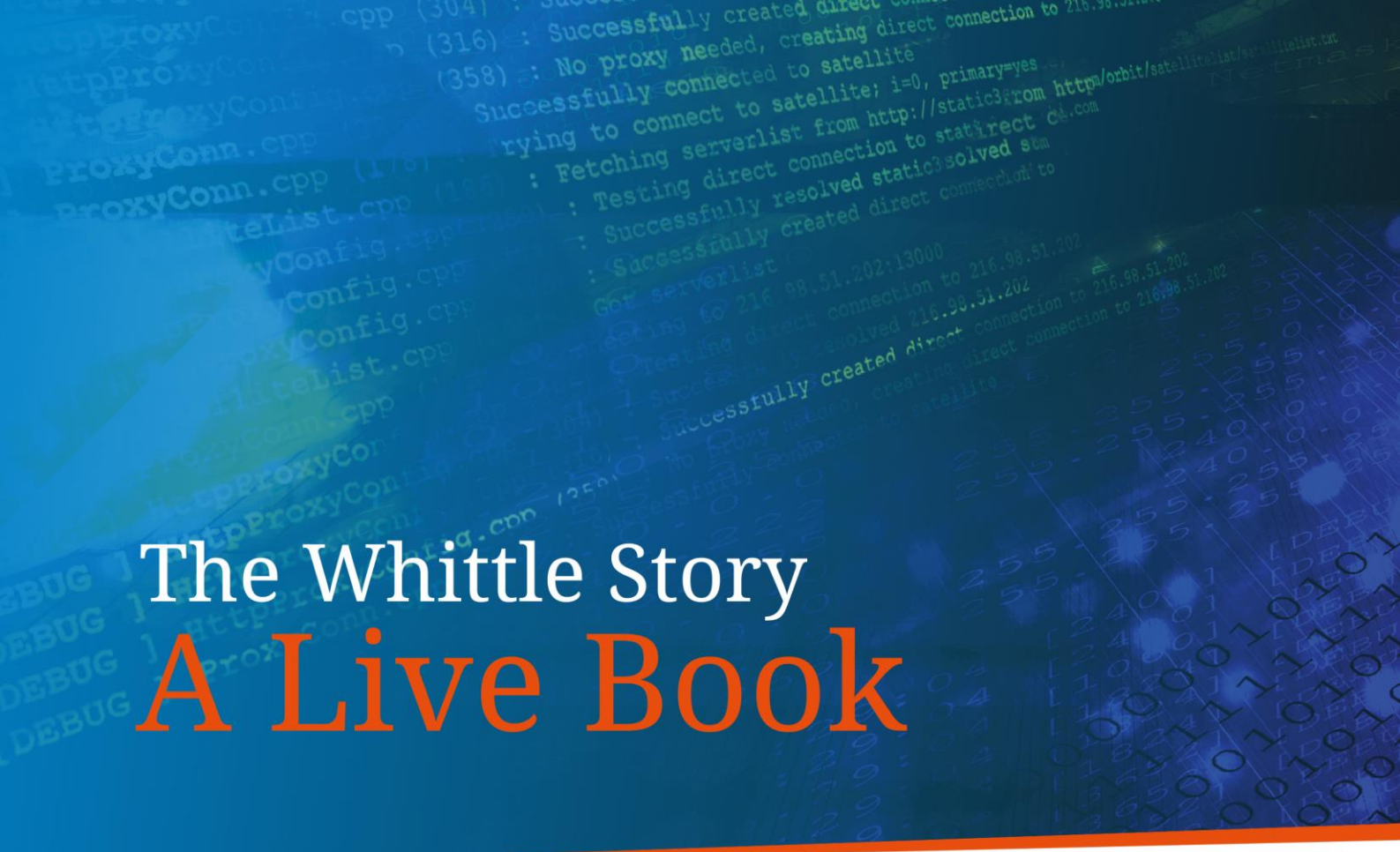
Adapting to COVID – Whittle Consulting pivot to online technology

By Gerald Whittle, November 2020

The pre-COVID Whittle Consulting business model

Traditionally, Whittle Consulting has generated new consulting work through the conduct of a 2-day Whittle Integrated Strategic Planning seminar. For the past decade, Gerald Whittle, CEO of Whittle Consulting, has spent approximately 200 days a year travelling all over the world presenting the seminar and visiting client mine sites. By the end of 2019, Gerald had delivered his seminar 168 times to approximately 4,000 delegates worldwide.

Whittle Consulting also holds public seminars, where anyone from the mining industry is able to attend. In-house seminars, for mining operations who are either considering or have decided to engage Whittle Consulting are also regularly scheduled. These seminars are the lifeblood of new consulting work, allowing individuals and mining operations to learn about the methodologies behind the Whittle process and to decide whether to engage Whittle Consulting for large-scale mining projects.



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ADAPTING TO COVID

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The management of Whittle consulting projects has traditionally been conducted face-to-face, with onsite mine visits. These visits often require our personnel to travel to the geographically remotest mines in the world. Site visits allow communication and education with mine staff, enabling our personnel to see the mine in operation and to manage Whittle Consulting mine optimisation projects. The pre-COVID Whittle Consulting business model was heavily reliant on the ability to travel internationally.

What challenges was Whittle Consulting facing due to COVID?

In completely unforeseen circumstances, COVID hit in March 2020. Almost overnight international travel ceased. To keep operations COVID-free, mines banned any external personnel from entry and arranged for management to work remotely from the safety of their homes.

The inability to travel overseas was significant for Whittle Consulting, as the business model used by Whittle for seminars and consulting service delivery was now redundant. This meant that due to COVID, the ongoing viability of Whittle Consulting was at stake.

The Whittle seminars and client meetings planned for the second quarter of 2020, could no longer go ahead as traditional face-to-face events. Whittle Consulting realised that due to COVID the challenge they faced was to embrace new technology to pivot their seminar and service delivery to a new online, interactive model. The added challenge was that for the ongoing viability of the business, this had to be achieved within 8 weeks, in order to meet the timeframe for the first scheduled public seminar in May.

What did Whittle Consulting do to address the challenge?

The first challenge for Whittle Consulting was to determine the best technological platform to deliver an interactive, online seminar and to conduct client communications.

As a small company, Whittle Consulting did not have in-house online technology expertise. After deciding on Zoom, technological issues relating to; broadband, lighting, cameras, video mixing, microphones, green screens, PC/hardware choices, electronic whiteboards, corporate Zoom backgrounds and the adaptation of hardcopy seminar workbooks to online offerings, were all addressed.

Functional issues included the management of Zoom seminars with upwards of 100 seminar participants across various time zones. Challenges relating to participants with differing primary languages, requiring the use of simultaneous interpretation services, had to be worked through.

In collaboration with SMG Consultants, drone technology was trialled to replace onsite mine visits. This has been a game-changer in the ease, speed and quality of obtaining detailed, high-definition, 3-D mine site visuals. Since implementing this technology, we have learnt that drone visuals offer

a “birds-eye” view of mining operation, and are far superior to the visual information obtained via traditional, onsite mine visits.

With no disaster plan in place that fitted the scenario that was being faced, it was a case of trial and error to ascertain the right outcomes.

What was the outcome?

Eight weeks after pivoting to the new business model – the first online Whittle Consulting seminar for the Americas time zone was held. Pleasingly, it was attended by 55 participants from 8 countries.

Participant feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Attendees prefer the online seminar to the traditional face-to-face format. Online seminars are the new face-to-face! Everyone is in the front row. There is good verbal interaction from participants, and even more in the typed chat on the side. In fact, there is more interaction in the online seminar than the traditional format.

Seminar numbers are no longer constrained by venue size, or the time and cost of travel. Online seminar participation increased by approximately 50% in Q2 2020 (in comparison to Q2 2019). Recently, 98 online participants attended from more than 20 countries.

Client communication has been enhanced via Zoom. Online meetings commence on time, with an enhanced focus that was often lacking in face-to-face meetings.

Importantly, the use of drone technology has been a successful alternative to traditional site visits. Drone technology is economical, offering high-definition, 3-D visual images, which can be imported into mining software for analysis. Since March, Whittle has used drone technology for site visits, with stunning success.

Drone technology has been a game-changer in the ease, speed, quality and cost efficiency of obtaining detailed, high-definition, 3-D mine site visuals. At the beginning of 2020, Whittle personnel would have travelled to remote locations to look at these mine sites, with all the inherent safety and health risks.

Now, thanks to drone technology this type of business travel is a thing of the past. Whittle personnel now conduct a superior level of analysis and review from the comfort and safety of their homes and offices all over the world. As the technology progresses, the advantages will only increase. Access to real time footage will be the next major stepping-stone for Whittle Consulting in the pivot to drone technology.

What is your advice to fellow businesses or international investors?

COVID has been the ultimate business disrupter. In hindsight, COVID has been a blessing in disguise for Whittle Consulting. Our disaster recovery plans did not include a COVID-like scenario. With no one to follow and no textbook to guide us – we just had to trust in ourselves.

Fortunately, Whittle Consulting has always invested heavily in our people. Harnessing the range of technical, intellectual and practical abilities within our personnel was crucial. Teamwork and the common goal of keeping the business afloat, provided a clear focus. To be honest, we were too busy pivoting to be worried! We knew that we had to act quickly, to retain the confidence of our client base and to keep our business afloat. Tapping into the power of virtual, online and drone technologies was a game-changer for us.

We have been overwhelmed by the support of our clients and their willingness to adapt to new technologies and ways of doing business with us. For Whittle Consulting, what started out as an issue of business survival has resulted into a story of business revival and growth.

Our advice is to trust your people, embrace change, try new technologies and if they fail - do so quickly, before moving on to try something else.

If you could sum up your experience what would it be?

COVID taught Whittle Consulting the importance of centralising control, developing a plan, creating positive momentum, harnessing new technologies - whilst trusting in the ingenuity, resilience and flexibility of our people. Due to COVID. Whittle Consulting is now well-placed to provide an enhanced service delivery into the next decade.

To read Gerald's bio please scroll to the next page..



Gerald Whittle
CEO, Whittle Consulting

Since 1999, Gerald has been the CEO of Whittle Consulting. In this role, Gerald undertakes optimisation studies and model design, business analysis, management reporting and client presentations. He conducts Strategic Assessments and Enterprise Optimisation studies for a range of major, midcap and junior mining companies. These studies have spanned almost all commodities, including pits and/or underground mining, complex minerals processing streams and marketing channels.

As a recognised thought leader on mining optimisation, Gerald travels the world delivering Whittle Consulting Integrated Strategic Planning seminars. These seminars challenge conventional thinking and bridge organisational silos, revealing substantial opportunities for value enhancement for current or planned mining and minerals processing operations. A skilled communicator, Gerald brings together important lessons learnt in other industries including; Activity Based Costing, Theory of Constraints and sustainability considerations. His knowledge sheds new light on the unique challenges of business planning and optimisation for the minerals industry.

Gerald is also a qualified accountant with over 35 years of international business experience in business planning, analysis and change management.

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