

Xpin overview

Preface

Welcome to Xpin. We don't know the details of your business like you do, but we think it's likely that Xpin could make a significant contribution. It's ultimate purpose is to increase efficiency and decrease operational risk by improving the flow of communication in your business. We have written this paper so that you know enough about Xpin to make your own judgement as to how Xpin could help you. Thank you for your interest.

Introduction

The purpose of Xpin is to provide real-time management and control over a project that involves many people. Xpin lets you manage the day to day details, ensuring nothing is missed. Detail that is difficult to formalise in a systematic way or is impracticable to include in fixed plans and schedules. Xpin is about the here and now, about the immediate recording and communicating of events as they happen.

Xpin is highly configurable so that it can be set up to fit the particular features of a project or programme of works. Xpin will work effectively in many situations - from the simple to the complex. Configurability is optional and Xpin can be usefully applied immediately to many situations.

Xpin is user friendly. It's really easy and intuitive to get started yet has powerful features that users can grow into when they are ready. Xpin is a browser based service and requires no local installation.

The basics

In its simplest form, Xpin is about placing pins on a canvas, like pins on a map. The canvas can be anything you want - a project plan, a site map, an engineering diagram. Pins are markers on the plan where the position is meaningful - for example a milestone point on a Gantt chart, or an accident spot on a road map. Three key points are:

1. Xpin updates in real-time. People in different locations can be viewing the canvas and pins and a change that is made there is updated in real time for a viewer over here. Xpin is designed to be updated in real time and to be acted upon in real time.
2. Pins are not dumb markers - they provide the context for communication. For example, people can enter comments against the pin - e.g. "A machine failure may mean a delay for this milestone".
3. Pins may represent real life entities. For example, in a manufacturing site, each mobile piece of machinery could be represented by a pin. It's location on a map would be clearly useful and the ability to comment on the machine's use or status would be relevant.

In a simple, intuitive way events and status information can be fed into Xpin as they happen. Of course, the key point of this information flow is to ensure it is disseminated effectively. And this is where Xpin really comes into its own. Not only is information shown in a relevant graphical context, but each user can very quickly filter incoming data to that which is relevant for them. This aspect is critical as, for larger, more involved projects there will be a lot of communication on different levels and aspects of the project.

Using Xpin

To varying extents, every stakeholder on a project needs to be kept informed and has information to add. Xpin works for everyone, whatever their involvement level.

How do you consume the wealth of information flowing into Xpin?

Xpin has a filtering capability; The pins (shown as customisable icons on the canvas) highlight key entities or observation points. Different types of pins have different icons and you can filter out types of less relevance to you. For example, there could be a “Senior Management” pin type which would be applied and used for communication with senior management. Pins are also listed in chronological order so that you get a sense of what’s changing when - the most recent change at the top. You may only want to see what’s changed over the last hour, or day. You may only want to see activity on things where you have had an input. Or you might want to find all references with the word “incubator”. Or activity where John Smith has been involved with. Or you may want to see all pieces of machinery that are currently marked as inoperative. Or all project milestones that are marked as complete. Filtering in Xpin is easy and instantaneous.

How do you get to know of relevant changes if you’re away from the screen?

Xpin has an alert capability; You can set up alerts to warn you when someone posts a comment, on a particular pin or pin type. Or when the status of a pin changes (for example, a Red-Amber-Green status change). Or even when a pin gets moved from one position to another. Or when a pin gets created. Or any combination. The alert mechanism in Xpin is comprehensive - you tune it to any level. You can even limit an alert such that it only fires when it reverses a change that you specifically made. Alerts can be either sent by email (replies to which automatically feed back into Xpin) or to screen where pins start flashing.

How do you contribute into Xpin?

For existing pins, you can simply enter a new comment. Or you may change the status of a pin. A pin can be configured to have a limitless number of status codes (urgency, operational status, RAG status etc). Or you can drag the pin to a new location. Alternatively, you could create a whole new pin and enter an optional title and some descriptive text. Pins can be retired (and unretired). You can upload files against a pin - as many as you want. Others can then download and review those files - pictures, spreadsheets, documents - any type.

How do I find out what happened, exactly, in the past?

Every event, every change, every comment is stored in Xpin in a timeline. On any pin you can review the events and comments made from when it was created to the present time. But Xpin lets you do much more than just that. The timeline feature lets you scroll back in time and see the state of the project as it looked at any point in the past. Being able to quickly review how a situation came to be is an essential diagnostic tool. By setting up a relevant filter, the timeline reviews only activities that fit the filter allowing you to zoom in and analyse specific areas of interest.

Pin Types

The simplest use of Xpin would be to have one type of pin called “Comment”. Any number of “Comment” pins could be dragged onto the canvas and then users could post comments on each of them. However, the real power of Xpin comes when you configure pin types that are specifically relevant to your business. Not only do you then assign them icons and names but you can also specify any number of “attributes” that can be set on pins of that type. For example, one could have an “equipment” pin and each piece of equipment may have attributes like location, operational state, project assigned and so on. Each attribute can be given any number of “values” it can take on (e.g. for operational state we could have “working”, “defective”, “in test”, “decommissioned”, “lent out”). Then, when pins are created these attributes can be set as necessary to represent the state of the equipment.

Permissions

Xpin has a rich permissioning system to ensure you can restrict both visibility of information and the ability to change information from particular people or groups of people. Users can be restricted from creating, viewing, commenting, moving certain pin types - or any combination. Users can also be restricted from viewing and/or changing certain attributes. Every pin has an owner, and that owner has additional fine control as to what other people can do on their pin - for example positioning or commenting on the pin.

Canvases

In many cases, a single canvas will suffice as the “host” for all pins. But this may well be too much of a simplification for some situations. Because Xpin works in tandem with ContentHead, our unique in-house authoring tool, Xpin can be delivered to work with multiple projects and/or with multiple canvases. In fact, a project could itself be a complete application built with ContentHead where pins can be located at any point in the application. This is an advanced use of Xpin and we would be delighted to discuss with you how ContentHead could help as a combined solution.

Want to know more?

You can experience Xpin in its uncustomised form from our beta site <https://xpin.codevanilla.com>. This is an invitation only site, so please contact us for registration details. To get a personal demonstration and to discuss your specific needs please contact us at hello@codevanilla.com or call us on 020 7375 2388.