

Welcome to the March 2009 newsletter for HSG Consulting

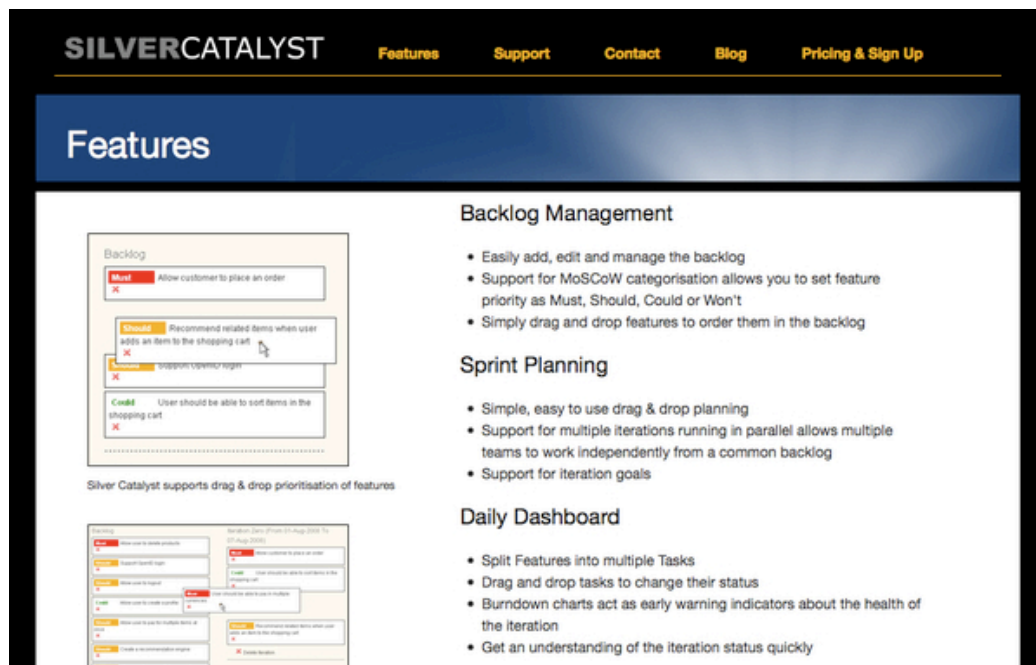
Welcome to the March 2009 newsletter. Occasionally I run across some great project management tools or ideas that I'd like to share with you. Somewhere between a blog and formal article, this is meant to be conversational, helpful, and inspire feedback. I hope you enjoy it.

[Click to visit my website](#)

In This Issue

- [Review of Online Agile Tools](#)
- [Who is HSG Consulting?](#)
- [Quick review of runner up's](#)

Review of Online Agile Tools



SILVERCATALYST Features Support Contact Blog Pricing & Sign Up

Features

Backlog Management

- Easily add, edit and manage the backlog
- Support for MoSCoW categorisation allows you to set feature priority as Must, Should, Could or Won't
- Simply drag and drop features to order them in the backlog

Sprint Planning

- Simple, easy to use drag & drop planning
- Support for multiple iterations running in parallel allows multiple teams to work independently from a common backlog
- Support for iteration goals

Daily Dashboard

- Split Features into multiple Tasks
- Drag and drop tasks to change their status
- Burndown charts act as early warning indicators about the health of the iteration
- Get an understanding of the iteration status quickly

Note: The screenshot shows a 'Backlog' section with items like 'Must Allow customer to place an order' and 'Should Recommend related items when user adds an item to the shopping cart'. It also shows a 'Daily Dashboard' with various charts and task lists.

Using online tools for Agile teams may be anathema for some but a necessity for others. In distributed teams, online access to the iteration card wall and backlog is critical. The ability to read the writing on each card often renders a photograph or scanned images of a card wall unacceptable.

I've been evaluating a number of tools recently and at the top of my list is Silver Catalyst. While still in beta release, this product holds the most promise of being a truly distributed Agile planning and tracking tool.

The nicest feature is the clean visual interface for the card wall, they call it the Iteration Dashboard. Each column represents the 'not started', 'in progress', 'done', and 'pass' status of the tasks.

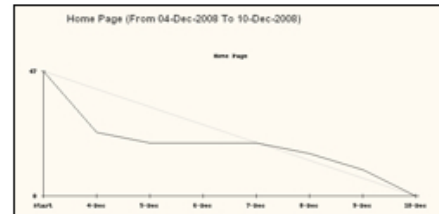


This goes a long way in mimicking the physical cards on a wall method and providing a status update with a quick look.

Silver Catalyst supports the Scrum version of user stories with associated tasks. The tasks associated with a user story have resource assignments as well as estimates.

The iteration burndown chart is automatically updated with each card update, a nice feature for those of us who have created these manually.

The burndown is present on the iteration dashboard, giving the team the constant view of progress while they review their own outstanding tasks. The display is clean and clear, showing the ideal burndown and the actual. One issue noted, however, is that new cards can be added or removed during the active iteration. Overall, a bad practice to allow removal of cards during an iteration. The burndown chart does not retain the original estimations, but resets to the modified plan. I would prefer either to be prohibited from altering an existing iteration or have the burndown chart show the original estimations and also show the change.



Project metrics contains a velocity trend graph. This handy chart is useful in determining team velocity over time.

At the end of every iteration an iteration report is mailed to administrators, showing the final burndown status. A nice feature to keep on top of the project. Email notifications are also available to alert team members of changes to card status throughout the iteration.

The product's import feature provides an excellent method for inserting new user stories in bulk. Their export feature provides the project manager or scrum master with another way to slice and dice the user story data. Both import and export work with csv files, for easy interface with common spreadsheet tools.

While still in beta release, there is no shortage of user support. Request for features have been handled quickly and positively. Their feedback interface, provided by [Get Satisfaction](#), is pleasant to use.

Pricing starts as low as free for basic projects (no metrics, no end of iteration report, no email notifications, no export), to \$25/month for a single premium project and unlimited basic projects, to \$240/month for 15 premium projects and unlimited basic projects.

Overall, Silver Catalyst is a well designed and supportive online Agile tool.

Who is HSG Consulting?

HSG Consulting has been helping clients refocus their teams, regain direction of their projects, and put their Agile adoption back on track. Are you having trouble planning your Sprints? Register for my [Scrum Planning workshop](#). It is an energetic two-day workshop involving structured brainstorming and idea refinement in small groups. Using your real-world projects during this interactive workshop, your team will be united in its outlook and motivated to proceed; you will have a clear understanding of the benefits, success criteria, risks, obstacles and hidden assumptions associated with your project; and you will have a breakdown of the key tasks for launching it.



[Click here](#) to learn more.

[Click to access my 'Contact Us' page](#)

Quick review of runner up's

[Scrum Ninja](#) by Internaut provides a nice visual display of your backlog along with the current iteration. It automatically assigns stories from your backlog to iterations based on your specified velocity. ScrumNinja provides the basics of burndown charts, backlog, supporting a process from 'in progress' to 'accepted', but the interface is not as clean and simple as SilverCatalyst. A close runner-up for tracking your Agile projects.

[Mingle](#) by [ThoughtWorks](#) - a cumbersome installation process followed by manual database configuration to get working, coupled with an equally cumbersome process of creating card hierarchies and relationships that just aren't worth the effort. Someone should remind ThoughtWorks that Agile is supposed to be simple, not complicated.

[Pivotal Tracker](#) by Pivotal Labs supports XP projects with basic user stories, no separate task tracking. The display presented is in more of a list format than that of a card wall, although on one screen all current and backlog stories can be displayed. The lack of enforcing a process (cards are either done or not, no progress through a cycle), and the flat display leaves me a bit flat as well.

[Version One](#) is comprehensive, robust, and able to support large implementations. Since this product is clearly designed and priced for enterprise-wide installations, free trials are hard to come by for smaller shops, leaving many of us looking for alternatives.

Want to become a CSM? Here's your opportunity at a discount! Agile leaders Ron Jeffries and Chet Hendrickson have announced a Scrum Master training class. To be held in Birmingham, MI March 31 - April 2, this class not only provides the fundamental principles of Scrum, it also gives participants a jump start dealing with the obstacles that confront Scrum teams. They will put theory into action through a variety of exercises.

See full description and register at: http://hendricksonxp.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=52&Itemid=29

Receive your \$50 per person discount through HSG Consulting. Enter discount code HSG17 in the 'for office use' field when registering .

Contact Information

helene.gidley@hsgconsultingllc.com

Phone: 734-358-1262

[Click to access website](#)

[Forward this email to a Friend](#)

One-Click Unsubscribe

This email was sent to hsgidley@gmail.com,
by helene.gidley@hsgconsultingllc.com

[Update Address/Profile](#) | [Unsubscribe](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

HSG Consulting, LLC | 2823 Englave Drive | Ann Arbor | MI | US | 48103

Powered By  TRY IT FREE
The #1 Email Solutions Provider