

Dutch Refugee Council – Becoming a centre of expertise with ECM

The Dutch Refugee Council (Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland) provides assistance to refugees and asylum seekers who come to the Netherlands. This process includes involvement in many legal proceedings, processing of numerous files, and management of endless information flows. In order to optimize internal efficiency and become the center for refugee affairs and legislation, the Dutch Refugee Council implemented Livelink ECM (enterprise content management) technology from Open Text™.

Organization

For over 25 years, the Dutch Refugee Council has been helping refugees build a dignified life in the Netherlands through representing refugee interests and assisting their integration into Dutch society. This independent, non-profit association is comprised of 29 affiliated regional branches, which represent an extensive network of over 8000 local working parties across the country. In most cases, these small, local bodies are run by volunteers.

The services provided by Dutch Refugee Council fall under two main areas: 1) Lobbying to ensure the points of view of Dutch Refugee Council are represented in political policy and generating more support; and 2) Providing practical support for refugees during the asylum procedure, naturalisation, and their possible return to their country.

Situation

Refugee support requires an intensive exchange of information and knowledge between both internal and external groups: the various branches within Dutch Refugee Council, its employees throughout the country, and social workers close to the refugees. Each of these parties needs access to files on refugees and all other documentation involved with asylum and refugee legislation. In order to streamline this exchange, Dutch Refugee Council developed ‘VluchtWeb’ — an intranet and extranet environment using Livelink, a document and content management solution provided by Open Text.

“This implementation was badly needed,” explained Mark Jansen, Knowledge Management Coordinator at the Dutch Refugee Council. “A lot of critical information was only available on paper. This made it inaccessible and hard to find. Furthermore, all the copying, printing, and faxing were becoming time consuming and expensive. In addition, the physical documents were only available during office hours, even though asylum matters demand attention day and night. We realized that information and knowledge sharing between our branches and head office was inadequate.”

In addition, the Dutch Refugee Council wanted to make their organization the center for all refugee related concerns. VluchtWeb would therefore have to become the nexus of all expertise on refugee affairs and legislation.

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Mark Jansen
Knowledge Management Coordinator,
Dutch Refugee Council

Industry

Non-Profit

Customer

Dutch Refugee Council
(Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland)

Business Challenges

- Co-ordinate all parties involved in providing information
- Decrease cumbersome and costly paper-based processes
- Provide access to essential information outside of office hours to geographically dispersed parties
- Ensure accuracy and security in handling refugee matters

Business Solution

Livelink ECM

Business Benefits

- More decisive and practical support for refugees
- Considerable improvement in internal efficiency and cost-saving
- 24/7 access to all essential information from geographically dispersed locations
- VluchtWeb is the centre for all refugee affairs and legislation

Solution

An integrated enterprise content management (ECM) application provided a solution to overcome these constraints while at the same time enhancing the services provided by the Dutch Refugee Council. The choice of the underlying technology was determined based on a number of distinct features of this platform. First, Livelink ECM from Open Text is entirely web-based – an absolute necessity for an organization where the vast majority of users are not at the head office in Amsterdam but are instead spread out across the country. Users can conveniently access critical information from diverse locations.

Second, Livelink is a standard application that can be implemented ‘out of the box.’ Installation and management are less complex, and internal IT staff members are not overloaded with work, saving precious time and resources.

Third, Livelink has a user-friendly structure for sharing information that can be easily adopted by all members of the organization, regardless of their technical expertise. “When you post a document, it is published. Few extra actions are needed to post suitable information on VluchtWeb. We are also certain that the content is secure,” Jansen explained. Content can be posted on VluchtWeb by the many advisers at the Dutch Refugee Council office and can be accessed at anytime by volunteers, employees, and external user groups.

Furthermore, access to protected information can be controlled: Information on VluchtWeb can now be organised into main folders and divided into sub-folders. Access to the different sub-folder headings is arranged according to user groups so that it can be monitored and secure.

“Ultimately, we have a lot of confidential information, so access has to be properly arranged and easy to monitor. There are other groups of users than staff at Dutch Refugee Council branches. There are the external divisions of the courts, specialist law firms, and other organisations, such as Amnesty International and the Red Cross, who use the information we make available,” Jansen reported. “All in all, we have 1200 licensees who cover part of the costs by subscribing. The arrangements for authorization in Livelink are sound.”

The solution’s user-friendliness ensured end-user adoption by keeping the system as accessible as possible, even to staff and volunteers who are not familiar with the technology. Livelink offers a manageable user interface that makes it easy for all user groups to find information on VluchtWeb. System administrators frequently consult with user-groups to implement changes to enhance the interactivity and usability of the site. One such change was to integrate a picture album to make the site more attractive.

Benefits

The increased efficiency of a web-based system resulted in substantial cost savings by eliminating the need for copious printing and faxing of documents. Employees, volunteers, and external partners alike can access the information they need, regardless of location or office hours. Users can post new content and retrieve information faster, improving services and response time to better assist their clients.

The system’s usability made it easy to deploy because it could be more readily adopted by users. The burden on the telephone helpdesk is lessened because users can easily find the information they need on the website. Advisers spend less time searching and retrieving information and, as a result, can focus more on refugee support. A recent user survey showed that over 75% of users reported that they were better able to do their work with VluchtWeb.

The Dutch Refugee Council expects this solution will result in VluchtWeb becoming the main port of call for everyone working with refugee issues. Jansen adds that with Livelink, he has all the options he needs to extend VluchtWeb’s capabilities. “Things like personalizing information using user profiles. Email alerts could draw attention to new information. Or setting up expert groups for knowledge sharing, integrating workflows in work processes, establishing regional intranets and discussion forums for peer supervision and knowledge-sharing between regional branches,” he explains. “At the moment we are involved with document management, and we want to move on to knowledge management. With Livelink, we can.”



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