

Optimizing Communication

Hotelplan Swiss Group implemented Open Text's Internet-based collaboration and knowledge management solution, Livelink®, on Microsoft SQL servers and Windows NT systems. Livelink provides Hotelplan with the ability to direct a flood of information into clearly structured channels and ensures that users have fast access to this and all corporate-related information. Robust document management and workflow functionality allows for seamless collaboration between various Hotelplan enterprises and teams. Over 80 content providers and managers in nearly every department guarantee that accuracy and a high standard of information is delivered.

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Alexandra Reich
Project Manager, Hotelplan



The travel industry has traditionally made use of a complex IT infrastructure. Until a few years ago, this infrastructure was entirely based on hosted environments—a legacy of the mainframe-based reservation systems that were used to perform all tasks ranging from order processing, such as drafting offers and confirming orders, to the final invoicing. Even though PCs were abundantly available within the Group, it was only at the beginning of 1998 that Hotelplan Swiss Group integrated its workstations into an enterprise-wide, Microsoft-NT based network system.

Having put a network into place, the next step in Hotelplan's strategy was to make all corporate information, forms and templates available to employees in a structured format on a centralized system. The initial plan consisted of creating a clearly structured folder system on servers.

Alexandra Reich, Hotelplan Project Manager, explained the change of plan, "We soon realized that what we really needed was a knowledge management system to cope with the complexity and the volume of the data." For this reason, the second largest Swiss Group of tour operators set out to implement a system that would allow them to create a standard intranet and provide them with knowledge management capabilities for creating workflow processes. Further requirements included:

- Decentralized creation of documents without HTML knowledge;

- Full text search;
- Document lifecycle management;
- Integration into the Microsoft environment used by Hotelplan, in particular the integration of Office products.

Solution

During the evaluation period, Hotelplan discovered that only a limited number of products available on the market could meet its demands. They were left with few options—to develop a tailor-made solution that included a workflow tool, or to use Open Text's Livelink-based knowledge management solution.

Livelink is a Web-based, platform-independent knowledge management solution. It encompasses features such as document management, project management, workflow, a search engine, discussion forums, news tickers and e-mail notification. Having such a product at their disposal, Hotelplan's decision was an easy one.

"We decided to use Livelink because it is a mature solution, it is closely linked with the Microsoft-Office family, and it does not require major customization," explained Alexandra Reich. Few, if any, customizations are required to implement Livelink, which offers strong features, including content management. The deployment of Livelink in international, large-scale enterprises warrants that the product is continually

developed. Support services and Livelink's potential for expansion into an extranet system were other factors that contributed to Hotelplan's decision. Having decided to deploy Livelink, the Migros-Subsidiary involved the entire Hotelplan Swiss Group and Interhome Schweiz in the project. If required, the integration of external organizations and the possibility for local representatives to access the system could also be considered.

Before the system was introduced, Hotelplan formed a project committee consisting of representatives from the various enterprises to make sure that the solution would meet all of their needs. The committee also identified the required information structure and editing permissions. At an early stage of the project, select employees from individual departments were given editing permissions and trained to prepare information for storage and use in the system.

The Swiss subsidiary of the Microsoft partner implemented Open Text's Livelink. The experts of the worldwide operating software vendor stressed the importance of the system's ease of use and intuitive functionality. Livelink includes such features as Change Agents, which notify users via e-mail to changes made to documents or the availability of new information in the system. Change Agents are pre-defined, can be used by all users regardless of their expertise, and can be modified to fit individual business requirements.

Current Information

Hotelplan's intranet structure consists of various levels of information. Corporate information is made available to approximately 1000 employees within the Swiss Group. Access is available to the following:

- Up-to-date media, protocols, weekly news;
- Figures and statistics;
- Information from individual departments across every enterprise;
- Information on travel, destinations, hotels, transportation, last-minute offers, an index of flyers, and more;
- Training, offers for employees, online employee magazine, birthdays, special employee pages, and more;
- Help manuals, instructions, hints and tricks on how to use the various IT-Systems;
- Forms, workflows and specific templates;
- Other information including Web links.

To avoid congesting the system with outdated information, Hotelplan implemented an automatic expiry date check for documents. Once a document has passed

the expiry date, based on the default value specified, the document is deleted, archived or its status is changed to inactive. A Change Agent then notifies the editor in charge, who can take the necessary actions, for example, to update the document. As a result of this process, administration of the system is fast and easy. Users access the Livelink intranet using a single login. A news ticker on the enterprise home page displays user-specific information, the contents of which are determined by respective access permissions. Related information is located in workspace areas. Adding new documents requires very little effort. Documents are saved in selected folders, where additional information, such as categories and attributes can be specified. This metadata is stored in the system's SQL database. An index for the search engine is generated at regular intervals.

Benefits

- Internal communication has improved dramatically: all corporate information is available to all employees without any time delays;
- Documentation, templates and forms can be managed centrally and are always up-to-date;
- Optimized communication for travel advisors: immediate reaction regarding incidents in travel destinations (e.g. strikes);
- Increased efficiency in internal processes through workflows.

Hotelplan's experience using the Knowledge Management system has been very positive to date. The centrally stored manuals, forms and templates have become especially useful aids. With the new system, employees are granted fast access to all information available enterprise-wide.

"In the travel business especially, it is very important to always be up-to-date, and to provide your employees with all the latest information," said Alexandra Reich. Should a problematic situation emerge in a country, such as a strike or any other incident, travel agents can react swiftly. The administration and updating of documents, which had been distributed previously via paper documents, has been dramatically simplified.

Hotelplan is currently working on extending the workflow functionality. Internal processes will be managed increasingly with Livelink, while LiveReports™ will help users locate information. There is also room for increasing usage rates—encouraging all employees to use the intranet as a day-to-day tool. To maintain a high standard of information in the system, Hotelplan has employed a Content Manager.

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OPEN TEXT
CORPORATION

www.opentext.com
1-800-499-6544

CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS
185 Columbia Street West, Waterloo
Ontario, Canada, N2L 5Z5
Phone: 519-888-7111 • Fax: 519-888-0677

USA HEADQUARTERS
2201 S. Waukegan Road, Bannockburn
Illinois, U.S.A., 60015-1577
Phone: 847-267-9330 • Fax: 847-267-9332

**EUROPE MIDDLE EAST
AFRICA HEADQUARTERS**
Webster House, 22 Wycombe End, Beaconsfield
Buckinghamshire, England, HP9 1NB
Phone: +44 1494 679700 • Fax: +44 1494 679707

ASIA/PACIFIC HEADQUARTERS
138 Harris Street, Pyrmont, Sydney
New South Wales, Australia, 2009
Phone: +61-2-9552-3334 • Fax: +61-2-9552-3446