

HK24—The Gateway of the Hamburg Economy

The Hamburg Chamber of Commerce (CC) now boasts business-to-business (B2B) information on the internet at www.hk24.de. Using the power of Livelink ECM content management solutions, contacts and information are easily accessible by anyone. Hamburg's virtual "House for Entrepreneurs" has become a business model for other German chambers of commerce and industries (CCI).

The Organization

The roots of the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce can be traced back to 1665. At that time, Hamburg merchants took control of their own affairs with the founding of "Commerzdeputation". In the German Bight, pirates posed a threat to the Hanseatic merchant ships. As the Hamburg bureaucracy debated the issues without swift action, the merchants took the initiative and financed convoy ships of their own to drive away the pirates. Soon, the slogan "Trading for Hamburg" began to circulate. The "gemene kopman" (common merchant), a sector of Hamburg merchants involved in marine trade, then elected a board of six elders. With that, the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce was conceived.

Today, the merchants of the Hanseatic city remain extremely active. With its longstanding and rich tradition, the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce currently employs 240 full-time employees. Its membership has swelled to over 105,000 companies with some 680,000 employees throughout Hamburg. Add the 350 of the city's entrepreneurs as elected officials to various committees within the Chamber of Commerce as well as 4,000 honorary examiners, and the motto of "Making Hamburg's Future" couldn't be more aptly appropriated.

Because the Chamber targets its services and information to start-ups and established firms alike, the potential of the Internet offers unlimited possibilities. However, the Chamber found that their information systems were outdated. The integration of so many external companies into the workflow was taxing the flexibility of the system. Priding themselves as the "Home for Hamburg Enterprises" and a pivotal center for the city's business sector, the Chamber of Commerce set out to find solutions to distribute information in an up-to-date and uncomplicated manner, harnessing the power of the new media. In the digital age of e-commerce, the Chamber recognized that it must quickly interact and exchange information with its membership. Out of this need, Hamburg's Chamber of Commerce, along with the neighboring CCIs of Lüneburg-Wolfsburg and Stade, created a project called "HK24."

That won't work—It's out of the question...

From the beginning, the adjoining CCIs raised the bar for high standards. "With HK24, we want to present ourselves as one of the most innovative and modern chambers of commerce," said Dr. Hariolf Wenzler, Managing Director of the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce. With projections to exceed more than one million page impressions per month—double that of previous figures—it was evident that a professional content management system had to be integrated into the HK24 project. The aim of a content management system was not only to help the staff present their editorial content on the intranet, extranet, and internet via a single user interface, but to guarantee ease of use and automatic formatting of the entire workflow. A low-cost extension of the system and a seamless linking of e-commerce functionalities also had to be considered.

When confronted with the task at hand, Wenzler recounted some of the dissent. "We only heard comments like "That won't work!" or "It's out of the question!" When the Chamber of Commerce together with its internet service provider ComNetMedia contacted Open Text, the prevailing attitude dramatically changed. "Open Text responded quickly to address our needs," Wenzler said. "In addition to the content management system at the top of technological tree, another key factor that swayed the decision in favour of Open Text was the perfect support. With Open Text, we have established a partnership, not a typical supplier/customer relationship."

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Managing Director, Hamburg Chamber of Commerce

Industry

Government and Public Sector

Customer

Hamburg Chamber of Commerce

Business Challenges

- Harness the power of e-commerce
- Distribute up-to-date information to members
- Enable system flexibility

Business Solution

Livelink ECM

Business Benefits

- Increased time to market
- Single sign-on to content
- Direct access to up-to-date information and content for all members
- Improved quality assurance
- Significant cost and time savings

Until the Open Text platform was implemented, preparation and distribution of information was somewhat disorganized. Content was stored locally and could only be transmitted as printouts or email. There wasn't anything in place to ease the distribution of content from the present intranet to the internet.

By August 2000, significant progress had been made. The content for the internet, intranet and extranet had been integrated into one portal using Livelink ECM. Plans were made to reinstall the extranet and re-launch both the internet and intranet sites. Within nine months, the portal was deployed and the virtual chamber's 24-hour service was open for business.

With Livelink ECM, all of the Chamber's employees could easily create and update content and place it in the portal using common office applications. No previous experience with internet applications was even necessary. A qualified system of issuing rights and a well conceived quality assurance (QA) system ensured that all employees could only insert quality controlled content into the portal within their own designated area. Automatic, customized templates guaranteed that the corporate look and feel was maintained during the process. "Livelink ECM is convincing in use," Wenzler stated, "It's so wonderfully simple to use. All of our staff without exception have managed it without any problems. Livelink ECM has taken a real weight off of our shoulders."

A portal with access control

ComNetMedia performed the implementation of the HK24 project together with the adaptation of individual products to the chambers' technical and individual requirements. ComNetMedia AG, a professional partner of Gauss, has amassed several years of international project experience. The company's expertise lies in e-consulting, e-commerce solutions and knowledge management. In addition, ComNetMedia supplies the HK24 portal as an ASP model. Consequently, the chambers don't need their own servers or have to worry about the technical issues, resulting in an enormous savings of time and money.

HK24 users can only view certain information on the portal within the parameters of their access rights. An HK24 member receives more detailed contributions in the extranet but these remain hidden from visitors to the internet web site. CC employees will also find extra internal information—color coded on the same page—which they may be able to include when giving advice. Employees can click on a page and send the information directly to a caller's fax machine. Technically, the classification into internet, intranet or extranet content—which also controls the appearance of the HTML pages—is carried out via Extra attributes. In fact, of the Livelink ECM's 30 or so standard attributes, only 10 are actually used. Because Open Text products are designed to be flexible, ComNet-Media was able to introduce an additional 19 Extra attributes. The standard attributes include document title, short text for the index page, author, creation date, document validity and notification of the author to update the information.

Another Extra attribute is fax-on-demand. All the documents to which the author allocates a fax number in a predetermined field are automatically recognized by the fax server and made available to the fax-on-demand service. The workflow of creating documents in Livelink ECM has also been adapted. Using a "service button," Chamber staff members can now specify all the necessary attributes of a document to be created so that it can be

rapidly retrieved. To access the extranet, members either input a password or use a smart card with digital signature functionality. The smart card solution offers a single sign-on mechanism developed by security specialist DE-CODA GmbH, a subsidiary of ComNetMedia. Because the Open text solution has open interfaces, these applications can easily operate with Livelink ECM.

ChamberCard holders can view the premium contents of the extranet and process orders from brochures. They also have access to an online database from which they can update their own company profile or conduct searches for information on other companies. Furthermore, cardholders can conduct legally binding transactions. This averts additional work for both extranet users and Chamber of Commerce staff. Wenzler commented, "The Open Text solution has fully lived up to our expectations in every respect. We have created a portal with Gauss products that serve as a model for similar institutions."

Steady expansion guaranteed

Although the HK24 project has been developed for Hamburg, it is available to other CCIs. The first to join Hamburg on their venture into the virtual world are the CCIs of Lüneburg-Wolfsburg and Stade. HK24 is hoping to partner with more chambers in the future. In fact, the goal is to unite all of Germany's CCIs on this portal. It is relatively inexpensive to add a chamber. With Livelink ECM, the number of users can be expanded any time at a very low cost. It is projected that 15 chambers will become integrated into this portal, including the chambers from Berlin, Frankfurt/M., Stuttgart, as well as smaller ones from Lübeck, Ludwigshafen, Potsdam and Konstanz. All will fall under one broad-based homepage with the www.ihk24.de address. The goal is to interlink all of the existing decentralized systems.

"Each CCI will place its own IHK24 service onto the web," predicted Wenzler. However, in order to offer consistent content between the chambers, the CCIs can use a search engine to explore each others' portals and integrate individual documents into their own home pages. Handling the technical support, ComNetMedia enables other CCIs to participate.

Using Open Text solutions, the Hamburg's Chamber of Commerce, along with Lüneburg-Wolfsburg and Stade, have become the first chambers in Germany to establish a virtual chamber of commerce geared to products and shop services. The brands HK24 in Hamburg and IHK24 in Lüneburg and Stade now offer the general public contacts and information on the internet. Members receive information via the extranet and can conduct legally binding transactions with a personal digital signature. Now that the internal processes have been systematically converted to web-based applications, the chambers can deploy internet technology within their intranet. The Open Text solutions not only permit new ideas to be implemented, but allow all Chamber employees to manage their time more efficiently. Complex workflows have become more straightforward and far more effective.

Livelink ECM has truly managed to ease the burden—on both the staff and the budget!

With its service-oriented portal structure incorporating digital signature facilities, the HK24 concept is particularly suited for transfer to the public sector, and can be easily installed in local authorities or associations.



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