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bestravel

Gecontur uses SharePoint Server to improve support for the Best Travel network

> *[With SharePoint] everything is accessible via the browser: the head of an agency can access the information they need anywhere in the world, even if they're on a remote island on holiday.*
>
> **Nuno Tiago Almeida,head of the Network and Systems Added Value division at Gecontur**

SECTOR: Travel and Tourism

CUSTOMER PROFILE: Best Travel is Portugal's largest network of franchised travel agencies, with around 80 shops throughout the country since 2003, when it began operating with 35 agencies.

BUSINESS SITUATION: THE HIGH FLOW OF INFORMATION REQUIRED BETWEEN THE MASTER FRANCHISE AND THE AGENCIES WAS MANAGED MAINLY THROUGH E-MAIL MESSAGES, WHICH CREATED SERIOUS PROBLEMS OF MISCOMMUNICATION AND LOSS OF USEFUL INFORMATION FOR THE BUSINESS.

SOLUTION: INTRANET BASED ON MICROSOFT OFFICE SHAREPOINT SERVER, WHICH BRINGS TOGETHER ALL THE COMMUNICATION AND DOCUMENTATION NEEDED FOR THE AGENCIES' ACTIVITIES.

BENEFITS

• RAPID DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION; • CONCENTRATED MANAGEMENT OF BUSINESS SUPPORT INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION; • SUPPORT FOR A SINGLE LOGIN TO ACCESS VARIOUS SERVICES AND DATABASES; • REDUCED RECOURSE TO THE HELP DESK.

Best Travel is Portugal's largest network of franchised travel agencies, with around 80 shops all over the country since 2003, when it started operating with 35 agencies.

The company seeks and promotes the development of more and better solutions, closer to consumers' tastes and needs - in imagination, quality, practicality, and price - and assumes that its mission is only complete when its customers return home 100% satisfied.

That's why it has implemented a solution based on Microsoft Office SharePoint Server to support its network of agencies and solve one of its main problems: excess information.

SOLUTION

Gecontur quickly concluded that it needed a document management solution that would both facilitate the organisation of all the company's communication needs with its member agencies and allow them to access that same information easily, quickly, and hierarchically.

"What we needed was an intranet and we soon came to the conclusion that Microsoft Office SharePoint Server was the platform that offered what we wanted." From there to Arquiconsult, the Microsoft partner that implemented the solution, was a step.

This company proposed a solution in which the information between Gecontur and the agencies is accessible, organised, and easy to access. The functionalities offered by the platform are such that the first prototype was presented by Arquiconsult in just two weeks.

The entire project, from the moment the decision was made to going into production, took just three months.

With the Microsoft platform, an Intranet was created that is divided into 11 large areas (Company / Project; Marketing; Training; Commercial; Expansion; Protocols / Partnerships; Procedures / Communications; Software; Manuals; Statistics; Customer information) that not only brings together communications previously sent by email but also organises other information that was scattered around, such as procedures manuals, contracts with external entities or even software used by the agencies and made available free of charge.

> *What we needed was an Intranet and we soon came to the conclusion that Microsoft Office SharePoint Server was the platform that offered what we wanted. The single sign-on was an excellent argument for getting users to start using the Intranet straight away.*
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> **Nuno Tiago Almeida,head of the Network and Systems Added Value division at Gecontur**

SITUATION

Best Travel is not only the largest Portuguese travel agency franchising network, but it is also unique in its kind in that each of these agencies is 100% independent, legally and administratively, to the point of having their own business licences. This is something that Nuno Tiago Almeida, head of the Network and Systems Added Value division at Gecontur, Best Travel's Master Franchise, is keen to emphasise, as it means that "at any time, if an agency isn't happy with our service, it can give it up and continue its activity". This is something that Best Travel is successfully endeavouring not to do.

Travel agents provide a service that may seem simple to their clients, but in reality, is extremely complex. It's a complexity that stems from the fact that each agency has to deal with a lot of information from the outside, from tour operator promotions to bookings, ticketing and price changes. That's why having the support of a Master Franchise makes an agency's job so much easier. In the case of Gecontur, each agency is able to connect to international air reservation systems (which in the case of Best Travel agencies and most other Portuguese operators is Galileo), for example, as well as other information and reservation systems.

However, problems of information overload can easily arise. "Master Franchise is a very agile operation, with only 15 people in Lisbon and a very horizontal organisational structure," explains Nuno Tiago Almeida. In order to be closer to its franchisees, Gecontur has set up some agencies around the country as "intermediate support" agencies for others in the same geographical area, so that it can liaise more closely with the network on the ground.
But even so, communication problems arise due to the excess of information naturally generated by this activity. "Any business of this kind generates a lot of information," explains Nuno Tiago Almeida, "because it's a business with a lot of ifs: it's the plane that's delayed, the hotel that doesn't have the room with exactly the same type as the client wanted, an unforeseen event that comes up at the last minute..." This typification of the activity, together with the constant promotions and price changes, plus the communications regarding advice and procedures from the Master Franchise, means that easily more than 200 communications are generated a day - and all of them sent via email.

"The result was that we were constantly receiving phone calls from agencies asking and confirming things that had already been sent - but which they simply couldn't find in the midst of so much email," explains the Gecontur manager.

BENEFITS

The way in which all the communication needs between Gecontur and the Best Travel agencies were organised and rationalised was the most immediate benefit of this project. But ease of access is also an important asset. As all communication between Gecontur and the agencies is now done via the platform and "everything is accessible via the browser, the head of an agency can access the information they need anywhere in the world, even if they're on a remote island on holiday", says Nuno Tiago Almeida. At Gecontur, there is just one person who pre-organises the information before putting it on the Intranet. From there, it's available on the platform for all the agencies. Security was another aspect that was taken into account, so the platform offers two levels of access: one for the branch owner and one for the counter staff, who only have access to the data and information relevant to their activity. In addition, the excellent interoperability features of the SharePoint Server platform have enabled Gecontur to implement an external solution specifically for travel agencies which, with a single login (the same login as the Intranet), allows the user to log in directly to all the booking systems to which the agency has access, which under normal circumstances would require separate logins.

In addition to the direct benefits of this solution," explains Nuno Tiago Almeida, "the single login was an excellent argument to get users to start using the Intranet straight away; in fact, acceptance is being good and very fast, because this is something we can easily verify through SharePoint reports." This project consists of two phases, the first of which has now been finalised and implemented. In this phase, the main focus was on better document management and organisation. "In the second phase, which will start in 2009, the idea is to create greater bidirectionality between Gecontur and the Best Travel agencies. The single login was an excellent argument for getting users to start using the Intranet straight away.

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At the moment we already have some interactivity, such as small online surveys, for example," he explains, "but the idea is to go further, for example by putting online registrations and vacancies for the internal training courses we run - and we have many more ideas," which will be easily supported by the Microsoft Office SharePoint Server platform, given its scalability and flexibility.

ABOUT ARQUICONSULT

Arquiconsult is an information systems consulting company, based on Microsoft Dynamics technologies, with offices in Barcelona, Bilbao, Lisbon, Luanda, Madrid, OPorto, Ryiadh, Salamanca, Seville and Vila Real.

Composed by the largest and most experienced team of consultants, having already implemented some of the most complex Microsoft Dynamics Business Solutions and being frequently referred to international clients for their implementations in our country.

Arquiconsult is constantly innovating its offer and has several verticals available, for several activity sectors, which add value to Microsoft Dynamics 365. Microsoft Dynamics AX is a clear example that allows us to make available to Portuguese and international companies the best and most complete integrated Management solution.

Some reference clients in the various sectors of activity:

- Polopique
- Dunlop Protective Footwear
- Teka Portugal
- Klaveness
- Farfetch
- Stericycle
- SAPA
- Gunnebo
- Tecnocabel

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