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Case study

“Improved quality of
consultation service and
reduced running costs”

The Union Investment
customer service centre



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Management Summary

Union Investment is Germany's second-largest capital investment company with fund assets of around 100 million Euros. Its portfolio services are used by four-and-a-half million investors. There is no single business area whose success is more closely tied to intensively consultation-based customer service than that of portfolio services. It is for this reason that the availability of all relevant and up-to-the-minute information is such a critical success factor. With the implementation of a central, web-based knowledge portal (HelpMe), Union Investment has been able to significantly improve the quality of the advice offered by customer services, whilst at the same time reducing running costs.

Initial position

The Union Investment "Customer Communication Center" (hereinafter referred to as the CCC) is the definitive interface with the customers: Here it is that a million customer contacts per year are processed, mostly by telephone, supplemented by fax, e-mail and letter contacts. However, the information basis upon which the CCC staff had to rely prior to the implementation of the new knowledge portal was inconsistent and not up to date – customers could very quickly end up being given contradictory or even incorrect information: There were many parallel filing structures and a high level of data redundancy, which entailed the additional disadvantages of overloading the computer network and requiring very high levels of memory capacity.

The project: "HelpMe" as a web-based knowledge portal

The enthusiasm for HelpMe to be found amongst the CCC staff is reflected in the fact that the quantity of accesses has increased by more than 1,000 per cent(!) since its introduction.

It has been possible significantly and demonstrably to improve the quality of the advice given by customer services and to reduce service costs: The costs of staff training and other measures have been significantly reduced and sharper focus on the part of the staff on their main operative task has, from the business management point of view, led to a boost in performance.

Customer service as a strategic success factor

Four-and-a-half million investors are supported by the Union Investment "Customer Communications Center" (CCC). The customers use various different communication channels to contact the CCC staff: primarily the telephone, supplemented by fax, e-mail and letter contacts. Responsible for the internal supply of information to the CCC is the "information management" department. Prior to the redesign and optimisation of the information process, information management was also responsible for the provision on an electronic knowledge platform of all relevant information, which could be called up by the CCC staff at any time. In parallel, e-mails were also regularly sent to the CCC staff.

The relationship between quality and technology

Both CCC and information management had problems with the original electronic knowledge platform, which had been set up as an interface between the two sides: Publishing information on this platform was complex and laborious. Due to the fact that the information structure had not been adequately thought through, it was not always possible for the CCC staff immediately to find the information they were looking for. The resolution of these problems therefore gave rise to the expectation not only of improved quality of advice but also of a more enjoyable working experience for the CCC and information management departments.

Problem 1: Making internal information available is complex and laborious

The procedure for publishing information on the knowledge platform turned out to be laborious and complicated: The preparation, conversion, publication or modification of particular documents that was required was associated with considerable manual work. This in turn required a depth of technical knowledge on the part of the information management department which could only be acquired through particular training courses. The effectiveness and efficiency of the department were significantly impaired as a result. A further effect of the complex procedure was that the documents provided were not sufficiently up to date: It was very easy to set these up wrongly, and delays in their generation meant that they were already out of date by the time they appeared on the platform.

Problem 2: Lack of transparency in information structures

The users experienced considerable difficulties in locating the desired information on the knowledge platform. Its information structure was clearly not practicable for the staff, who resorted instead to setting up laborious filing systems in their e-mail inbox or personal filing system. The information additionally sent by e-mail to the service staff was also filed here. The result was that old information was kept, and the inadequacy of the structure meant that it took a long time to find information, if it could be found at all. The information basis upon which the CCC staff had to rely was inconsistent and not up to date – customers could very quickly end up being given contradictory or even incorrect information. The many parallel filing structures and high level of data redundancy entailed the additional disadvantages of overloading the computer network and requiring very high levels of memory capacity.

All in all, it became apparent that the previous organisation of the relevant information was in need of decisive optimisation.

The solution: Make knowledge available in a structured and straightforward way

The quality of customer service is critical to success. High quality depends on several decisive factors:

- The information is up to date and factually correct.
- Information that is desired or required can easily be found and quickly retrieved.
- The fact that the information platform is easy to use makes it possible for customer services staff to concentrate on the essentials: Giving the customer high-quality advice.

In addition, the quality of advice can also be considerably improved if the information structure is so designed as to make cross selling possible or to allow staff to point out related products and services without any particular extra effort.

Consequences for the Union Investment CCC

In order to realise these decisive factors it became necessary for Union Investment to completely rethink the previous organisation of the information distribution structure so as to simplify it and make it more target-oriented. The questions which therefore arose were how to make the relevant information available in a structured manner and how to set the information up in the system in as uncomplicated a way as possible, also making it as easy as possible to retrieve.

Efficient information management to meet real needs

Information management

In order to boost the quality of the advice provided by customer services, Union Investment set about the task of fundamentally restructuring its information flows. Once an information model had been devised, it was implemented using the arago DocMe[®] information management system. The individual steps to an efficient information management system tailored to real needs will be described in the following and the advantages resulting from them highlighted.

It starts with the information model

In collaboration with the Institute of Information Management of the University of St. Gallen, a new information model was drawn up. The focus was on the following objectives:

- It should be easy to integrate the information system into the Union Investment architecture, the use of standard software is a prerequisite for this.
- Optimisation of the use process through the integration of a search engine and a navigation instrument.
- Improvement of editing processes through the deployment of a CMS.
- Simplification of the administration process through the uncomplicated maintenance of the navigation structure and labelling of the contents by means of metadata.

The arago DocMe[®] standard software solution proved to be a precise and user-friendly way of implementing the information model that had been devised. "HelpMe", a central and web-based knowledge portal, was born.

Make knowledge available in a structured and straightforward way

Information from a wide diversity of internal and external sources is automatically and centrally provided using this solution. The uncomplicated set-up and retrieval of the information does not require any particular technical skills – it is enough to be familiar with the usual MS Office applications. The information providers or authors generate their reports in a familiar environment (e.g. MS Office Word or Excel). A single mouse click is enough to integrate the information automatically into the communications platform without any requirement for formatting or conversion into HTML pages.

arago DocMe[®] has special rules for information distribution which, depending on the user authorisation and content of the created document, ensure that documents are automatically

moved to the right location. arago DocMe[®] adapts them to the required format in each case. There is no longer any requirement for parallel information distribution via e-mail. The staff of the information management department are no longer burdened with technical issues and can instead devote their entire energy to their core task – the procurement and preparation of information.

Goal-oriented customer advice with an uncomplicated knowledge portal

When looking for information, the CCC staff are supplied in a targeted way with all the information relevant to them – and are always kept up to date. There is no longer any need to maintain personal filing systems, and the redundancy of internal information stocks is eliminated. The CCC also have options to personalise the work interface on their screens, meaning that the information can be displayed in full accordance with individual needs (staff with direct customer contact attach importance to different information and menu points than those involved in PR work).

A clearly arranged overall structure of the information accessed via the screen and comprehensive search functions mean that the decisive knowledge is immediately to hand (see Fig. 1). The information is organised in a context-related manner – the special linking supports the process of giving interactive advice to the customers: The consultants have access to links to related matters and to the most up-to-date notifications on the respective screens.

The screenshot displays the Union Investment HelpMe portal. At the top, there is a navigation bar with tabs: UnionDepot, VL, Altersvorsorge, Produkte, Recht / Steuern, Systeme, Sonderlines, Marktbearbeitung, and Vertrieb. Below this is a sub-menu for 'HelpMe Vertrieb'. The main content area is divided into two columns: 'Vertrieb Aktuell' and 'Kundenservice Aktuell'. The 'Vertrieb Aktuell' column contains several news items, including 'Motivationstrainer Terminkalenderübersicht (Stand: 07.11.2007)', 'MABISS: Ansprechpartnerpflege der Steuerungs Pakete', 'Favoritenwechsel im Investment-Style', 'KV Terminkalender (Stand: 26.10.2007)', 'UnionPartnerProgram in Teilen jetzt auch für UFO-Kunden nutzbar', and 'Aktuelle Kontaktdaten der Competis Consultants (Stand: 10/2007)'. The 'Kundenservice Aktuell' column contains items like 'Ausschüttung November 2007', 'Aussetzung der Anteilscheinrücknahme für den ABS-Invest', 'Warum ist die Verwendung des Testsiegerlogos nicht mehr möglich?', 'Neue Medienstruktur der "IC-Reihe"', and 'Sonderkontingent UniImmo: Global per 5. November 2007'. Below the news items is a section titled 'Neue und überarbeitete Dokumente' with a table of updates, including 'Fonds des Monats November 2007', '15.11.2007', '15.01.2008', and '02.01.2008'. On the left side, there is a search bar labeled 'Volltextsuche' and a navigation menu with categories like 'MB-Aktivitäten', 'MB-Pakete', 'Präsentationen', 'Kapitalmarkt', 'Immobilienfonds', 'Steueroptim. Fonds', 'Auswertungen und Statistiken', 'Presse und Öffentlichkeit', 'Provisionen', and 'Depotinformationen'. Red annotations highlight the 'Content of the Topic area' (left menu), 'Full text search' (search bar), and 'Current information (updates and changes) is visible at a glance' (news table).

Figure 1: Well-organised structure of the HelpMe pages

Make knowledge available faster, more easily and in a more targeted way

The significance of the new knowledge portal for improved quality and cost efficiency at Union Investment can be judged by several criteria:

- The time and expense required for information procurement have decreased.
- The knowledge process is stable.
- The knowledge portal demonstrates high levels of system performance (only one system crash in three years).
- The opportunity costs for staff training have decreased.
- New staff members require significantly less time to find their feet.

Use of the knowledge portal outside customer services

The system was originally conceived for use only by the customer services staff (approx. 150-200 people). In the meantime, HelpMe has become so broadly established that the knowledge system is no longer used exclusively by customer services but also by contiguous specialist units such as marketing, sales or the portfolio division of the Union Investment Service Bank. This aspect is not limited to the use of HelpMe. In some cases contents are being independently created by the contiguous departments, who are taking responsibility for their initiative. In theory, the system is open to some 800 employees within Union Investment.

Conclusion

With the implementation by arago of HelpMe, the CCC and information management departments of Union Investment have benefited from the provision of an efficient knowledge portal tailored to their individual needs. An internal investigation of the Union by project manager Thomas Pitz has shown that the quality of advice given by customer services has improved significantly. The former very laborious manual processes involved in the internal provision of specialist information for the customer services staff has been automated.

This has taken a burden off the shoulders of the information management department, with the consequence that the customer service centre can now be provided with up-to-the-minute information more quickly and in a more targeted way. Redundancies in the internal transfer of information have been eliminated. The enthusiasm for HelpMe to be found amongst the CCC staff is reflected in the fact that the number of accesses has increased by more than 1,000 per cent(!) since its introduction (see Figure 2). HelpMe is most frequently accessed during peak customer calling times in the CCC - further evidence of the high level of relevance of HelpMe for customer support.

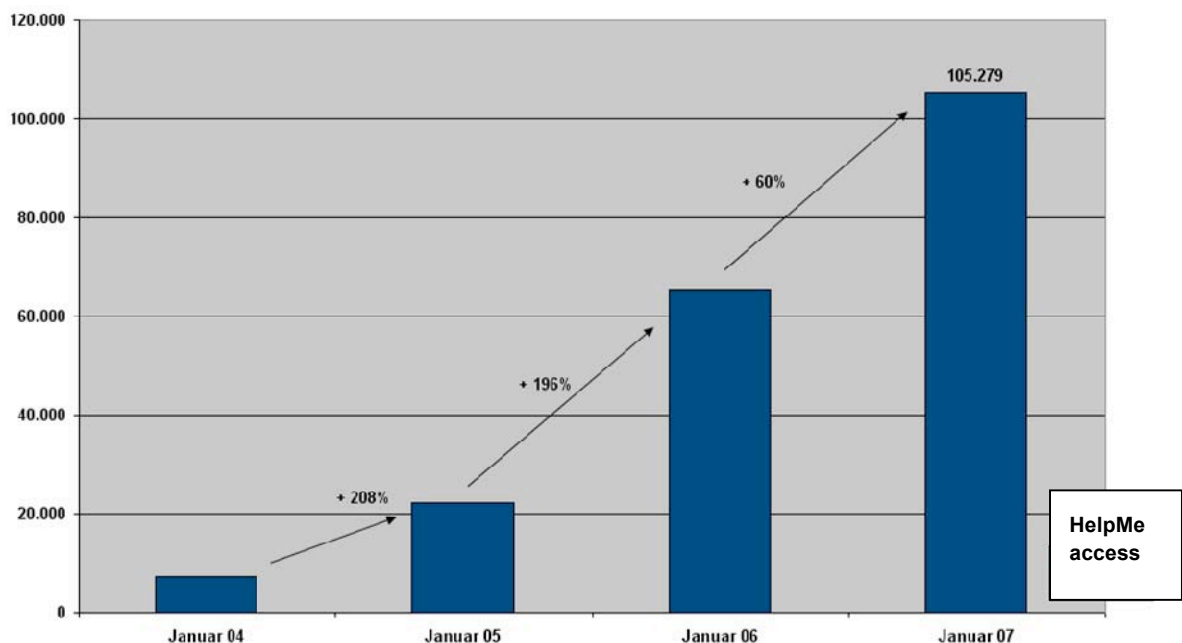


Figure 2: Development of HelpMe access since its introduction in 2004

The optimisations have a direct influence not only on the quality of the advice but also on service costs, as Thomas Pitz confirms: “The costs of training courses and other measures have been significantly reduced. The staff can concentrate on their main operative task, which has from the business management perspective led to a boost in performance.”

arago DocMe[®] - the most flexible platform for efficient information management

80 per cent of corporate knowledge consists of unstructured data, such as contracts, bids, invoices, manuals, documentation, minutes, directives, service instructions or catalogues. In arago DocMe[®] you have a system that intelligently and automatically gathers information and deploys it in a structured and targeted way in different portals and applications. This guarantees a clear competitive advantage. Your staff find information more quickly and are always as well informed as it is possible to be. This is because DocMe[®] ensures that your information is well laid out, targeted and immediately to hand. A further advantage: You can continue to work with your previous applications in your familiar IT environment. This is because DocMe[®] is interface-independent and can be used in every corporate environment.

Rules-based approach: Automation with an information model

If an optimal information process is to be guaranteed, the information model required to implement any central knowledge portal must first be in place. This model defines,

- Which information is distributed where,
- How information is converted,
- How information can be adapted visually at the destination,
- How information can be linked at the destination,
- How long information should be kept at the destination.

One pool for all data

With arago DocMe[®] you can pool all the existing data in your company in one solution that transcends system boundaries. Regardless of where the data are to be found. Every format is possible: Text, number, graphic or multimedia data (see Figure 3).

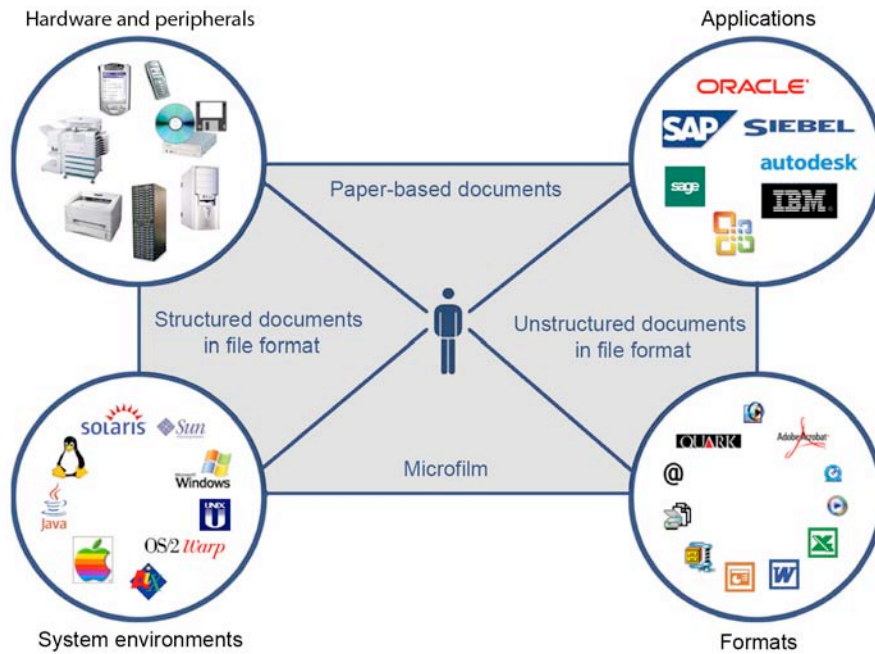


Figure 3: Document management in the area of tension between different applications and requirements

The benefits of this user-friendly, automated organisation of information by arago DocMe®:

- Staff can concentrate on their work rather than on the provision of information.
- The central information pool can be supplied with information directly out of the working environment in a completely uncomplicated manner.
- The information is gathered, archived and versioned in the pool in a structured environment.

User-friendly, automated organisation

With arago DocMe® all information is automatically collected, stored, archived and distributed in a user-friendly way. Every piece of information is available in a personalised form to all those who would like to call it up or process it, irrespective of user and information system.

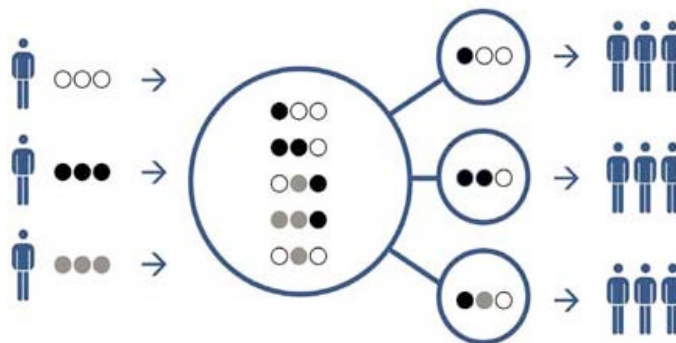


Figure 4: Centralisation of information processes

Provider and contact information

With its successful services delivered by qualified staff, arago AG is one of the leading specialists in complex business applications in all kinds of information networks. Since 1995 the company has been creating innovative solutions in the development of its projects, in its consultative work and as an outsourcing partner, providing online information more quickly, efficiently and safely.

The company operates in two complementary business fields. With ITIL-compliant sourcing solution in line with the WebFarmTM Standard and IT Security, professional IT operations and network security benefit from certified and tried-and-tested sourcing services in the form of high-availability and high-security systems. With many years of experience in the projects field, arago is successfully represented on the market by the arago DocMe information management system and arago FondsSuite a modular fund sales systems for capital investment companies.

arago AG has its roots in the financial sector. The standards required in that sector in terms of efficiency, stability and security have been consistently further developed and transferred to other sectors. Alongside its traditional focal points, arago has developed special solutions in particular for the pharmaceutical/health, media, telecoms and consumer goods/commercial sectors.

Today our products and services are in demand wherever companies

- Generate large amounts of information or have to handle such information,
- Operate out of different locations,
- Work with different systems,
- Are reliant upon high-availability system environments,
- Have very rigorous technical security standards or work with sensitive data.

For more information about our company and spectrum of products please go to www.arago.de.

If you have any questions about this case study and the services provided by arago AG, please feel free to contact:



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