

Ministerium für Generationen, Familie: Helping young professional women succeed

Overview

■ **Business Challenge**

The German Ministerium für Generationen, Familie is working to create a more equitable society by helping young professional women advance their careers through a highly successful mentoring program. To enhance the effectiveness of the program and facilitate better communication and collaboration, the ministry needed to deploy a platform that would take information sharing to the next level.

■ **Solution**

To fulfill its vision of free-flowing community interaction and mentoring, the ministry deployed a flexible, simple-to-maintain communication and collaboration platform that helps program participants collaborate more closely, and gets needed information into the hands of program participants more easily. Based on technology and expertise from IBM and IBM Business Partner kasten.concepts, the platform also incorporates additional custom features designed to meet the particular needs of the mentoring program.



■ **Key Benefits**

- *Enables professional mentoring through a collaborative online community*
- *Provides effective management without the need for extensive technical skills*
- *Enhances program effectiveness and streamlines interaction*
- *Facilitates sharing of documents via an easy-to-manage custom document management portal*

Sharing knowledge to foster success

In many industrialized societies, professional women are confronted with barriers to advancement: the so-called “glass ceiling.” The government of North Rhine-Westphalia’s Ministerium für Generationen, Familie, or MGFFI (Ministry for Generations, Family, Women and Integration), set out to change this culture of professional inequity and instituted Karriereforum-NRW, an invitation-only mentoring program designed to provide career guidance and advice to young professional women, helping them break through into the ranks of upper management.

Business Benefits

- Fosters societal change by enabling more efficient communication and collaboration
- Enables professional mentoring through a collaborative online community
- Enhances program effectiveness and streamlines interaction
- Facilitates sharing of documents via an easy-to-manage custom document management portal
- Simplicity of setup, operation and maintenance facilitates management without the need for extensive technical skills

The IBM Workplace™ Services Express is a good fit for MGFFI because it is a collection of small, simple portlets, completely customizable without any additional programming. The ministry can add communities, manage users, change form layouts and more – all easily accomplished in-house, without relying on IT staff or outside consultants.

Enlisting successful professional women who have attained management positions to act as mentors, the program enrolls a “class” of 200 program participants annually. As they move upwards into positions of greater responsibility, they in turn can become mentors for a new set of participants. Women who have completed the one-year program are free to remain part of the community, to enrich the dialogue and interact with new participants. The program has proven highly successful and has been fully subscribed since its inception.

The program relies on the ability of mentors and program enrollees to communicate and collaborate. The true value of the Karriereforum lies in the interaction among the community of participants—societal and cultural change is enhanced when individuals are able to help one another.

In its original form, however, the Karriereforum lacked the tools needed for truly effective collaboration. At its inception, the program relied on paper mail, telephone calls, e-mail and in-person meetings; it was cumbersome at best. It soon became apparent that a more effective way for the participants to work together was needed.

The existing methods were hurting the program’s effectiveness. Reliance on manual methods prevented the free flow of ideas and made it difficult to contact program participants. The ministry’s vision was to transform the program at a fundamental level by taking advantage of a burgeoning Internet trend: social networking, in the form of an online community where program participants could interact and share information and ideas.

Transformation constraints

The core challenge faced by the ministry was limited resources. MGFFI had to find a way to do more with less—to provide a robust service without having a large IT budget or a strong set of technical skills. The ministry needed a solution that not only met the Karriereforum’s ambitious functionality goals, but also was manageable and affordable. In particular, MGFFI wanted a feature-rich content management system to share documents, but had no budget for a separate content management solution.

To help fulfill the ministry’s vision of societal change, the new solution would have to do more than simply replicate the capabilities of the existing manual system. MGFFI determined it needed a flexible platform, with a variety of options for online discussion, chatrooms, exchange of information and activity planning, while also maintaining cost-effectiveness and ease of navigation and ease of usage. Further, the ministry needed a platform with superior content management tools and newsfeed capability.

There was also the issue of control: free, moderated Web forums with adequate functionality are easy to set up, but they are fixed in terms of functionality, are driven by advertising, and ultimately are under the control of the forum hosting companies. As a government agency, MGFFI needed to keep total control of design, content and access, and also saw a clear need for additional functionality not available elsewhere. The use of public forum services was deemed inappropriate.

Fast implementation of a robust solution

IBM and IBM Business Partner kasten.concepts saw the opportunity to help and stepped in, working with MGFFI to design and implement a new Karriereforum platform. IBM Workplace Services Express collaboration software was chosen because of its rich feature set and ease of management. The IBM software combines document management, online forum capability instant messaging, team workspaces and an integrated portal.

The Karriereforum has three separate communities with distinct purposes. One community is for program participants only, so that they can exchange opinions and ideas freely without supervision by mentors. The second is similar, for mentors only. The third is an open forum for all.

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For the additional capabilities needed by the ministry, kasten.concepts added custom portlets to the basic solution, and did it very quickly. The entire project took only six weeks to complete...and that included a Workplace Services Express version upgrade along the way.

Enhanced capabilities address special requirements

The standard Workplace Services Express platform includes a powerful set of capabilities that allow MGFFI to provide services to Karriereforum participants that were not possible using the old manual methods. These include built-in instant messaging for live chat, support for streaming video, planning/scheduling tools, and forum features such as the ability for users to start new discussion threads open to any member.

Key Components

Software

- IBM Workplace Services Express
- Lotus® Domino®
- Custom portlets

Hardware

- IBM eServer™ x346 server

IBM Business Partner

- kasten.concepts
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Why it matters

The German Ministerium für Generationen, Familie is working to change a culture of professional inequity that is marked by barriers to advancement for some people. The Ministerium sponsors Karriereforum-NRW, a professional mentoring program that helps young women break through the “glass ceiling” into upper management. The ministry realized that the best way to bring forward this cultural change is to enhance individuals’ ability to help one another. Needing a flexible and easy-to-use solution to meet this challenge, the Ministerium teamed with IBM and IBM Business Partner kasten.concepts to roll out a new communication, collaboration and information-sharing platform. The new system encourages interaction by creating new opportunities for discussion, live chat, activity planning and the automated exchange of information, which ultimately strengthens the relationship between the young professional women and their mentors.

A variety of additions were also made to the basic platform to extend its capabilities to meet MGFFI's special needs. One of these enhancements was a more fully featured user registry, containing detailed information, to help MGFFI filter and qualify new program participants. Additions were made to the user file and a portlet was created by kasten.concepts to help manage that information.

Innovative document management

The solution to the document management challenge was simple and clever. Originally, the Karriereforum had no central repository for documents: Microsoft® Word files were manually e-mailed to program participants, a tedious and labor-intensive process. This made information sharing very difficult, because there was no good way for participants to see what was available to them.

For the new forum, a custom "newspaper" portlet was created to disseminate documents, based on the document management capabilities in Workplace Services Express. Users are able to access a Web page that displays a familiar file folder structure, the documents within each folder, and click-to-open headlines from each document in an easy-to-navigate fashion, so that forum members can see at a glance what's available for download. A key feature of the document management solution is its ease of use: no coding is necessary to generate the "newspaper" display; documents need only be placed in the directory, and they appear on the Web site automatically. The clickable headers are generated from the document content.

Teaming for success

IBM and kasten.concepts worked closely with the MGFFI to help make the Karriereforum-NRW's online presence a reality, and helped the ministry achieve the goals it had set for this project. IBM provided the software platform, and kasten.concepts created the additional custom features, provided implementation services and hosts the Karriereforum on an IBM eServer x346 server.

For more information

Please contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner.

Visit us at:

ibm.com/innovation

<http://www.mgffi.nrw.de/familie/index.php> (German)



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