Success Story

ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen)

Electronic travel management based on Adobe® solutions eliminates paper processes

On April 1, 1963, Germany’s national public television station, ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen), officially began broadcasting. Today, approximately 3,600 full-time employees and 1,500 contractors work for the television station at its broadcasting center in Mainz, a studio in Berlin, as well as at 16 other domestic and 19 international studios.

Eliminating mountains of paper
At ZDF, employee travel needs and requirements placed a significant burden on the staff responsible for managing that travel. A paper-based approval process resulted in a number of problems that could be addressed by automation.

Previous manual workflows suffered from long lead times and no process existed to track accounts and verify costs. But above all, the process was not transparent enough. “ZDF’s paper-based travel management processes needed to be more unified, automated, and managed online,” says Frank Antoni, ZDF project leader responsible for the implementation of the new travel management system. “As part of the unified process we also wanted to increase the transparency of the approval process and boost its efficiency. An important element of the new system was the introduction of support for advanced electronic signatures to help ensure the security of any changes to forms, as well as to verify approvals.”

Rapid implementation
After evaluating many existing products, ZDF business planning and implementation team managers made a unanimous decision: deploy SAP Interactive Forms by Adobe, particularly because the solution supported electronic signature integration. Implementation of the Adobe solution focused first on replacing an older version of Adobe Reader® on employee desktops with a more recent version that supported advanced electronic signatures.

During the entire development and implementation phase ZDF maintained close contact with the Adobe and SAP teams. Accurate knowledge of Adobe solutions and SAP technology was required for smooth implementation of the project.

In the months leading up to the test of the pilot, the application workflow was defined in terms of ZDF requirements, business travel forms, and approval processes. At the same time, digital signature software and card readers were installed. Once complete, a pilot for a new online travel booking and billing system (ORKA) was launched for 200 employees.

Secure booking and approval
Since the automated system went live, ZDF travel management has been benefiting from the electronic processes. After a travel request is submitted to the SAP portal by an employee or a travel manager, the system sends an automated approval request to the appropriate decision makers. This generates the request as PDF forms within a browser window, where reviewers can fill out the forms and select a signature field.
After a reviewer selects an identity and the signature feature, a pop-up window prompts the user to enter his or her PIN. The information is then encrypted and the signature is appended to the PDF form. Simultaneously, the user’s identity is verified.

For special travel arrangements requiring an additional signature, another field is available in the form. The system instantly confirms active information and does not stop the workflow when urgent or time-sensitive travel is requested. If travel arrangements are required for a technical representative, such as a ZDF cameraman, this comprehensive information flow becomes an integral part of the process.

**Mission accomplished: improved quality and efficiency**

The new, unified travel management process for ZDF and its subsidiaries met all of the company’s expectations. By eliminating the original manual activities, the efficiency of the approval process increased considerably. Also, huge quality gains were made by eliminating numerous process disruptions.

The transparency of operations also improved significantly with a central repository that is accessible at any time. Another key objective of the project, helping to ensure audit security of the processes, was achieved with the introduction of enhanced electronic signatures.

**Benefiting other business areas**

SAP Interactive Forms by Adobe is also used for the mass printing of forms, as well as for travel expense reporting. For the past year the Adobe solutions integrated with electronic signatures have been used successfully in accounts payable as well, where vendor invoices are reviewed, approved, and released via electronic signature.

Beyond these departments, procurement is also looking to leverage the Adobe solutions. In the future, purchase requisition details are to be captured and sent electronically to designated approvers who authorize the release of a requisition using a digital signature before a purchase order is generated.

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Frank Antoni, Project leader, ZDF Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen

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