

1 million faxes a year – and rising

Techniker Krankenkasse (TK)

Germany's private medical insurance company for technical staff, the Techniker Krankenkasse (TK), uses a Unified Messaging solution to optimise its communications processes and can now react to queries from its 7.2 million insurance holders with minimum delay. "OfficeMaster for Notes", supplied by the Berlin company Ferrari electronic, enables TK staff to receive and send faxes directly in the existing Lotus Notes system. Today the Techniker Krankenkasse's service teams receive around 85,000 faxes monthly, directly in their Inbox, and send approximately 40,000 faxes from their workstations. The company is currently upgrading its systems to provide completely electronic processing of correspondence, at which point the TK is expected to send more than a million faxes a year in total.

For every company, speeding up business processes is near the top of the agenda. "An approach that promises success in this case is to optimise communication both within the company and also externally, with customers, suppliers etc., and so shorten the reaction times when an order is received", explained Christoff Wiethoff, Sales Director at Ferrari electronic AG. For this reason, more and more companies are deciding in favour of using a Unified Communications (UC) solution which integrates separate communications tools such as fax, SMS or e-mail in one uniform application environment. The relative importance of these solutions will increase continually in the next years, at least according to forecasts in a UC study on business communication in the 21st century, which was published by the Experton Group, a market research company, at the start of 2009.

Optimised communication with Unified Communications

As a modern health service provider the Techniker Krankenkasse also requires an efficient communications infrastructure, so that it can optimise its company processes. For this reason it selected OfficeMaster, the Unified Communications suite, supplied by the Berlin company Ferrari electronic. OfficeMaster was integrated in the Lotus Notes system that was already in use at TK in 2005 and used by 1,200 users in the main administration offices in Hamburg. Later it was then rolled out across Germany, which involved connecting all 215 of the Techniker Krankenkasse's branch offices to the solution. Today around 10,000 staff access the Unified Communications suite during their daily work without even thinking about the background to it. With OfficeMaster for Notes any documents can be sent directly from the Notes client by fax and incoming faxes can be received as mail attachments. To do this the user enters the recipient's number in the Address field and sends the document in the usual way. OfficeMaster converts the fax jobs in the background and then sends them.

Secure fax transmission

The Techniker Krankenkasse, which operates across Germany, insures around 7.2 million people. Its catalogue of services includes more than 10,000 individual services, ranging from prevention to rehabilitation to medical technology and natural healing methods, and they are the subject of communication every day. TK staff are organised in different service teams, according to the types of work they do, and are primarily involved with one particular type such as, for example, processing accident reports in the hospital or communicating with employers of insurance holders.

A fax transmission is confirmed and is treated as being of document quality. In the past, faxes within the different subsidiaries came to a central device and had to be redistributed to the relevant staff manually. They were handed out approximately twice a day, and so that alone already caused an unnecessary time delay in the processing of jobs. Apart from that, due to the manual distribution of the faxes, it was not obvious who was working on each job, and when they started.

Transparent workflow

Today faxes are sent directly to the Inbox of the responsible service team in the form of e-mails. As they are stored centrally in a database, ready for use, and can be accessed there by the different user groups, depending on their permissions, the complete workflow is transparent.

Consequently the people responsible have a better overview of the areas of responsibility of the individual service teams. Apart from that, due to the complete integration in the Notes system, the incoming faxes can be processed more easily. "Another plus point of the Ferrari electronic solution is that the users did not have to do any more training to gain new skills: they simply use their Notes interface the way they always did and the solution works in the background", said Hermann Guldener, System Administrator at the Techniker Krankenkasse. The OfficeMaster Unified Communications suite independently determines whether an e-mail or a fax has arrived and processes it accordingly.

Now, sending faxes is also easy: the member of staff simply presses a button from their workstation – there is no need to print out the fax, walk to the fax machine, type the number, wait for confirmation of transmission, and then archive the document.



Techniker Krankenkasse
Gesund in die Zukunft.

Perfect integration

The solution from Ferrari electronic AG is based on the mechanisms existing in the Lotus Notes system used by the Techniker Krankenkasse and integrates itself completely in that system. The combination of hardware and software components ensures that the telephone exchange installed in the main administration offices can be connected to the communications server via network-enabled external ISDN boxes, the OfficeMaster Gates.

OfficeMaster Gate is a powerful 30-channel ISDN controller. The people who are authorised to send faxes, and their direct dialling numbers, are administered in the normal person document in the Public Address book. You can configure every aspect of OfficeMaster over the network with the Configuring Messaging Server. The connection is set up via a Notes client on the server. The Techniker Krankenkasse played it safe when it carried out the implementation and created a redundant backup system to protect against the system going down.

The OfficeMaster solution is now running on Windows 2003 servers in different computing centres. They are in different geographical locations, guaranteeing that fax communication is successful: even if, for example, a server goes down due to a power outage in the area in which it is being used, the other fax server takes over transmission and reception of faxes.



Figure 2:
 Ferrari electronic's Unified Communications solution can be integrated in all leading IT infrastructures. (Source: Ferrari electronic AG).

Positive summary

"We have absolutely and completely achieved the aims that we set before we implemented OfficeMaster", summed up Hermann Güldener. "Today, our communications workflow is completely transparent. OfficeMaster has increased the overall availability of our service teams and consequently also our productivity when it comes to job processing." Ferrari electronic itself has even forecast a cost saving of up to 90% for message and data delivery. For the Techniker Krankenkasse, the next step towards Unified Communications with OfficeMaster will be direct SMS transmission and reception in Lotus Notes.

Currently the TK has another new project: after it has been completed, all correspondence will only take place electronically. Once again, the OfficeMaster suite has smoothed the way. "After a successful project start, we expect to be sending upto 350,000 faxes per month", estimated Güldener.

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Figure 1:
 The powerful Unified Messaging functionality is integrated in Lotus Notes environments with OfficeMaster Gate.
 (Source: Ferrari electronic AG).

