Full Case Report

Case 506

HELP -- virtual guide to Austrian authorities and institutions (Austria)

Online government support for Life Events in Austria

Executive summary of the case:

Abstract
HELP - www.help.gv.at - is an initiative of the Federal Chancellery, and has become one of the leading e-Government applications in Europe. HELP - the virtual guide to Austrian authorities, offices and institutions, offers citizens information about official procedures, deadlines and fees, as well as making forms available for download.

To support this initiative, a large number of services and information is available targeted on approximately 150 life events.

For individuals with enquiries or suggestions, there is a 'question and answer' forum which is facilitated and supported by specialists with competences in ICT.

In order to be able to offer quick access to specific information, a special service is offered to the following target groups:
- Entrepreneurs
  Entrepreneurs get quick and straightforward information and support concerning official procedures, e.g. the setting up of a business, the registration of employees etc....
- The Disabled
  In order to enable disabled citizens to access official procedures, information and services without barriers, HELP has been designed to conform with WAI (Web Accessibility Initiative) guidelines for disabled persons.
- Citizens from other countries
  HELP provides information in English to foreign citizens living and working in Austria, about the most important official procedures.

Official Procedures online (Amtsweg online)
Electronic handling of procedures means that citizens can complete their business with the authorities quickly, with just a few clicks of the mouse. The information is quickly delivered via the internet directly to the appropriate department. Different registration details, such as information on a person’s residence and business registration, can be delivered directly to the authorities who require these.

Case description:

Background

The Approach

What was created as an information platform on the internet in 1997 is today a comprehensive service platform for citizens. HELP - www.help.gv.at - the navigation aid for official channels on the internet, describes starting from life events/ situations such as pregnancy, birth or marriage, the related official procedures. It offers information on administrative processes, the required documents, fees and deadlines.

In addition to all this information there are forms to print or download and there is the possibility to make individual requests and conduct official procedures electronically.
The Problem

The citizen is not interested in which department is responsible for certain issues; he just wants to avail himself of the service, for example he wants to get his passport quickly. HELP sees itself as a bridge between citizens and the responsible authorities.

The Solution

HELP is an interface between 12 federal ministries, 9 provinces, 80 district administrations and 2359 municipalities. Being the virtual guide through the world of administration, HELP has graduated from being just a pure information medium to a communication medium for the users and the successful processing of official procedures (transactions) electronically. "Official Proceedings Online" ("Amtsweg online") gives visitors the opportunity to carry out their official procedures online with the Austrian partner cities and municipalities.

The key principles of:
- fast action,
- recognise new developments and trends,
- always offer correct information, and
- use understandable language,

have made HELP an efficient, user friendly service widely used by citizens.

Objectives

One-Stop-Principle

There is one access to the administration. Regardless of which department or authority is responsible, HELP forwards applications, requests etc. automatically to the correct one.

Correct and Up-to-date Information

HELP offers information on more than 150 life events. Information is updated regularly and amended according to legal and social developments and changes.

Communication and dialogue with the Citizens

HELP offers citizens different kinds of communication and dialogue. On the one hand they are able to pose questions to the editorial staff of HELP via "Questions and Answers" and on the other hand they are regularly asked for their opinions through the HELP questionnaire.

Online Processing of Official Procedures

Official Proceedings Online ("Amtsweg Online") allows the electronic processing of official procedures. It supports the participating partners (authorities at federal, provincial and municipal level) with the development of these online procedures. The objective is to handle all official procedures electronically by 2005.

Access to the Administration for ALL

Everybody should have the possibility to use the services of HELP, regardless of whether he or she has access to the internet (e.g. via a public access point) and to choose in which language he or she speaks. At the moment, information in HELP is available in German and English only. However, translations into the following languages are being prepared:
- Hungarian
Resources

Financial and Human Resources

The cost of maintenance and smaller developments of HELP amount to around 1.2 million euros. Larger technical modifications, new contents or marketing activities are financed separately.

The core team of HELP consists of:

- Five people from the agency net@value (www.net-value.com) who are involved in the editorial work and answering user requests.

- Four people from the Federal Data Processing Centre who deal with the technical operation.

- Two people from the Federal Chancellery, the lead ministry.

The extended working group consists of persons who deal with HELP in varying degrees.

- One person in the Centre for Public Administration Research who works for Official Proceedings Online (“Amtsweg online”).

- Around 50 HELP coordinators and specialists from the administration who check and approve the contents and answer specific user requests.

- A further 100 members of the HELP Council and representatives of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the Federation of Austrian Industry.

Technical Equipment

HELP is operated by the Federal Data Processing Centre (www.brz.gv.at) in Vienna, and is maintained and managed by highly qualified staff operating the technical infrastructure (mainframes, servers, personal computers, networks, firewalls, web servers, etc.) of the Federal Data Processing Centre.

HELP runs on a high-performance and scalable web server configured as a cluster (with two servers). The operating system is AIX, the web servers are an Apache Web Server and an Oracle Application Server.

The approved Oracle database technology is used, not only for the management of all data (HELP content, public authorities with their addresses, links, etc.), but also for the dynamic generation of web-based official proceedings, the online forms, data validation and the delivery of forms to the responsible public authorities.

Open standards and open technologies are used to satisfy the different needs and requirements of users (citizens as well as companies) and their diversified technical equipments. The most important of them are recommendations of the W3C (XHTML, CSS, WAI, XML, SOAP, etc.) and the portable Java programming environment for interface modules.

In addition open standards (technologies, methodologies, structures, and formats) defined by the CIO (chief information office) of the Austrian government are supported. These standards are obligatory for Austrian eGovernment portals and applications, and guarantee an optimal interoperability between the eGovernment applications of different providers.

Security is based on the secure environment of the Federal Data Processing Centre, supplemented by the protection of sensitive data (data encryption, SSL) and user authentication (username and password, combined with a preceding registration using an identification card).

The support of PKI (Public Key Infrastructure) and the use of electronic signatures have been in preparation for years. Its operation will be publicly demonstrated in a few months.
**Activities**

In order to meet the objectives mentioned in section 2, the proven routes of Information Communication and Transaction have been chosen. HELP was and is a leader in the area of eServices for citizens. The approach of HELP, using life events as access points, the direct communication with the citizen as well as the implementation of Official Proceedings Online ("Amtsweg online") is unique in its citizen-oriented approach. The keywords fast, up to date, correct and easy to understand, can best describe the work of HELP.

The editorial team of HELP (comprising five people who permanently take care of the site) reacts quickly to changes in laws as well as the requests from citizens. Necessary changes are implemented which keep the system up to date and forward looking.

The HELP Co-ordinators from different ministries (voluntary and appointed HELP partners from the public administration) deal with the accuracy of the content. Ease of understanding for the citizens is guaranteed by the editorial team of HELP.

**Information**

In its first stage, the support for official channels was for pure information collection. In order to construct life situations (events), official proceedings were described, responsible authorities were identified, documents to be presented and fees to be paid were listed. Thus the citizen is able get information on his official proceedings without having to know the administrative background.

HELP was awarded a prize in the first year of its existence (Speyerer Verwaltungspreis; see [www.help.gv.at/speyer.html](http://www.help.gv.at/speyer.html)) - however HELP was little known at this time within Austrian administration and among the public. The public had to be told about this unique service and the necessary cooperation from partners in the administration had to be sought and motivated.

**Solution to the Problem:**

- Awareness raising and establishment of HELP - Easily understandable and simple/intuitive structure enabling access for all.

- Determination of a corporate identity and a word/picture brand. The change from the paper clip to the @-sign (see annex: Advertisement.jpg and Spot.jpg). With this very handy branding, today still the trademark of HELP (see annex; picture 1), an advertising campaign was started in 1998 by Federal Minister Molterer and Undersecretary Ruttensdorfer. The campaign "change from the paper clip to the @-sign" was shown on billboards, TV spots, folders and print advertisements. A PR campaign accompanied the efforts for an increase in the brand awareness of HELP. The focus of the information campaign consisted of presenting a much asked for but complex and often misunderstood piece of information in a simple way demonstrating the clarity and simplicity of HELP.

In order to raise awareness in the administration, events in the Austrian municipalities, exhibitions, lectures and seminars were organised.

- Easily understandable and simple/intuitive structure

Categorised by life events/ situations, official proceedings are presented in the left navigation bar. Extensive animations, audio installations, pictures and graphs have been intentionally abandoned. The user should get to the desired official proceedings quickly. For that reason the Questions and Answer Forum, the forms service and the Official Proceedings Online Service (Amtsweg online) have been emphasised, as these services are often used independently of an official proceeding (see annex: picture 2)

- Access for All

There have been efforts to provide the services of HELP to those who do not have internet access.

When the service offer was first introduced a HELP Line Service Telephone offered support for the internet application.
Since 2000 in more than 1000 tobacconist shops ("Trafiken") forms and support information could be printed for a small fee.

In order to improve access to HELP, in Vienna so called Info-Columns (also called Access Points) were built. From there interested persons were able to surf certain websites - among them www.help.gv.at.

- Conclusion

In this way soon after it was started we managed to make HELP a platform linking authorities which is used by large numbers of the public, regardless of whether they have internet access or not. With these efforts, HELP was able to win many partners from the administration and thus become the main interface of networking at all levels of the administration and was able to extend its services further. See also Section 5 - Results.

- Communication

An internet platform like HELP enables entirely new possibilities for the exchange of thoughts and information. HELP started very early to actively include the users in the development process and to direct them to the appropriate authorities.

- Problem

There have been questions from users for which answers were not available in the official proceedings. In order to provide a channel for some of these questions to be answered further services were developed.

- Solution to the Problem

- Question and Answer Forum
- Forms-Service
- Dictionary of Governmental Terms
- Focus on Target Groups

The communication forum "Questions and Answers" (see annex: pictures 3-4) is the starting point for a two way communication with our HELP visitors. This forum has been designed so that for every life event described in HELP there is a corresponding "Questions and Answers" forum. Questions are asked by HELP visitors and the editorial team of HELP (see annex: picture 3) answers them. The forum "establishment of business" for example is hosted by a HELP coordinator (see also section 6 - "Learning points and conclusions") from the Federal Ministry of Business and Labour (see annex: picture 4).

HELP visitors can also feel free to give advice to other users and share their experiences. The editorial team of HELP answers these requests immediately.

- Forms Service

A comprehensive forms service is an integral part of the electronic handling of official proceedings and the one stop principle. A forms service was created for every life event. Thus the user is linked directly to the necessary form. These forms can be printed, saved and often filled in on the PC.

- Dictionary of Governmental Terms

The Dictionary of Governmental Terms ("Amtsdeutsch von A-Z") supplements the offer. Should a citizen get a letter or notice from an authority and should he not be familiar with the terminology, he can quickly and easily look up the term in the dictionary. If the requested term is not available, it is possible to send a message to the editorial team. The team researches and adds the term and its explanation to the dictionary.

- Focus on Target Groups

HELP has existed for five years. From the start we remained loyal to the life event approach with proven success. In order to enable every target group to find what it needs, the relevant information is presented separately. There is an entrance for "Entrepreneurs", "Disabled Persons" and "Foreign Citizens" (see
Under the direction of the Federal Chancellery, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the Federation of Austrian Industry and the Federal Ministry of Business and Labour the HELP team had to ensure that in "HELP for Entrepreneurs" all contents and official proceedings relevant for businesses were shown.

HELP for Disabled People was created in connection with the year for disabled people which was declared by the EU for 2003. It has special facilities for disabled persons, their relatives and nurses allowing them to prepare and execute official proceedings. At the same time the accessibility regulations for web contents (WAI: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) were implemented at "A"-level for the whole website. HELP has tried hard to reach the level of conformity "AA" and subsequently "AAA". A working group in the Federal Chancellery with representatives from several organisations for disabled persons and from the Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations deals with this part of project development.

HELP for Foreign Citizens describes official proceedings in the English language and facilitates the contact with the authorities for those who are in Austria for short or long periods of time, either for business or private reasons.

Networking/Linking

Special emphasis is given to the networking/linking between the authorities and partners. After the users have gathered initial information on www.help.gv.at they have the option to get to the responsible authority via automated and permanently updated links in order to receive further information on office hours and responsible staff (see annex: pictures 5 and 6). A success factor at European level is intensive linking with the EU Portal public services.eu [Information on cross border public services in Europe] europa.eu.int/public-services/index_en.htm. This portal also provides information for all EU countries structured according to target groups and life events. More than 40 links lead from this portal to HELP (see annex: picture 7).

Transaction

In 2001 HELP started with the development of a portal for transactions. In line with the HELP approach of linking authorities, this step was taken in cooperation with interested cities and municipalities (Salzburg, Linz, Perchtoldsdorf, Schwechat, Zeltweg). The following criteria were chosen for the selection of the official proceedings for online handling:

- Frequency
- Simple official proceeding
- Utility for citizens obvious
- No problems concerning data privacy protection
- Utility for administration
- Focus on target groups
- At least one of the official proceedings should include a payment (e-payment) or the use of a digital signature, and one official proceeding should be focused on the target group of businesses.

The actual selection and the implementation of online official proceedings in March 2003 are presented in the section “Results”. Through the collaboration with cities, municipalities and district administrations throughout Austria a broad implementation of eGovernment projects was initiated. Moreover, the unification of forms and processes gave an incentive for administrative reform. In total by March 2003, 90 local official proceedings were offered in "Official Proceedings Online" ("Amtsweg online").

Cooperation took place in the framework of the HELP Council and in special partner meeting which were held twice a year. The technical implementation started with an online application in HELP. The information from the municipalities takes place via an automated email. There are two ways of forwarding the data to the responsible authority:

- Smaller municipalities without powerful IT-infrastructure may acquire data through an HTML-download.
- For the connection with workflow systems which would normally be available in larger cities, data is provided in XML-form.

In order to increase security the possibility to register with a user ID and a password was created.
As an ePayment solution "bezahlen.at", an independent Austrian internet payment platform was used. HELP also works closely with the provinces. In the "federal-provincial working group" the contents of processes and forms are harmonized. The working group has also developed a style guide for eGovernment forms which is uniformly valid for and applied by authorities all over Austria and which has received much interest by providers of software for public administrations (available at reference.e-government.gv.at/).

As an extension of the broad networking between authorities, HELP also participates in a research project of the EU on the development of eGovernment. It is the project "eGov: An Integrated Platform for Realising Online One-Stop Government", IST-project number 2000-28471. Participation takes place through the principal of HELP, the Federal Chancellery, and the Federal Data Processing Centre.

**Output and Results**

Information, Communication, Target Groups, Services, Transaction, User Satisfaction, Technology:  
- Browsers and Operating Systems  
- Registration in Search Engines  
- Conformity of HELP with WAI-Regulations  
- Search Function

HELP in general:

From the beginning HELP has enjoyed relatively high access rates. Through the addition of life event/situations and permanent improvements for our target groups we managed to multiply the number of accesses per month tenfold.

The number of user accesses to HELP increased from 19,778 in January 1999 to 220,064 in January 2003 and the average length of stay increased from 7:18 minutes to 8:14 minutes respectively (Graph 1 "Monthly Access Numbers 1999 and 2003").

Please note: The number of accesses indicates how often the domain HELP has been accessed by month, irrespective of how many pages have been called consequently and how long the session has lasted.

The number of life events/situations has risen from 15 at the beginning in the year 1998 to around 140 in 2003 (Graph 2 "Number of life situations 1998 and 2003").

Life Events/Situations Called Most Often:

The following life events/situations were called most often between December 2002 and February 2003 (Graph 3 "Distribution by Life Situation - Dec 02 - Feb 03").

Access to HELP by day of the week:

The virtual aid for official channels is accessed mostly on weekdays, i.e. from Monday to Friday. Moreover, 65% of the sessions take place during daytime between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. (Graph 4 "Access by Day of the Week - January 2003")

Communication:

In order to provide official proceedings for many target groups, HELP was extended to four main topics in the course of a relaunch.
Target Groups

HELP for Entrepreneurs:

According to a study carried out by the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration (University_Statistic.jpg), 62.5% of entrepreneurs and 46% of private users can look forward to handling their official proceedings online in the future. In order to provide virtual official proceedings for busy entrepreneurs, HELP for entrepreneurs was launched in January 2001. Meanwhile HELP for entrepreneurs comprises about 50 life events/situations. In the period between March 1 to March 14, 2001 alone, there were 4,876 user sessions with an average length of stay of 6:18 minutes (Tab. 1 "Access Statistics for HELP for entrepreneurs").

HELP for Disabled Persons:

In connection with the international year for disabled persons, in December 2002 HELP for disabled persons was launched. At the moment it comprises about 15 life situations (e.g. Documentary proof of disability, Trusteeship, Health Care).

HELP for foreign citizens:

In order to provide foreign citizens with information on official proceedings in Austria, there is HELP for foreign citizens with 18 life events/situations researched specifically for that target group. The fact that not only Austrian citizens but also citizens from different countries with different languages access HELP has encouraged us.

For example, in January 2003 user sessions on HELP from the following countries were recorded: United States 40104 (20%), Germany 11882 (6%), Switzerland 904 (1%) (Graph 5 "Access by Country - January 2003").

Services

Questions and Answers:

The forum "Questions and Answers" with 5,524 entries per year is an important indicator for new life situations and suggestions for improvement of HELP (Graph 6 "Guest Book Topics 2002").

FAQs:

In order to answer questions quickly, regular questions have been collected during the past five years and answered in the so-called FAQs (Frequently asked Questions). HELP currently offers 10-15 FAQs and the corresponding answers for about 93 life situations.

Forms:

HELP gives users the possibility to download and print about 400 forms on more than 30 life situations. The forms site is one of the most popular sites of HELP, in January alone 19,513 user sessions were recorded.

Newsletter:

2117 registered users are informed conveniently one to two times per month by an online newsletter on news around HELP.

Dictionary of Governmental Terms

In the dictionary of governmental terms ("Amtsdeutsch von A-Z") more than 200 terms, phrases and expressions form the world of administration are explained easily understandable. Users have the opportunity to forward terms not found to the editorial staff of HELP (approximately 4-5 per month). Thus we are able to complete the dictionary of governmental terms.

HELP-Advertising:

Businesses have the opportunity to present advertisements on HELP, geared towards specific target
The number of businesses which made use of this service has risen from 9 businesses with 7 life situations (January 1999) to 17 businesses with 14 life situations (January 2003). The banners have an average click rate of 14%.

Links:
HELP sets external links to authorities and internal links to subsites of HELP very exactly and according to the need for information and the official proceedings. Currently HELP links to about 4,140 authorities and offices. All links on HELP can be recognised by being underlined. 1,320 sites refer to HELP.

Of 220,064 sessions in January 2003, 123,531 sessions (56%) were direct requests to HELP. The most frequent referencing partner sites were: Google 18.4%, Wien.at 2.7%, Federal Chancellery 1%.

Transaction

Official Proceedings Online (“Amtsweg online”):
Official proceedings online has 23 partner municipalities. Here already ten official proceedings can be handled in their entirety via the internet. The primary objective of the Austrian government is to process all official proceedings electronically by 2005 (Tab. 2 “Official Proceedings Online: Status of implementation March 2003”).

The development and implementation of online official proceedings in cooperation with partners is an important impulse for administrative reforms. For example, for proceedings which are based on nine different provincial laws, an agreement was found on uniform forms and routines. Other examples are deregulations in the area of trade law and the simplification of processes like the registration of a business: access to the central register renders the presentation of the residence registration form and the proof of citizenship unnecessary.

User Satisfaction

General Issues:
According to a study of the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration in January 2001 (University_Statistic.jpg) one third of know of HELP and its contents; of these 81% actually use HELP.

Further expert evaluations by Fessel GfK show that the utility of HELP for citizens is evaluated as excellent and the usability as above average.

According to a study of the Austrian Research Centres Seibersdorf (Forschungszentrum Seibersdorf) in 1999 Austria is the leading country in Europe concerning the electronic handling of official proceedings (ARCS.jpg).

Determination of the user satisfaction by questionnaire:
The satisfaction of HELP users is determined monthly by means of an online questionnaire (www.help.gv.at/fragebo_f.html). Since the beginning of HELP in 1998 around 6850 questionnaires have been filled in by users.

5186 of the asked users make use of the information offered on HELP privately and 4001 use it also professionally.

Further surveys of user satisfaction are done once to twice per year during different fairs and exhibitions. The surveys are usually executed face-to-face by means of a questionnaire with closed and open answers.

Design:
Due to the well structured and clearly arranged design of HELP it is possible to give many users fast access to the necessary information. In order to speed up loading, sound and animation effects have been abandoned entirely when designing the portal.
Retrieval of life events/situations:

In order to enable users to find the life events/situations quickly (e.g. Housing, Birth, Marriage), all life events/situations are listed in a field, the so-called glossary, in alphabetical order. Thus it is possible to direct the user quickly to the required information. In reply to the question as to whether HELP was helpful in the search for information, 84.3% of the surveyed users answered with a clear “Yes”.

Texts:

All texts in HELP are written easily understandable for the citizens. Furthermore the font was chosen in a way that all texts can be recognised faster on the screen. Thus reading is speeded up and information is transmitted quickly.

63% of the users asked use HELP for the preparation of official proceedings and 50% appreciated HELP as a useful innovation of the public administration.

Time savings through round the clock accessibility:

HELP offers its users 24 hour, seven day a week access to information from Austrian authorities and offices and in this way saves the user time and money. 59% of all surveyed users said they access HELP so that they can save time and about 50% appreciated the round the clock availability of HELP.

Technology

The HELP system was available online for 99.14% of the year 2002. This means that HELP has been down for only 75.25 hours in the course of the past year (this was for maintenance and power cuts).

Browsers and operating systems:

HELP supports many browsers and operating systems thus giving users fast access to the virtual aid for official channels (Tab. 3 "Browsers an operating systems")

Registration in Search Engines:

Registration with the most common search engines ensured that our users were directed quickly to the required information in HELP. In January 2003 there were 8,822 user referrals. Google had the highest number of hits (26.96%), Austronaut (25.85%), Yahoo (21.23%) and Lycos (15.69%) (Graph 8 "Most Important Search Engines"). Terms frequently used for the searches were: Forms, Personal Income Taxation, Austria.

Graph 8: Most Important Search Engines (Search System; Sessions)

Conformity of HELP with WAI Regulations (barrier-free access for all)

In order to provide barrier free access to information on HELP, all content was modified according to the WAI Regulations.

- Pictures were provided with an Alt-Tag.
- Tables were modified according to WAI Regulations allowing for example for data cells and headers to be connected with each other.
- The colours of HELP were chosen in such a way that they contrast with each other.
- Links have not been accentuated by colour, but underlined
- Sites or texts in foreign language have been labelled with the respective abbreviations (de, fr,....)

HELP has reached the “A” level of conformity, and all personnel dealing with HELP are trying hard to reach the “AA” and then “AAA” levels of conformity.

Search Function:

To make access to information easier for users, there is a search function on HELP which can be activated from any of the HELP sites. A list is being compiled of all failed searches and the search terms that activated them. This is called the 0 Hits List and is an important piece of information for the further extension and perfection of HELP.
Lessons and conclusions

Learning points and conclusions

- Administrative Innovation
- Legal Aspects
- Communication

Both for the clients and the service providers HELP is above all a communications project. Clients and supporters have to be found, informed and motivated to use the project.

The HELP team comprises the principal and lead player; the Federal Chancellery, the editorial team and the technical partner; the Federal Data Processing Centre. This team meets twice a month in order to discuss current projects and to perform coordination tasks. In the following section we want to give examples of challenges arising in this context.

- HELP-Coordinators:

The HELP service providers have tried from the outset to provide the users only with information which has accurate content. It was therefore absolutely necessary to include employees of the public administration in the project team. Only these people from the ministries and authorities are able to ensure that the texts published in HELP have an accurate content.

- The Problem:

The editorial team of HELP which comprises five persons who work on a permanent and exclusive basis for HELP, creates the texts for the life events in language easily understood by the citizens. The content is created in such a way that the information on the sites provides answers to 80% of all questions. Concerning the remaining 20% of more complex and highly individual questions, the users are referred to other channels and the links of the appropriate authorities. For the information on HELP to remain correct and up-to-date, the collaboration with employees of the public administration is necessary as they are the first to know as well as being those who execute legal changes. In the beginning only a few volunteers were ready to work for HELP.

- The Solution:

In 1998 there was a decision of the Austrian council of ministers (Council.pdf) saying that every ministry had to nominate a HELP coordinator who would act as an expert for HELP in their ministry. In spite of the voluntary cooperation, both agreements and meetings with partners have to be recorded in writing. It is absolutely necessary to strictly regulate workflow processes and competences.

- Conclusions:

Now there are around 250 contact persons from different levels of the administration who are motivated members of HELP. These members are invited twice a year. During these meetings opinions are exchanged, information is forwarded and work schedules are set up.

Provinces and Municipalities

HELP sees itself as a bridge between citizens, authorities and institutions. In order that this bridge can work properly, the cooperation of many different administrative units is necessary. For example, it is important that a person living in Vienna is able to obtain the necessary data from the Viennese authorities.

- The Problem:

The volume of data carried by the different Austrian authorities is so large that central maintenance by the HELP team cannot take place.

- The Solution:
HELP provides high quality links to authorities all over Austria which are permanently maintained and updated. Each authority may service and update data and links at any time through a link management system. This system is explained step by step and there is regular training on the use of the system.

- Users Problems

Suggestions, wishes and experiences can be fed into the question and answer forum by users.

- The Problem:

The following problem concerning the Questions and Answer forum had to be solved in connection with the relaunch of HELP in 2002:

This concerned requests to the HELP team of a very sensitive nature which were visible to all.

- The Solution:

Anonymity can be achieved using the following procedure: A choice of options exists from which one has to be chosen
1) I want my entry to be published in the forum.
2) My entry should not be published. Please send my information to the above e-mail address. See annex; Picture 8)

Administrative Innovation

- Problem Areas:

At the moment Official Proceedings Online (Amtsweg online) still has its limitations. For example the low take up of the electronic identity document (Bürgerkarte) by the public has slowed down the implementation of proceedings with enhanced security standards. The necessary adaptation of the legal regulations has also just started. Therefore it is necessary to develop Official Proceedings Online carefully and not to set unrealistic and questionable objectives. For example the procedures for an application for a passport has already been modernised with the result that everybody can apply for a passport at any district administration or federal police headquarters in Austria and usually the document can be picked up immediately (Passport.jpg). As the citizen has to collect the document in person, there is no advantage in the electronic handling of this official procedure. Therefore an electronic application for a passport or a driving license in Austria at the moment does not make sense.

Solution of the Problem:

- HELP as a lever of administrative development.

Starting from the four key principles of the HELP philosophy: fast, up-to-date, correct, easy to understand information, HELP constitutes a considerable lever for administrative development at all levels of the administration. Most particularly Official Proceedings Online ("Amtsweg online") influences the internal organisation of authorities; alternative means of communication (e-mail) are used more frequently in order to speed up the execution of tasks. Due to the decentralised processing of files a certain standardisation is necessary especially concerning standards for the workflow, the length of the process and the outward appearance of the authority and effectiveness of leadership. The electronic handling encourages decentralised processing of tasks. For the management this has two consequences: first they must become accustomed to getting necessary information in a new, non-traditional way; second a climate of trust, mutual support and loyalty has to be created and maintained between the management and the employees. Only in this way will the management always know what it has to know, be involved in important decisions and be able to rely on the workers when delegating work.

- The requirements upon the personnel

In order to meet these requirements, the employees have to find a technical environment which facilitates their work. Training enables them to gather the necessary up-to-date knowledge for their decisions. Specific databases may provide support. Objectives and standards have to be agreed upon with the management. Only in this way can decentralised decisions which will have the support of the management be made.
The mutual obligation to inform each other and institutionalised communication (e.g. regular meetings of the department) support the professional work.

- The legal framework

A further example of the leverage effect of HELP is the standardisation of nine different provincial proceedings together with their application forms etc. This concerns the implementation of the electronic registration of dogs. Every pilot municipality has different fees for dogs and every province has different registration forms. HELP made it possible for all participating partners to use a standardised registration form which is now available through HELP.

Conclusions:

When developing official proceedings electronically care has to be taken to ensure that the whole system is geared up to delivery, rather than it being just a technical project. Often it is better to take some time to ensure a sound solution. Seen from a purely technical point of view, eGovernment is a project which is too expensive. Rather it has to be seen in the sense of a broad innovation. HELP as a standardised entry for official proceedings contributes significantly to the standardisation and clarity of administrative proceedings.

Policy:

Our content policy to present official proceedings in connection with life events has been criticised several times and a request was made to soften this policy and offer information independent of official proceedings on activities such as tourism or leisure information. All these influences have been resisted and we have remained true to the original policy. Our success supports our stance. The technical policy has on the same basis been extended and improved in the course of the years. HELP however intentionally steers clear of extensive audio, animation and graphic effects. Emphasis is always put on:

- Simplicity of operation.
- Clarity.
- Good orientation for all target groups.
- Little need of explanations.

Legal Aspects

Liability of Public Authorities

This is a problem HELP has always been aware of, however it has never been an issue. Legal actions to establish liability of public authorities have never been an issue. Rather, people are grateful for the fast and easily accessible answers and the informal communication via the internet.

References and links

HELP - aid for official channels: www.help.gv.at/
HELP for entrepreneurs: www.help.gv.at/HELP-U.html
HELP for disabled persons: www.help.gv.at/HELP-BEH.html
HELP for foreign citizen: www.help.gv.at/HELP-FC.html
Questions and answers: www.help.gv.at/113/Seite.1130000.html
Official Proceedings Online/Amtsweg online: www.help.gv.at/28/Seite.280000.html

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