



Industry

Public sector

Business Issue

Set up a secure IT-based system to manage collective agreements

Solution

SAS/IntrNet® software

Benefits

Users now have a Web-based easy system to quickly take care of the wide range of tasks to manage collective agreements



“At the FPS Employment's IT department we only had two people to work on the changeover to an internet-based system, and only one to manage our intranet. It would not have been possible if we hadn't chosen SAS in the beginning, and if we had not been able to keep the SAS system as we made the changeover.”

Nicole Decheneux

FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue

The Power to Know.

Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue

A net-based system to track collective agreements

One of the many responsibilities of the Belgian Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue is to provide support and an institutional framework for the country's extremely well-developed industrial relations scene, including collective agreements. These agreements — between employers and trade unions in a certain company or sector — are formally registered, and are in some cases made binding by a Royal Decree. The FPS's Collective Industrial Relations Administration acts as a secretariat which takes care of the wide range of tasks required to arrange the meetings and register the agreements reached.

The Challenge

The FPS Employment had already dealt with one enormous challenge: setting up an IT-based system to support the administration of collective agreements. While this SAS-based system initially earned its spurs, long search times and a rather outdated operational framework meant it was time to evolve. The challenge was to transfer this system to an easily-navigable, Intranet-based system.

The Solution

Sticking with SAS meant that the job was made much easier. SAS IntrNet allowed the FPS Employment to make the changeover fast, and with a minimum of resources.

Collective agreements

An important feature of the Belgian industrial relations landscape is the collective agreement. This is the result of negotiations between the social partners — employers and trade unions — in a particular sector of industry or region, and sets a jointly agreed set of rights and

obligations for both sides on key issues such as wages, productivity, working conditions, etc. The collective agreement was born from the gradual awareness of the importance of good industrial relations towards the end of the nineteenth century. Already in the "sixties" of this nineteenth century, the first trade unions of workers of large factories started to emerge. In 1919 serious social unrest broke out in the metal manufacturing and mining sectors, which gave birth to the first three joint committees. The current legal framework for agreements is set out in a 1968 law that gave a legal status to the agreements. For the joint committees the legal framework exists since 1947.

The agreements are negotiated in the joint committees, one for each sector. Within the Belgian Federal Public Service, the Collective Industrial Relations Administration is responsible for labour relations and agreements, and provides a secretariat for the joint committees, in order to arrange meetings, draft the agreements, and provide the follow-up. The work of this administration involves announcing the meeting and inviting participants, drawing up minutes, finalising the text of agreements, and dealing with their official registration and publication.

This is no small task. Today there are some 170 joint committees in Belgium, with over 1,500 meetings, and around 1,000 collective agreements negotiated every year. More than 50,000 letters are posted annually, and 900 Royal Decrees are promulgated and sent for official publication.

Stage One - OK while it lasted, but time to change

Back in 1997, a first project was launched to set up a single, secure, IT-based system for managing this work. The nature of the

content meant that this was a complex project: it needed to provide 50 users with simultaneous access, so as provide the Secretariat with all the IT assistance it needed for the smooth running of its own responsibilities, but also needed to link into other databases containing social security information and company records. A user would have to be able to request from the system information according to a number of criteria: information based on a particular person, the way information was classified, any information relating to a joint committee, the state of play of a particular dossier, or a search along thematic lines.

SAS was chosen as the language for the mainframe system, based on a VM platform. While the system was extremely successful in meeting all the initial requirements (within the operating and budgetary constraints in place), there were also a number of drawbacks. Nicole Decheneux, one of the experts of the FPS's IT department, explains: "The system was stable, and allowed us to input information in a modular way, and to produce documents automatically. The main trouble with the mainframe system was the slow response time, and users were not that enthusiastic about the system." In a PC-centred world like today's, the fact that it was impossible to print out a request locally was becoming more and more unacceptable.

SAS IntrNet®- an easy changeover, an easy system for users

The changeover to a SAS IntrNet system kicked off in July 1999, with the selection of items for a list creation, and the development of graphics. After a course for users in September, the production proper started already in November. The web-based search windows look familiar, with scroll bar lists and click buttons alongside boxes to fill in with search criteria. It can easily provide a list of members, the agenda of meetings for a particular day, travelling expense claim forms for attendees, and scorecard indicators on the secretariat's workflow and workload. One important breakthrough is the way the system can produce documents necessary in the follow-up procedure of the agreements, such as the one required for publication in the "Moniteur belge - Belgisch Staatsblad", both in terms of language and layout, and produce this in a Word document. The changeover could be carried out in a contained way: the various modules could all be grafted on independently in record time. With limited resources, the time required was a key concern for Nicole Decheneux: "We only have two people to work on the changeover, and only one to manage our intranet. It would not have been possible if we hadn't chosen SAS in the beginning, and if we had not been able to keep a

SAS system as we made the changeover to an internet-based system."

The system now has more than 200 "internal" people consulting it on a regular basis. People are generally acquainted with browser windows, and training in the new system is either minimal or not required. A weekly refreshed extract is published on the Internet and consulted by more than 10.000 visitors a month. Visitors to the website of the FPS Employment can consult the texts of all agreements since January 2001.



SAS Institute
Kasteel de Robiano
Hertenbergstraat 6
3080 Tervuren
Belgium
Tel.: +32(2) 766 07 00
Fax: +32(2) 766 07 77
www.sas.com/belux

SAS Institute s.à.r.l.
204 route d'Arlon
L-8010 Strassen
Luxembourg
Tel.: +352 26 11 84
Fax: +352 26 31 11 84
www.sas.com/belux