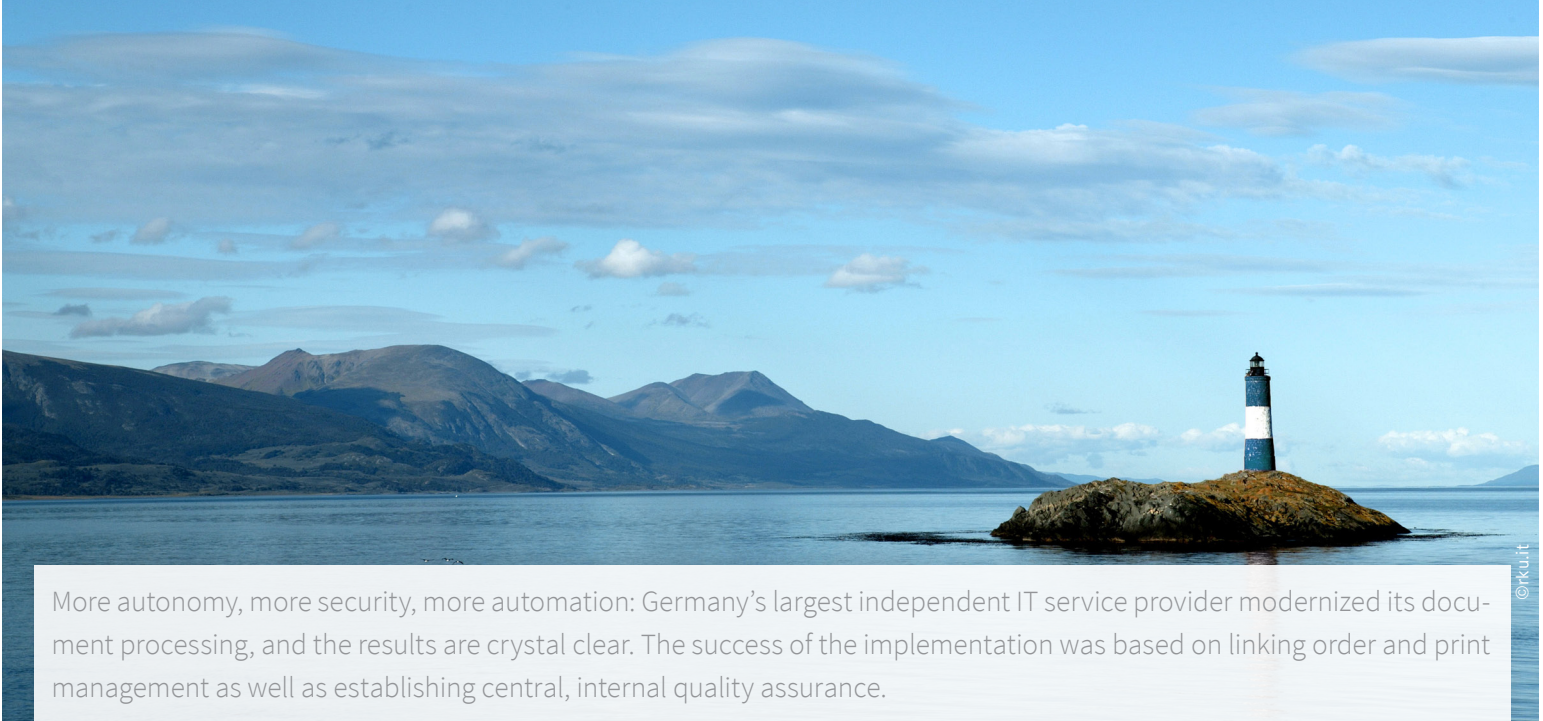# In output-wonderland

Customer Story | Compart

More autonomy, more security, more automation: Germany's largest independent IT service provider modernized its document processing, and the results are crystal clear. The success of the implementation was based on linking order and print management as well as establishing central, internal quality assurance.

Markus Koch, Head of Output Management at rku.it GmbH, calls it as he sees it: output management at his company represents the «dawn of a new era.» Two years ago, the IT company specializing in municipal management completely overhauled its document management process. It began in November 2013, when it outsourced its previously internally run print center to an external service provider.

The reasons for the move were pragmatic. The conversion to color and continuous printing was imminent and would have involved considerable investment. One major driver of the decision was the Energy Industry Law (EnWG 2011), which requires energy suppliers to issue invoices that are understandable and transparent. In addition, the customers' sales requirements for the design of print products were rising.

rku.it therefore decided to switch to color for more customer-friendly graphic design with embedded color elements. By setting up white paper production (printing on completely white paper), the company could save on preprinted logo paper.

Furthermore, the legally mandated design requirements drove invoice page volumes up, in some cases many times higher.

The company's existing infrastructure would have never kept pace. As a result, rku.it decided to outsource printing and mailing. Considering other parts of the company were pursuing their own restructuring initiatives, the move would help conserve needed financial resources.

Initially, however, essential core processes of output management – including modifying, converting, sorting and bundling documents – lay in the hands of the service providers, putting rku.it in an awkwardly dependent position. The new goal, therefore, was to bring the operations upstream of the printing process back in house.

Internal check established

Another downside of full outsourcing was that the rku.it employees could not intervene in the OM process. They only got to see the final (printed) document. There was no realtime preview, and hence no full quality control before printing. Errors always necessitated canceling the entire job at the end of the process chain. Even though the precise cost of reprints due to errors is unclear, Koch believes it was significant.

So a stringent, in-house quality assurance process was established. Specifically, all created documents go through a central check before they are sent out. Since 2015, rku.it has been using Document Desktop for this task. Compart developed this web-based software for different release mechanisms.

Users can check outgoing correspondence for plausibility and conformance with defined rules (corporate identity, compliance). A check for duplicates is also included (are there multiple copies of the correspondence?). The system automatically rejects erroneous or redundant documents.

Executive Summary

Successful integration: By linking the printing and order process, rku.it GmbH was able to achieve a greater degree of automation in document production than ever before. At the same time, establishing an internal check and release step created a level of production reliability from which customers, partners, and external service providers also benefit. The Compart DocBridge® Pilot solution for document preparation and Document Desktop for validation, along with the internally developed ticket system for monitoring and reporting, are key players in the process. www.rku-it.de

Automatization with Integrated Quality Assurance

For quality assurance directly in print production, rku.it and the service providers drew up precisely defined service level agreements (SLAs), which also cover downstream processing (enveloping, electronic franking, etc.). In particular, deadlines for the phases of the printing process, from data receipt to completion of the deliverable, are also included. rku.it also conducts regular on-site audits of their external service providers.

Digital mailing as an alternative

rku.it cooperates with various partners to ensure on-time delivery to customers (should one service provider «drop out»). rku.it has approximately 370,000 documents of about 14 million pages printed and sent per year. Half are invoices (rolling and per due date). Peak document production season is typically between October and February.

Paper-based communication still predominates, but digital delivery is certainly an alternative for the company. In fact, some invoices are currently sent as an e-mail attachment, a download link, or via E-POST. The same is true for advertisements and notifications (e.g., rate changes), and the trend is growing. That is why rku.it itself is also working on developing practicable solutions for legally binding electronic mail.

But there is hardly a revolution on the horizon, according to Markus Koch, because requirements, especially for the energy industry, are still too tied to paper.

More autonomy, more automation

It remains to be seen what delivery method will dominate at rku.it in the future. At present, two things are more important to Markus Koch and his colleagues: regaining control over the process – in other words, more autonomy – and a greater degree of automation. Modernizing output management achieves both. The latter essentially relies on standardizing document creation and linking the printing and order process.

Here's how it works: The specialist applications (SAP ERP/IS-U, Schleupen CS) deliver the data to the central correspondence system, (OpenText StreamServe), which generates the documents and transmits them to the DocBridge® Pilot platform.

This software, also developed by Compart, converts the incoming documents into a PDF, generates associated XML files (metadata), checks whether inserts are needed (DocBridge® Pilot adds the appropriate control code to the document for downstream enveloping), sorts the mail, bundles it for the best possible postage rates, and sends everything as a PDF file to the print provider via FTP (File Transport Protocol).

Ticket system: automatically in view at all times
At various points during the print process and when the print job is finished, rku.it automatically receives a status report (number of pages delivered, number prepared, number actually printed, when printed, and any problems). This feedback is used to reconcile the quantity structures (whether all the documents were processed in the quality and quantity specified in the order). Any deviations halt the process and the teams involved are notified. After the issue is investigated and addressed, the process continues or starts over from the beginning. The automatically generated final report is also the basis for invoicing (accounting).

Automation is front and center: The workflow begins as soon as the documents are generated. The jobs are checked for quality (using Document Desktop) and then sent to DocBridge® Pilot via a scheduler function. There, they are prepared for printing.

Interestingly, the workflow is tied into a ticket system (Omnitracker). It plays a key role both in internal communications as well as external communications with customers and service providers. Omnitracker records and monitors all service orders, not just print jobs. It also tracks IT orders that rku.it fulfills for customers, such as installing an application on the customer's client server.

The workflow is designed such that customers can input their orders directly into the ticket system, either via a corresponding client or a web front end.

One major benefit is that the ticket system displays not only the completed jobs but those still in progress. The following is documented:

- Number of pages printed/to be printed
- Job status (Is the document still in progress or already at the printing house? When was it printed? Was it already sent?)
- Were there problems? If so, what were they?

One critical feature: Any stakeholder – rku.it, the customer, or the print service provider – can view these status messages.

Markus Koch: «I know of no other company in our industry with processes as automated as ours. One reason is that the DocBridge® Suite is so open to other systems. This flexibility is invaluable.» But, the manager adds, the purpose of automation is not workforce reduction but greater production reliability. The initial successes are already in evidence: «Customer satisfaction has risen considerably.»

DocBridge® Suite was hardly an unknown

rku.it first learned about Compart through a partner already working with DocBridge® Pilot. They took a closer look at the solution and conducted a market analysis. There were two main selection criteria: fast conversion of large document volumes into any format and metadata extraction, as well as the ability to modify documents.

Compart software came out on top, recalls Holger Schwarz, Head of Output Management. «Above all else, DocBridge® Pilot handles different input and output formats so professionally, which makes for a positive implementation.» He is emphatic that there were no reservations about the change.

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Automatization with Integrated Quality Assurance

The self-imposed pressure toward automation meant thinking way ahead and defining «bullet-proof» processes from the outset.

Independence came quickly

With some measure of pride, Holger Schwarz mentions that iku.it handled the launch largely on its own. They did need Compart support with the initial processes, but after that they moved ahead independently, for example with implementing the Document Desktop solution. «We were working on our own very quickly, and open communication was a key factor.»

Regular meetings and discussions were part of the project from the beginning. Not only were employees from output management included, but those from other departments. According to Schwarz, Compart's excellent consulting was also key to the speedy implementation.

rku.it produced its first documents with DocBridge® Pilot by the end of 2015. They were regular annual invoices for various energy suppliers. Other types of invoices were successively added. Today, almost their entire output runs through the new system.

But that's far from the end of the story. The degree of automation will be pushed even higher (to include input of customer-supplied materials) and internal quality assurance expanded. One plan is to incorporate a check directly in the forms system, i.e., during generation.

The reason is that changes to the correspondence system (such as release changes) can definitely affect document creation. Questions to address include: Do the documents look exactly the same after the update? Do they also meet all the corporate identity (CI) and compliance criteria in the new software version?
Using intelligent software that runs through such test cases (jobs) and graphically displays devia-

tions at the press of a button, rku.it could build even more reliability into document production. A related project is due to start shortly. Compart will again be on board.

For Markus Koch, Holger Schwarz and their colleagues, the entire endeavor spawned an interesting side initiative. During the project, the idea came about to hold a regular technical workshop (harmonization committee).

The goal of this forum is to discuss current topics and trends in the field of output management with the customers' OM managers. The focus is not only on technical aspects, but also on basic questions: What challenges do businesses currently face in customer communications? What practicable ways are there to modernize document and output management? What are the musthaves versus the nice-to-haves? What are the stumbling blocks and risks? In any case, there's plenty to discuss.

> «Our employees know that it is better to keep document preparation and quality assurance in house. That way, we can maintain a very structured output management workflow.»

Holger Schwarz

Markus Koch

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