

Better than a filing cabinet

Do away with the paper trails

Uptime AG has carved its niche as providers of user-friendly and efficient means of avoiding the doldrums of the paper-filled filing cabinet.

Time-consuming document searches. Records security. Storage space costs. Regulatory compliance. The considerations are the same whether the issue is streamlining operations for a more robust bottom line or serving a municipality's citizens more effectively. Paper filing systems pose significant business challenges in the form of increased costs and lost productivity.

We all need it to do our work, but paper accumulates quickly. Folders and filing systems make documents easier to find. Records' managers organize, archive and retrieve our information. But the mass of paper keeps growing. Paper files are often hard to find. Records may not be in their proper folder. Or they may be "borrowed" and then lost on somebody's desk. Studies show that professionals often lose up to 500 hours a year just looking for documents.

A nimble and innovative solution

Those days are gone. Document imaging and management solutions offer better ways to manage the

records you rely upon. There are around 200 software companies that provide automated solutions for the management of documents, but less than a dozen can provide complicated and tailor-made solutions for larger corporations. To name some of the best, there are Americans IBM on demand, Filenet and Documetum, as well as the German Ixos.

But one of the most nimble and innovative of this group is to be found right here in Switzerland. Over the past ten years, Uptime AG of Zurich has carved its place among the best on offer, with user-friendly and efficient means of avoiding the doldrums of the filing cabinet.

The Managing Director and co-founder of Uptime, Federal Business Information systems specialist Patrick Richter, insists on differentiating his company from the rest of the pack: "There are two basic particularities of our products," he says. "The concepts we base our work on are totally new. Our definitions of what a document is and how documents and their contents correlate with others are really groundbreaking."

"Our software is guided wholly on the particular business processes of a given customer. This allows for a number of collaborators to retrieve and correlate the documents they use simultaneously, even though the sources of these documents may be in different format and located in a multitude of files. The 'master dossier' will deliver the specific files and tie them up to any other document that the chore on hand demands."

"What really distinguishes Uptime from our competitors is of a more practical nature," Richter continues. "Compared to other products on the market, we concentrate on making the implementation, administration and the use of our products simple and very user-friendly."

Efficient and rapid service

The ability of Richter's company to propose solutions for the management of documents in a complicated procedural environment is surprising. Thanks to the base definitions Uptime uses, they are very efficient and rapid when it comes to completing a project.

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To cite a specific instance, the immigration services of a Swiss canton received a particular solution for their archiving needs within three months, whereas one of Richter's competitors took over one a half years to produce a solution for a problem of the same complexity in the same environment. "Speed and reliability is very important to us," he insists.

Any business model carries its load of processes. A manager's constant worry is to ensure that these processes are as efficient and rapid as possible. The standards applied to system processes in a company have a direct relationship to the bottom line as well as to customer satisfaction. Each and every process undertaken within a company structure is supported by some type of document.

It seems evident to Patrick Richter that in order to survive competition and to work efficiently, document management – be it on the production side, the retail side or the distribution side of a business – must be handled with top efficiency. It is through their flagship product, ARTS that Uptime endeavours to offer this efficiency to their customers.

How to beat the system

An example from the retail sector well illustrates how Uptime's efforts pay off.

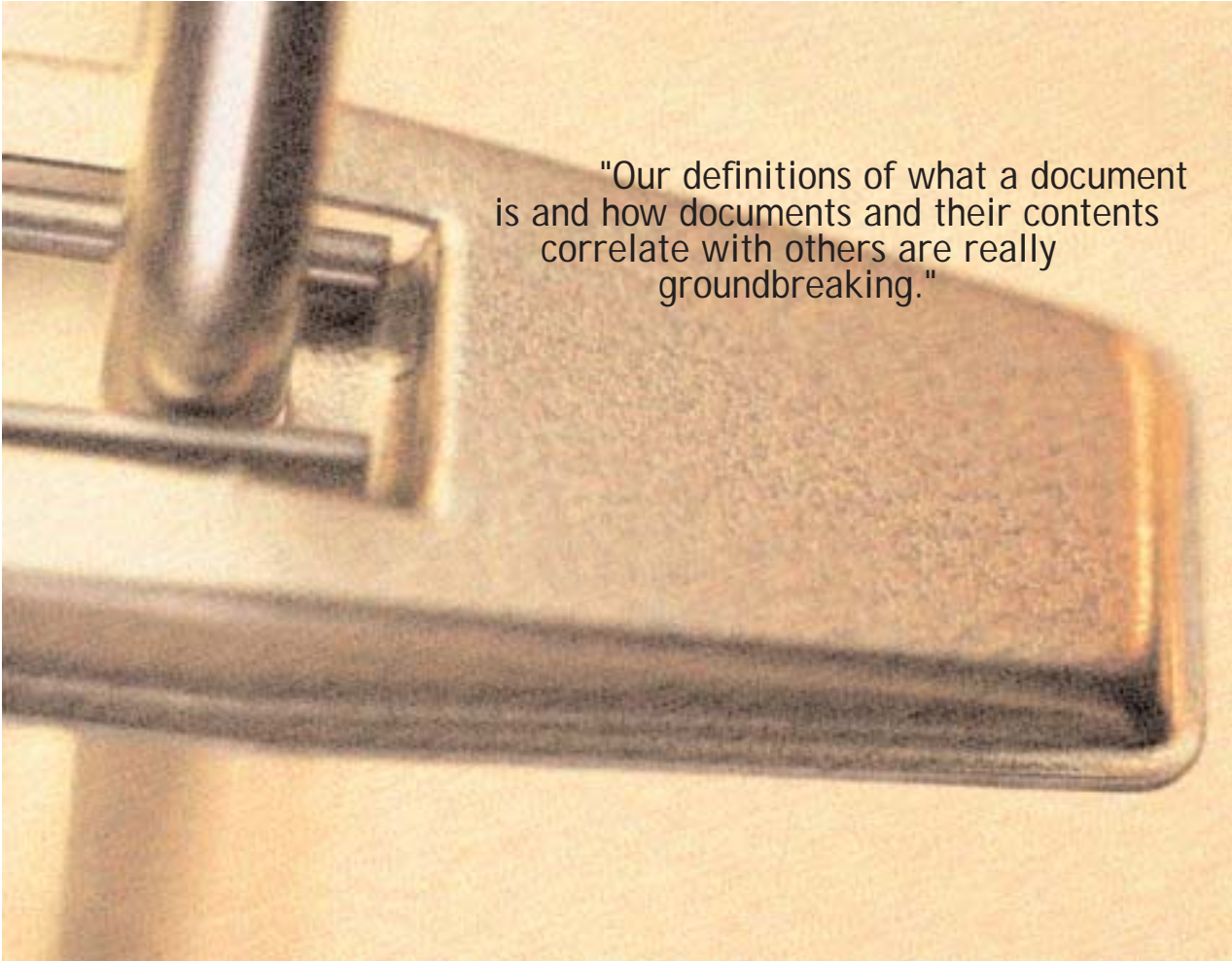
For the electronic archiving of its receipts, leading Swiss retail chain Migros put its stock in the competence and reliability of Uptime. Under Swiss law, detailed lists of receipts have to be archived for ten years. Easier said than done, however, especially when you serve more than 1.5 million customers a day. That's precisely the case with Migros, the largest retail chain in Switzerland. Each customer purchases an average of 10 items, adding up to 15 to 20 million data records a day.

Until 1998, the various Migros cooperatives archived their receipts in different ways. The majority of the stores packed the rolls in cardboard boxes, which resulted in enormous volume and made searches extremely difficult. A few were already using the cash register manufacturer's proprietary archiving system, which, however, had extremely limited functionality.

In 1998, the cooperatives undertook the task of evaluating the introduction of a uniform archiving system. It was not only the legal requirements that led to this decision. The co-operatives also wanted to

improve the quality of their customer service, support accounting with clarifications and create possibilities for further use of the data.

Uptime got the job because they had already successfully set up a document archiving system at the St Gallen Migros co-operative. Faced with this new challenge, Uptime responded rapidly. "The most important component of the archive system put together for Migros is the ARTS Retail platform," Richter explains. "An Uptime document management solution for the retail sector. It was installed on a store-by-store basis over the course of a year. That also included employee training for the customer service representatives of the individual retail stores, the accounting departments of the cooperatives and the Migros Cumulus bonus card infoline employees." «««



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A particular challenge was the integration of different types of cash registers from four different manufacturers. To prepare for this task, Migros defined an interface standard together with the cash register manufacturers, so that all registers would supply the data in the same format.

From the onset, ARTS performed well. Each evening, Migros data is delivered via file transfer to the central archives – not as scanned documents in pixel form (another Uptime speciality) but as records with sales figures. The system processes the data at night, making it ready and available for queries in the morning.

Richter concludes, "Not only does that have a positive effect on operational costs at Migros, but our application also makes it easier for employees to work at the different cooperatives."

A shot in the arm for document management

Another case that illustrates the efficiency that Uptime offered the public sector is to be seen in that involving the Migration Office of the Canton of Zurich. In addition to other functions, the Migration Office issues

immigration and residence permits, extends visas and issues return visas.

Until the intervention of Uptime, the government was hard put to manage approximately 240,000 files with 8 million pages, spread over three floors of the offices of the Foreigners' Police. Everyday, the workforce of approximately 100 officers had to refer to around 1,700 files and create 400 new ones. Day by day, with 800 postal items received, the stack was increased by approximately 2,500 pages.

The influx of paperwork almost brought about collapse. Management of this flood of paperwork was extremely labour- and cost-intensive. And there was a constant increase in demands placed on the office, to the extent that employees were hardly able to cope with the workload.

This new situation was not only unsatisfactory for all those involved but led to continuously increasing political pressure. Everything had to move very quickly in 2001 because,

beginning on 1 September, not only did the Migration Office move to new premises but it also introduced the electronic archiving system conceived by Uptime.

Gradually, all of the old files are being digitalized so that officers can make the transition more easily. Currently, all new, incoming documents are digitalized on scanners and then indexed. Automatic comparison with existing documents helps to avoid capturing errors. Files then reach an electronic postal input for one of the 100 officers. "The implementation of our management system had dramatic effect on day-to-day work in this department," Richter stated matter of factly.

Richter's young face lights up when he says, "And you thought I would tell you about a filling cabinet!"