

Tailor-made for each employee

ZF Friedrichshafen AG pilots the use of role-based portals



Overview

■ The challenge

Analysts from the Meta Group have defined the introduction of company portals as a critical business factor. Particularly within large companies this issue is being given top priority this year. For example, automotive suppliers, who operate globally and whose IT landscapes are therefore often heterogeneous and widely branching, portal solutions offer attractive perspectives. A pilot project at ZF Friedrichshafen AG demonstrates how role-based portals make it easier for employees to work with different IT applications.

ZF Friedrichshafen AG.

ZF Friedrichshafen AG is a globally operating automotive supplies group in the drive train and running gear sector, which, with a turnover of around nine billion euro, is ranked as Germany's third largest automotive supplier. The purchase of the automotive supplier Mannesmann Sachs AG in 2001 was a major step in the 87-year history of ZF. The company has now set a course for greater added value in its core competence fields, for higher international market significance and further economic growth. ZF's product programme includes transmission and steering systems, running gear components and complete axle systems and axle modules. The company's share in the systems market is set to increase from 30 % at present to 50 % in 2010.

According to the results of an investigation carried out by the Meta Group, around 85 out of the 2000 global firms will have introduced a

company portal by 2003. A portal enables a company not only to keep in contact with its customers more efficiently but also to coordinate its internal working processes. For globally operating companies such as ZF Friedrichshafen AG this results in enormous time and subsequent cost savings.

The world's largest independent automotive supplier for drive train and running gear technology is represented in around 22 countries with around 56,000 employees. The number of separate locations has risen to 117 over time and many of the companies bought up along the way have their own IT landscapes. For the individual buyer, manager or production operative therefore it has become increasingly more time-consuming to target and access information. A buyer, for instance, working with economic data from the SAP solution also needs to access production and development data and to be able to communicate with ZF's suppliers.

Two consultancy arms link to form a team.

Last year ZF Friedrichshafen AG's IT Predevelopment department investigated ways to make it easier for their employees to work with the different systems. Staff portals were soon under consideration as an innovative possibility for providing content from different sources in a user-compliant form. Portals supply

the user, via a single access point, with precisely the data and services, which are important for that person's work from the overall IT landscape of the company. Whether buyer or secretary, everyone has an individual personalised workplace corresponding to that person's role within the company. When SAP delivered the role-based portal solution – mySAP Enterprise Portals – at the start of this year, ZF decided to test the solution. Joachim Müller-Angstenberger, Manager of Reporting Systems and IT Predevelopment says, "According to the Gartner Group, SAP is one of the leading portal suppliers. ZF has furthermore been a customer of SAP since 1995 and this strategic partnership is highly prioritised within the company."

IBM Deutschland GmbH's involvement gave the pilot project an implementation partner whose consultation expertise has grown over the course of a long-standing partnership with SAP. SAP brought the knowledge of how to introduce the platform and solutions. IBM on the other hand contributed to the success of the project with its experience in the conception and introduction of portals and e-business solutions. "A good combination", according to Joachim Müller-Angstenberger, "since I was working with a committed, highly motivated team."

This project culture was a significant factor in the fact that a prototype had been produced by March of this year, only two and a half months later. The employee portal provides group-wide access to 20 SAP systems alone, various product data management solutions and other specialist systems. The single condition for connection to the portal is that the system is Internet-compatible. "This unified view of a heterogeneous IT

landscape has great benefits for a company like ZF. Different local systems, for instance, can be integrated into other applications quickly and without too much effort", says Joachim Müller-Angstenberger.

An analysis of the potential use of the portal system has found that company-wide introduction can be expected to result in a measurable reduction in learning time and, more importantly, save time in daily work. Employees can also undertake further training via e-learning over the Internet, thereby saving travelling expenses.

Users have found the 'Single Sign-On' (users register only once with the system) particularly user-friendly. "These days there are people who keep lists of passwords under their desks. If they need to remember just one key word they can eliminate this invitation to unauthorised data access", explains Joachim Müller-Angstenberger.

Starting with four roles.

The first ZF employees will start to see the benefits in the next year. The aim is to start company-wide rollout by the end of this year. Until then the challenge is to define the different roles. In the prototype phase ZF confined the roles to purchasing, secretarial, management and a general standard workplace. It is already clear that there will be between five and ten different workplaces for purchasing alone. The IT Predevelopment department is currently demonstrating the prototypes to as many staff as possible. Joachim Müller-Angstenberger says, "Many colleagues need this to come up with ideas. Wherever possible we shall implement them." ZF Friedrichshafen is also depending on its well-established IT partner for the realisation of the system.



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