



Paperless Politics in Rastede, Germany

By Ralf Kobbe
Translated by Johanna Natalia Dyrszka

The council office in the city of Rastede works exclusively electronically. With the introduction of *Session*, both the city council information system was improved in addition to a reduction in costs.

With its decision in 2000 to launch a new website, it was clear that the city of Rastede's decision would have to involve city council members. Many council information systems were tested for their practicability, with heavy emphasis on Internet capabilities.

The technical platform was decided on - that, for SOMACOS' *Session* meeting management software. The technical conversion consulting sequence followed, which precluded a significant additional budget of €1,300 later allocated for the voting period. Council members were also granted a fixed supplementary monthly sum for Internet use expenditures. The test installation proceeded in 2002, after formal details necessary for program implementation were finalized.

The fine tunings required for implementation included the introduction of an internal content management system, the configuration of technical capabilities and the training of city council members.

In 2002, the post-mail dispatch of documents was replaced by electronic dispatch. Since then, the council members themselves decide whether or not their information should be printed. Through database migration, Rastede council members now have access to an extensive search feature.

Through the introduction of *Session*, internal communication has been vastly improved; one such feature includes *Session*'s internal forums.

The average time expenditure per council member has been significantly reduced. Another benefit of the program includes the savings from the usual paper and postage uses and expenses so common to city government. Through the introduction of the *Session* meeting management solution, the city's annual costs have been reduced from €23,000 to €11,000.

Ralf Kobbe is responsible for press and public relations in Rastede, Germany.