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Fighting file overflow in the county of Grafschaft Bentheim

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With the introduction of the county information system "CIS" in January 2003, the county was able to reduce its paper use by approx. 4000-5000 pages per year. Representatives print documents at home – and that only if they feel that it's necessary.

The county's and its 16 committees' daily agendas, meeting reports and minutes no longer have to be printed and sent via post mail. All these documents can be retrieved from the server. This is not only beneficial to administrations and politicians but also to common citizens. Citizens are thereby given the option to monitor the county's administrative and political proceedings, provided they have internet access.

County administrator, Mr Ricken, district head, Josef Brüggemann as well as further county administration employees explained how the system works. They hope that the majority of citizens will log-in at www.grafschaft-bentheim.de to download meeting documents. They also hope that citizens will again become more interested in local government.

On December 29th, 2001 it was decided to introduce the system. The 51 county representatives got the chance to test the program during a 6-month trial. Since January 2003, correspondence between the county and its representative has been executed exclusively electronically. "The system is obligatory for all county members," remarks Josef Brüggemann. "We were the first administration to introduce the system in our district Weser-Ems and to switch from paper to electronic format", notes county treasurer Uwe Fietzek. The county administration is particularly proud of the implementation phase of just one year. Approx. € 42,000 was invested to provide appropriate technical requirements. The system cost an additional € 13,000 and another € 7,000 was spent on administration and representative training.

Each representative had to purchase a computer and a printer and obtain internet access. Acquisition costs are partly reimbursed through the county budget. In addition, representational allowances were increased from € 180 to € 250 per month. The supplementary € 70 should cover internet fees and office supply expenditures. However, as noted by the county administrator, "representatives are not being rewarded working extra hours". "The download or printing of reports is quite time-consuming. Each item and report must be highlighted and printed individually. A county administration meeting can contain up to 100 pages... that can take a while."

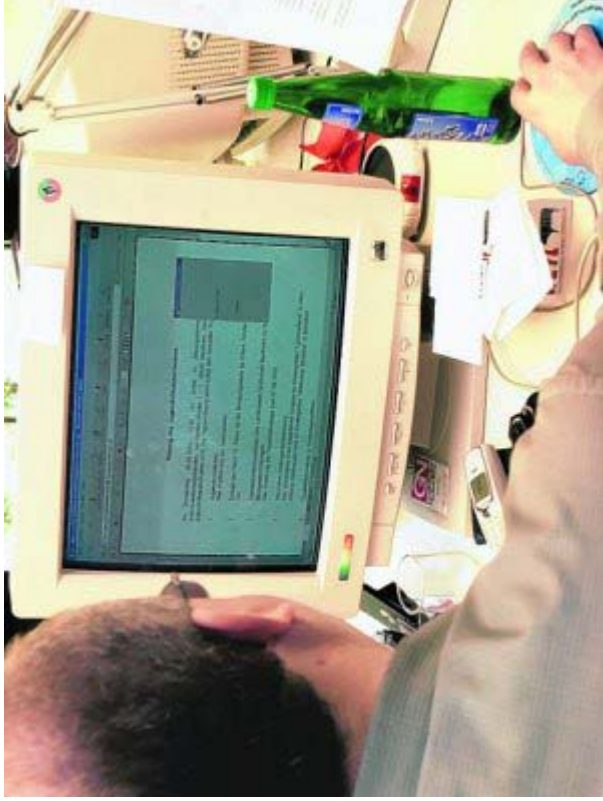


In background: the annual number of folders of a representative. From left to right: county council head Josef Brüggemann, county administrator Paul Ricken and county treasurer Uwe Fietzek. Seated: Ludger Flucht (project manager) and Hans-Georg Mers (CIO).

Other representatives try to overcome obstacles that are more of a technical nature. This problem concerns more or less the elderly who are not familiar with the new computer age.

An important goal of the new information system is also to provide citizens with an insight into the work of the county council. Meeting dates, public documents or decided resolutions are made available. Results are released within a short period of time and former documents are archived and available for the search function.

This is also beneficial to the representatives who no longer have to archive documents in folders at home. Paul Ricken, a representative since 1968, has enough folders to fill his basement. He's glad about the significant improvements the implementation of the new system has brought.



Found: The citizen can choose his/her topics from the list of reports.

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www.gn-online.de