

ADARVO CUSTOMERS IN THE LIMELIGHT

Regionale Feuerwehr Leibstadt (fire brigade): «A team spirit plays a major role.»

82 men and two women staff the «Regionale Feuerwehr Leibstadt» (regional fire brigade in Leibstadt, Switzerland). As soon as we met their leaders, we realized that the old idea of a bunch of happy-go-lucky types who like playing with water belongs to the past. On the contrary, high levels of professionalism were evident in all areas, be it management style, fire-extinguishing or related techniques, methodology training, (Internet presence www.rfwl.ch), and the promotion of motivation and team spirit. They also rely on modern tools when it comes to communication and data organization. As a result they have implemented a groupware solution based on Adarvo ThemeWare. An interview with the Commander, André Burkhard.

Mr. Burkhard, you are the commander of the «Regionale Feuerwehr Leibstadt» (regional fire brigade in Leibstadt, Switzerland). How big is this organization?

André Burkhard: We fall into the category of a Dorffeuwehr (village fire station) which means that our 84 firefighters are responsible for three Gemeinden (parishes). That's roughly 3,000 inhabitants and over 1,000 households.

But 84 firefighters sounds like a much bigger unit?

Maybe it does, at first glance. However you have to remember that not everyone can be called up right away when the alarm goes. On average we only have around 40 people available to us in an emergency situation, and we also need them urgently on site if more serious incidents occur.

How often are you called out?

In the past few years we averaged eight serious incidents per year. Last year alone we had a fair number of major situations.

When people usually think about the fire brigade, the first thing that comes to mind is tackling fires. However, nowadays there are many more reasons for calling you out.

That is correct. In recent years we have seen more call outs for problems with water, storms

and traffic. On the other hand, this year the majority of call outs have been to extinguish fires. Even there, our basic areas of activity are very varied, ranging from small chemical fires to large-scale fires or road traffic accidents. To cope with these we need a well-trained team of reliable fire fighters.



Andreas Burkhard, Captain and Commander of the Leibstadt fire brigade, leads it with a great deal of involvement and enthusiasm.

What made you decide on Adarvo?

For the past three years the issues of centralized data – and document storage, and also clear event management and task assignment, have been top of the list. Until we heard of Adarvo we had been managing by using simpler Web Groups.

How did you find out about Adarvo?

I read about Adarvo in a specialist magazine, then I went to the website and downloaded the program. It was immediately obvious that this would be a very interesting tool for us. Then we visited the Adarvo at Internet Expo, discussed various issues and decided to buy the product.



What were the most important reasons for implementing a collaborative solution?

As I said, the main factor was to find a way of managing a centralized document store. We did away with paper documents years ago. Everything is electronic nowadays. It is important to me that this information is not only transparent and easy to access but also secure. In addition, there is a need for everyone to be able to share tasks and dates. It is enormously useful to know who is doing what and when – especially in a militia system where you don't meet each other every day. And then so we can work on specific issues together and exchange documents with one another. We have already run through this procedure and it worked beautifully.



How difficult would you say the program is to use?

I use software a lot as part of my main job day and I would say that this program is not complicated, and is easy to learn. Nevertheless even the brief product training course clearly showed that even those people who are less familiar with software were highly motivated when they left the classroom, and can now very happily send messages from home in the real operating environment.

The implementation of a groupware solution also relies on having the right kind of organization for this. How did you tackle this?

In the first step only five people, the management team, actually worked with Adarvo. These are also the power users, who will probably use Adarvo the most in future. The second step involved another five to ten users who we shall train ourselves. I am responsible for set up, authorizing permissions and administering Adarvo themes.

How many themes do you manage?

We have one central theme for the whole fire brigade with an alarm section, a questions and answers part, a database area with all the forms and statistics, a team data store with notes and links,

and then, of course, the actual fire brigade data, correspondence etc.

Do someone host your theme for you, or do you have your own Adarvo server for that purpose?

We host everything on the Adarvo server.

« From my point of view, Adarvo is easy to learn and use. Even our colleagues who were less confident with software left the product training course feeling very motivated. »

Is the Adarvo WebPublishing function one of your themes?

Yes, but we are still in the initial stages with this. In practical terms, we are currently publishing the exercises timetable, which is continuously updated.

Were there any complications or problems?

One problem we have is the issue of acceptance, i.e. why we need this type of tool at all. And then we have also had a few strange experiences with Adarvo that we had to resolve. It wasn't always clear whether we caused the problems or whether they were due to errors in the program. Despite this, it is an excellent tool.

Change of topic: how are things with the next generation of firefighters?

This is a very hot topic! We work closely with the fire brigades in our neighboring villages Dogern and Albruck in Germany. Junior fire brigades have been on the go for years there, and more and more of them are being set up in Switzerland as well. In these brigades ten- to twelve-year olds are taught about the fire brigade, which makes them perfect fire-fighters when they are 18 years. However, we also need other sources of motivation.

Which ones do you mean exactly?

In the Fire Brigade I come into contact with the latest procedures and modern technology, I can find out about new features, and get to know new people. I need to be able to pass on this valuable information. I also see the use of a solution like Adarvo as part of this need. I learn to work in a team, which is not only important in the Fire Brigade nowadays. Here, as in the past, the Fire Brigade a good integrated social platform.

Mr. Burkhard, many thanks to talking to us.