

Achieving Higher Communication Quality via Automation

How to reduce the time spent for catalogue production to a quarter of the original time, is demonstrated by Sto AG's example, who not only saves valuable time, but can furthermore observe enhanced quality achieved by consistent automation of the publication process.

Sto AG, as a leading international manufacturer of products and systems for wall claddings and coatings, has a core product range, which is comprised of both thermal insulation systems and high-quality cladding elements, as well as plaster and paints for buildings' interiors and exteriors. Further core areas result from innumerable associations and highly qualified subsidiaries such as StoCretec and StoVerotec. In this very significant segment, carrying over brand promises and product quality into product communications is important.

Different Countries, Different Catalogues

The product range that Sto AG offers their customers is not only very comprehensive, but is furthermore quite divergent at the international level. This results in a large number of different publications, as the company currently has a market presence in more than 30 countries. As this is only partially carried out via trade partners, the company must also produce innumerable international catalogues.

It is only in a few exceptional cases that the individual catalogues are produced every two years, and supplemented by a streamlined price list in the interim. Apart from that, the catalogues are distributed to all markets. Additionally, special price lists are often printed two times per year. These contain products that are either not amongst the core



product range, or are to be sold at the current prices. The highly fluctuating cost prices for raw materials are thus taken into account.

Naturally, a decisive factor for brand identity on these markets is to achieve consistently high catalogue quality at a reasonable cost. However, up to now the individual subsidiaries had different solutions. In addition, there really wasn't any uniform Corporate Identity. High costs were incurred, as the implemented solutions were most often external ones.

Direct Access to the Catalogue via SAP

Sto AG attaches great importance to

the quality of their product communications. A fundamental step was taken in 2006, when a uniform database was set up in SAP. Not only product programs are generated from this product data pool, but also labels, Web sites and technical bulletins. From this point on, Sto AG has worked with an InBetween CLASSIC bundle. The IT staff could then manually launch generation on the defined project dates. However, only one document at a time could be generated. This stand-alone solution not only blocked the workstation, the individual generation runs took 20 to 24 hours, of which roughly 50% of the work was carried out in dialogues.

10 publications à 3 correction runs add up to a significant loss of working time.

Case Study Catalogue Production Time Reduced by Three Quarters

If you assume that by 2013, 30 publications per year were planned, then an IT employee would have been exclusively tied up in working on generating catalogues for roughly 135 days per year. The complex supervising and monitoring of different publications furthermore requires in-depth expertise. Only a few employees were actually capable of performing the generation.

This changed drastically with the conversion to InBetween ENTERPRISE Plus. Now the catalogues are automatically generated in their entirety via the InBetween server in combination with the InDesign CS4 server running in the background. An agency performs a finishing following the final correction run, and only in exceptional cases do they need to intervene in the layout. As a rule, just a few manual adjustments are needed. Up to this point, the data are exclusively maintained in SAP and transmission to the documents is fully automated, all without any employee intervention. All product and article data, as well as publication structure, originated in SAP. This also holds true for references to images and creative content. The former are predefined, editorially generated PDFs, which must be integrated into the automation process. They contain creative contents such as overviews.

One Template for all Publications

Catalogue production is based on a single layout. In the future, a separate layout will be designed for subsidiaries that do not operate under the Sto brand. The highly flexible template, which defines the layout, is only driven by project variables. The layout itself contains no static texts whatsoever, language variants are completely achieved by exchanging different data XMLs in the appropriate language. To generate text, Sto AG uses a phrase technology. This



means, when a product is defined, the appropriate phrases are selected from a predefined list of several thousand text elements, which are then compiled for the areas: application, properties, processing, etc., and supplemented with technical data such as consumption or density, if needed. Translations are subsequently performed via a Translation Memory System.

The conversion now provides for a batch process, which generates the total 700 pages in 12 hours, maximum. This saves approximately 50% working time per each generation. The quality of the entire production increases, as all country and language variants are output with a single process. Currently, 12 price lists and product programs, as well as 2 language versions are generated in this manner annually. This includes the master product range in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, the master product range in the English language, as well as language versions in Dutch, Swedish, Italian or French for Switzerland, Danish, Norwegian and Finnish. After all, in 2013, roughly 30 different publications are to be produced by these means.

Automation Provides More Flexibility

Altogether, depending on the subsidiary, the catalogues contain up to 2,000 products, 4,000 articles, as well as more than 700 images and creative pages. This easily adds up to a volume of more than 700 pages, which are generated via data compression in SAP, the subsequent export and automated import to a PIM system and finally undergo automated generation via the InBetween ENTERPRISE Plus server. The degree of automation achieved for a finished price list thus leaves practically nothing to be desired.

Nonetheless, Sto AG is taking the next step and in cooperation with InBetween, will fine-tune the automation process. In addition to the InDesign documents, high-quality PDFs are to be automatically generated during correction runs. Moreover, the conversion step via the PIM system is to be eliminated. In the future, this will enable direct access to the SAP data via InBetween. The manual work effort is thus reduced by a further 50%, which means that only 25% of the original effort is incurred. Moreover, the current costs

Case Study

Catalogue Production Time Reduced by Three Quarters

for operating the PIM system are eliminated, as are maintenance costs. The specialist department can more easily generate publications themselves.

By means of the significantly increased degree of automation, in the future, all subsidiaries can be provided with high-quality and current product programs and price lists. At the same time, Sto AG has greatly reduced their staff's time and effort, while simultaneously achieving considerable cost savings. The common database vastly improves data consistency, so that redundant data maintenance is eliminated. On the whole, a new era of international product communication commenced at Sto AG when the conversion was implemented.



Interview

Communication with Added Value

Horst Nadler, who is responsible for Process Management, Production QM and R & D at Sto AG, provides insights to the distinctive characteristics of a high-quality branch and its impact on catalogue production.

What priority does a catalogue take for a company that is the market leader in many sectors of the building industry?

In our business, extreme flexibility is a must. Our product range is very large, and our company now has market presence the world over. For us, it is therefore of utmost importance that in principle, customers can at a glance, view all relevant information from a single medium. That is why we quite consciously decided to not only provide our customers with price lists, but also with concrete product information. Quality plays a particularly prominent role. And that is why our catalogue is generally highly appreciated by our customers.

Why is the quality of the catalogues so dear to your heart?

By reason of our years of experience, we know that much more is hidden behind the individual materials than just their properties relevant to processing and utilization. They have optical and haptic qualities, which can touch your emotions. Architects and designers should naturally perceive and experience this potential. This is only possible when Sto does not just provide comprehensive product information, but as a partner, also conveys this special feeling for materials and their properties to those involved in the construction and building industries.



Horst Nadler,

Process Management, Production, QM and R&D, Sto AG

After passing his Abitur (general higher education entrance qualification) in 1989, he served his apprenticeship as a data processing administrator and until 2002, worked as a developer, group manager and product planner at ERP software companies in Villingen-Schwenningen, Constance and Behla.

As of late 2002, at Sto AG, he is responsible for process management and IT in the fields of QM, research and development, as well as hazardous material management, primarily in an SAP environment. Since 2005, he is additionally responsible for the sectors production and product data management.

Why did you decide to automate catalogue production to such a high degree? Doesn't a bit of quality fall by the way-side?

No, quite the contrary holds true. There are no two countries where we offer identical product ranges. Therefore, we must also supply customers with specific catalogues in each country where we're on the market and don't have a sales agency. All our subsidiaries profit from the changes and enhancements. Furthermore, due to the common database, redundant information is elimi-

nated. The high degree of automation thus results in increased quality.

Are there any further advantages for you?

Catalogue automation definitely saves much time, especially time that up to now was needed in dialogue mode. Our staff now has more free resources for their core tasks. We are of course also secure in view of data quality. When catalogue generation runs in the background, a large measure of security is guaranteed.

Project Highlights

- 12 price lists and product programs in 2 language versions are produced annually under high automation.
- Common database considerably improves data consistency.
- Upgrade to InBetween ENTERPRISE Plus reduced the original effort by 50%.
- All country and language variants are produced using the same process.
- Language variants are output just by exchanging data exports.
- All product and article data, as well as publication structure are maintained in SAP.

Sto: On Course as the Technology Leader

The Sto AG (Stühlingen) is a global leader in manufacturing products and systems for cladding buildings. Their broad product portfolio comprises, paints, plaster, varnishes, thermal insulation systems, materials for repairing concrete, floorings, acoustic and ventilated rainscreen cladding systems. With approximately 4,250 employees, the

corporate group achieved a turnover of 986 million euros in 2010 – in 30 subsidiaries, at 20 production sites. The guiding principle, „build consciously,“ underlines in two words Sto Group’s concept, which encompasses ecological and social responsibility. The company’s roots go back to a lime plant founded in 1835, which Wilhelm Stotmeister



purchased in the 1930s. Today, the Sto AG is under the management of the third generation of the Stotmeister family, who also holds the bulk of common shares.



InBetween Deutschland GmbH
Friedrichstraße 39
D-70174 Stuttgart

- ☎ +49 711 72 23 32-0
- 📠 +49 711 72 23 32-29
- ✉ info@inbetween.de
- 🌐 www.inbetween.de