

# Austrian Government Takes Smart Approach to Border Security

**Capgemini collaborates with the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior in a long term partnership to enhance efficiency in processing visa applications**

## The Situation

In 1996, Austria was preparing to implement the Schengen Agreement to abolish border controls with other Schengen states in continental Europe. Since the agreement introduced free movement within the Schengen area, a new requirement arose for close communication between participating states regarding visa applications. In the interests of public security and in order to control migration, applications received in one Schengen state might have to be rejected if the applicant was on a watchlist or blacklisted database in another.

Until this point, Austria's Federal Ministry of the Interior (or BM.I) had used only simple IT systems to record visa requests, and to manage watchlists for Austria only. As there was rarely any need to consult authorities outside Austria when processing visa applications, there was no mechanism in place to enable communication with other countries. The new requirement to consult with other

Schengen states was expected to generate a ten-fold increase in necessary visa processing activity. As a result, a system had to be implemented to process the visa applications with far greater efficiency.

## The Solution

The BM.I selected Capgemini as its partner for a project beginning in 1996 to deliver the new system, called VISION Austria, which would enable the country to join the Schengen Visa consultation network called VISION (or Visa Inquiry Open Border Network) in 1997. Ever since the success of the project, Capgemini's partnership with the BM.I has grown in scope and maturity. Initially Capgemini had a maintenance contract for the new system and was responsible for application management. But in 2002 Capgemini took on full responsibility for the management of the solution, and enhanced VISION with new

features in response to the latest Schengen regulations and processes, as well as migrating it to a new Microsoft platform (.NET, windows Server, MS SQL Server).

By the end of 2007 nine new member states had joined the Schengen area, resulting in a near 70% increase in workload, which VISION Austria handled without any problems. Today, a Capgemini team maintains the system, and delivers functional management for the IT department of the Ministry.

### The Result

Within an ongoing partnership which dates back 15 years, Capgemini and the BM.I have put in place a modern solution to support the Schengen process. VISION handles the ongoing consultation that enables the Schengen states to exchange information on visa requests from foreign nationals, identify individuals who may present a risk to other member states, and deny those individuals access to the Schengen area if necessary. Most applications run through the system without manual intervention, because criminal record and counter-terrorist checks across national boundaries are conducted automatically. When a match is detected between a visa applicant and a watchlist in one of the Schengen states, the visa application is flagged to BM.I staff for further investigation and decision making.

In 1999 VISION-Austria was awarded the Solution of the Year Award at the IMC Show & Conference in Amsterdam. Today, over 100 agencies within Austria's Federal Police, Security divisions, District Authorities and Magistrates, and over 90 Foreign Embassies in Austria are working with VISION. Around half a million email transactions are carried out every month through the system, and over 2.3 million visa applications have been processed through VISION so far.

Capgemini continuously implements change requests to improve VISION, and accommodate the new provisions in the Schengen treaty without causing any major disruption to critical operational processes. In 2010, changes were implemented smoothly in line

with Article 25 of the new visa code concerning the issuing of visas with 'limited territorial validity.'

### How Capgemini and the Austrian Ministry of the Interior Work Together

The teams which Capgemini assembled to develop the system initially, and then manage subsequent upgrades were sizeable, and drew on experience from implementing similar technologies in the Netherlands and Slovakia. Today though, Capgemini fields a standard maintenance team of project manager, business analysts, developers and testers at the BM.I, whose functional management role spans both the IT and the business & user departments.

The maintenance team discusses functional requirements with the business & user department and proposes solutions that consider the functionality and benefits from a customer perspective. It evaluates the cost and benefits of all proposed changes, as well as advising on how to implement them, thus enabling the relevant BM.I stakeholders to make an informed decision on their priorities for future development.

Capgemini staff work closely with the IT departments of both the BM.I and the BMEIA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which maintains the IT system used by embassies to communicate with VISION Austria. Capgemini ensures that the operational aspects of VISION are managed, and change requests delivered successfully, without compromising the business & user department's requirements for system availability. Given the large volumes of visa requests being handled at any one time by VISION and the need to communicate quickly with other states in relation to applications, excessive or unforeseen downtime would have a major detrimental impact on the BM.I's performance.

Capgemini ensures the system is kept up to date on its underlying technology platform so that it remains fully supported by the vendor. Hardware upgrades are made every three to five years, with Capgemini acting as consultants for both the business and the operational departments to ensure an optimal solution without compromising service quality.

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Based in Vienna, the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior is responsible for Austrian security and defence forces,

citizenship, elections and referenda, crisis and disaster response, border control and counter-terrorism.

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