

THE IRISH GOVERNMENT STREAMLINES ITS DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES WITH QUARK ENTERPRISE SOLUTIONS

THE IRISH GOVERNMENT IMPLEMENTED A CONTENT AUTOMATION SOLUTION BASED ON QUARK XML AUTHOR AND VASTLY IMPROVED THE PROCESS THAT UNDERLINES DECISION MAKING IN IRELAND



Like many organisations today, the Irish Government faced the challenge of improving its decision-making processes by successfully bringing together knowledge from diverse sources and personalising the information for those receiving. The solution needed to manage the creation and collaboration of documents across all government departments to ensure that the structure and content con-

formed to Cabinet guidelines and was deliverable in multiple formats including print, web, and mobile devices.

Working with Quark and its XML technology, the Irish Government implemented a content automation solution based on Quark XML Author and vastly improved the process that underlines decision making in Ireland — introducing an unprecedented level of efficiency that brings together thousands of civil servants across the Government.

eCabinet: A Modern Approach

A report by leading consultants concluded that significant efficiencies could be gained by introducing an application which addressed the process of government decision making, specifically in the creation, distribution, and management of Cabinet documents and the running of Cabinet meetings.

Government memoranda, the basic document in the government decision-making process, were distributed manually, consuming large amounts of time and effort, resulting in time delays at various points in the system and making document security difficult. Ensuring that memoranda complied with Government rules on structure, content, and presentation was challenging. Collaboration and knowledge sharing was inefficient, cumbersome, and time consuming. Civil servants, senior staff, and Ministers often had to struggle with very large amounts of paper documents and it was hard to locate and refer to information.

The purpose of eCabinet was to make the process of decision making more efficient by introducing a system that provided dynamic and collaborative working and reduced the vast amounts of paper and manual processes required to bring together memoranda for the government. eCabinet pioneers a fully electronic, secure, and collaborative knowledge-sharing application that engages over 6,500 knowledge workers at all levels of the Irish Government across its 15 departments.

Content Automation with eCabinet

eCabinet replaces an essentially paper-based system which has operated since the foundation of the Irish state in the 1920s. eCabinet provides a complete, secure, and collaborative knowledge-sharing service from the initial draft of a proposal by a civil servant in any department through inter-departmental consultation, right up to the decision at the Cabinet meeting, and afterwards to the distribution of the decision to the relevant officials. Included in this is full electronic support for Ministers in their preparation for meetings and conduct of the Cabinet meeting itself. It provides users with up-to-date information on matters coming before government. For example, Ministers can see the evolving agenda as each item is submitted to the Cabinet Secretariat, rather than having to wait for the circulation of a full printed agenda.

“eCabinet is a Web-based application, using XML technologies, that electronically supports the process, from beginning to end, of preparing proposals for submission to Government (Cabinet), bringing them to the Cabinet table and subsequently recording/issuing Cabinet decisions,” said Philip Hamell, Government Secretariat, Dept. of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister).



Improved Decision-making Process

Government memoranda must adhere to specific structure and content guidelines as laid out in the Cabinet Handbook. Rules also determine the collaboration process in creating and collaborating on these documents. The rules expressed in the Cabinet handbook are aimed at ensuring that senior management and Ministers have all the necessary information to make a decision and to ensure that the consultation and collaboration process has included all the appropriate sources within the government. Using Quark XML Author for Microsoft Word, users are guided through the creation of memoranda content and complex Cabinet handbook rules by navigating through specially designed wizard screens that prompt/assist them with the types of information required within the familiar environment of Microsoft Word. Information passes instantly at the click of a button within and between departments right up to the Cabinet table.

Using Quark enterprise solutions technology, innovative and personalised display formats are used to assist users in making the adjustment from reading hard copy to accessing information on-screen. All users, including Ministers, are able to access key information much more

quickly and readily as the system has a focus on bringing increased clarity to the presentation of government memoranda. This succinct presentation of information is key to the improvement in the decision-making process gained from eCabinet. The concept is based on the idea of electronic paper and considerable effort went into designing screen formats which eliminate the need for paper.

Personalisation is Key

All senior management, whether official or political, have one thing in common: they need to maximise the use of their time. They need information presented to them in ways that enable them to absorb the most relevant aspects very quickly and be able to quickly access such other supporting information promptly as and when they need it. The use of XML in eCabinet enables the instantaneous, dynamic publishing of eCabinet content and the personalisation of the presentation of key information.

According to Louise Jevens, IT Director, Dept. of the Taoiseach, "One of the main reasons for the success of this project is XML and the use of XML within the application. It's a very powerful format. XML allowed us to repurpose the information that we got into the system and present it in whatever way we need to different users as different users have different requirements. That's where the beauty of XML Author came in, because it looked like MS Word to users, every Department had it and we weren't exposing the users to the raw XML."

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Deploying Across the Enterprise

The deployment of an application to 6,500 users across the Irish Government enterprise raised considerable technological and deployment challenges. The task was to successfully implement a common system across all departments where no such system previously existed, irrespective of the various technological platforms in use in the different departments. In addition, they required a system that provided the features and functionality that the users, whether civil servants or government Ministers,

would find intuitive to use so that the need for training was minimized.

The XML infrastructure web portal and the Word-based XML authoring environment ensured that the solution was intuitive, easy to use, and easy to deploy. Combining the innovative incorporation of the Cabinet handbook rules with the application and the automation of key processes has enabled novice or one-off authors with no experience of drafting memoranda to engage in the process while ensuring frequent users can efficiently engage with the process. eCabinet was successfully implemented and rolled out to 6,500 knowledge workers across all 15 Departments of the Irish Government.



Increased Efficiencies

Considerable efficiencies and benefits have emerged since the system was implemented, in particular, by providing real-time secure circulation of all documents streamline the government decision-making process.

The use of Quark XML Author, an add-in to Microsoft Word, has transformed the creation, management, and presentation of government documents. Knowledge workers are guided by the underlying (and invisible) XML in the creation of the appropriate content depending on the nature of the proposal/decision sought. Quark XML Author presents the knowledge worker with the familiar Microsoft word environment; however, Quark XML Author maintains the structure of the document and enforces content rules automatically, ensuring the author always creates a document which meets government requirements. Previously, decisions were delayed due to incorrect for-



Phillip Hammel, Government Secretariat, Dept. of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister)

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— PHILIP HAMELL

matting and missing content in proposals - this is no longer the case.

Previously, the process of securing and disseminating critical information in a collaborative environment was a manual process. This is now managed by the eCabinet application based on metadata generated automatically when the knowledge worker is authoring or contributing to content. Since content is created in XML, Quark enterprise solutions are able to personalise and deliver content as soon as it is approved.

“In a nutshell, eCabinet enables the preparation of meetings and materials for meetings, the running of meetings, and the issuing of government decisions afterwards and enables these three things to be done securely, collaboratively, and efficiently among more than 6,500 government officials in 15 government departments,” said Philip Hamell.

eCabinet, an Irish Government flagship project, demonstrates how Quark’s XML technology, publishing expertise, and content automation vision can deliver flexible, efficient, and scalable solutions for enterprise information and publishing challenges across a wide range of industries.

ABOUT QUARK SOFTWARE INC.

Quark Software Inc. develops a content automation platform that helps large organisations streamline the creation, management, publishing and delivery of business-critical content. Our solutions automate the process with reusable Smart Content components that can be dynamically assembled and delivered with precision in any format and to any channel — web, tablet, mobile, print, and more. As a result, leaders in industries such as finance, manufacturing, energy, and government can reduce costs, save time, improve consistency and make their content brilliant.

To find out more about Quark Enterprise Solutions visit www.quark.com or contact us at www.quark.com/contact

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