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Introducing the Destatis-CRM: When customers create their own information supply

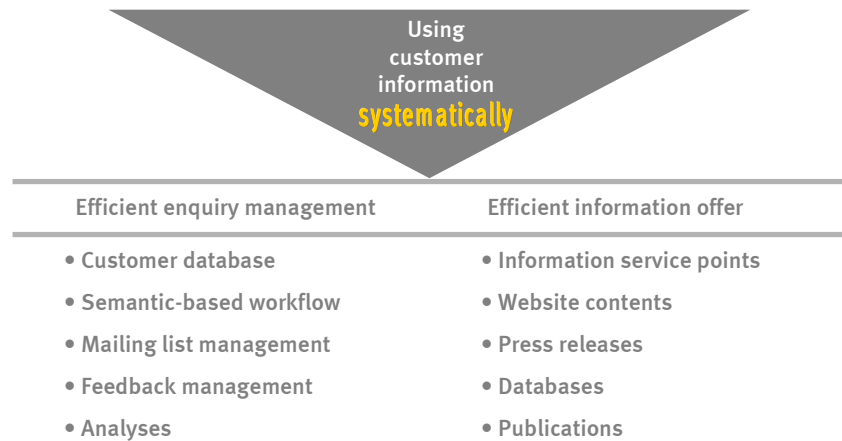
Introduction:

Disseminators of statistical data really are in a good position: They have such a wide range of data that they often can fulfil even quite unusual requests for information. At the same time, the very wealth of data is also a problem. What information should be offered where? Through what channels? In books, flyers, on the internet, through the information service? In what form? Mainly in a database, as a table or rather in a background text? In a cross-section manner covering several areas or examining just one section? Are explanatory texts required, or charts? Should the products be electronic or printed? And once all those questions are answered, will searchers find the information at all or within reasonable time?

Those are exactly the questions we are dealing with again and again. What was used in the past to find out as much as possible about customer wishes was mainly – due to a lack of alternatives – experience and sporadic customer surveys. Those are quite crude tools and, what is more, they can be sufficiently suitable only for part of the information offered and at a specific point in time. In addition, customer surveys involve the disadvantage that they often produce only few results that are really useful.

Usually, the only purpose of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is to control customer contacts and to manage them efficiently. Consequently, when the Federal Statistical Office decided some years ago to introduce a CRM in the Office's information service points, "*efficient enquiry management*" was a top priority goal. At the same time, however, something else was envisaged: The information obtained from communicating with customers – either through customer wishes or user groups – should systematically be used and continuously serve the purpose of creating an "*efficient information offer*". Ideally, the continuous evaluation of customer information will lead to an ever adjusting, optimised offer. Thus the customers themselves quasi create the offer through their demand.

Destatis Customer Relationship Management



In this paper, the introduction of the Destatis-CRM is examined from all the aspects we considered crucial for success: Idea, concept, strategy and interaction with other systems, and especially the acceptance among the staff working with the system every day. Without their enthusiasm, success can hardly be achieved.

Abstract – Summarising the sections:

Section 1 - Overview of the strategic orientation of Destatis-CRM p.4 →

The Federal Statistical Office is the leading information provider in Germany. All areas of the society, such as politics, businesses, administration, associations, NPOs and, not least of all, the “normal” citizens are users – or customers – of statistics. Consequently, customer orientation is highly important in all publication areas. In view of the ever faster and continuous changes in customer needs, customer relations today are considered as a flexible and dynamic process.

At Destatis, the main pillars of information supply, which complement each other, are the Office’s website content and the approximately 80 information service points. In the information service points, some 420,000 individual enquiries are answered every year.

In this section, the ideas and goals are presented which led to the decision to introduce a professional, web-based CRM in our information service points. Also, the strategic components are mentioned which are relevant for the whole customer relations, whose core part is the CRM.

Section 2 - Interaction between the web and the CRM p.6 →

The main information source for Destatis users is the Office’s website content. The information service points, however, have an important complementary function as a separate in-

formation channel. Customers with more complex enquiries, who cannot find something specific on the web or who attach much importance to getting personal advice will be well served, rapidly and individually. Not least of all, analysing the enquiries received by the information service points provides the knowledge required for continuous improvement of the website content.

Section 3 - Development of the overall project p.7 →

The overall project was split into two phases. First, the “CRM pilot project” was carried out. The goal of that test run was to find out whether a CRM would really be able to meet the expectations regarding the optimisation of customer relations.

After its successful termination, it was followed by the project “Introducing a CRM at the Federal Statistical Office” that started in January 2006. Adjusting the CRM software and the analysis tool, which is also web-based, to the requirements of the Federal Statistical Office, integrating them into the Destatis IT structure, and creating the “semantic workflow” were finished by mid-2008. The information service points not connected yet to the CRM will be integrated by around mid-2009. This is the fourth year that the CRM has been operative.

Section 4 - CRM components p.8 →

The components of the CRM-Software are an Oracle-Database, the enquiry management, the mailing list management, the feedback management, the semantic-based workflow, and a separate analysis tool that is also web-based. The individual components are explained, their mechanisms shown, and their importance for the CRM alone and in combination with other parts is illustrated.

Section 5 - Staff acceptance of the system p.12 →

A software can successfully be applied only if, in addition to being technically mature, it is really accepted by the staff members working with it. Based on that conviction, the operators were involved in the development from the start, and their ideas were taken into account. Keywords here are software development together with the staff members, testing in permanent operation, accompanying working groups, a training concept aimed at individual attendance, and continuous internal information on the project progress.

1. Overview of the strategic orientation of Destatis-CRM

As the leading statistical information provider in Germany, the Federal Statistical Office regards “substantial customer care” as one of its strategic priority goals. Customer care is considered as a dynamic process whose goal is to continuously anticipate the permanently growing and changing customer needs and to integrate them in an optimised manner into the information activities. “Ever changing requirements” include both the quality of the information, its timeliness, and the forms of presentation as well as, for example, the way of, and time required for providing the information.

The Federal Statistical Office is legally required to make the statistical data available to the general public. The main platform here is the Destatis website content at www.destatis.de.

However, official statistics consist of millions of data which, in turn, may occur in millions of combinations of variables. This means that there will always be statistical information that either is not available on the internet or is just not found by customers. However, to offer customers nevertheless highly comfortable data access, which includes sparing them time-consuming web search, the Federal Statistical Office offers a comprehensive information service for individual enquiries. Also, it is part of the Destatis self-image that users of statistics must always have the opportunity to settle questions and problems direct with Destatis experts.

Every year, some 420,000 individual enquiries of customers from all areas of the society are handled and answered at Destatis. Two thirds of them are telephone enquiries and just under one third are received through electronic channels. About 500 staff members in 80 information service points are involved in answering the enquiries and, for many of them, providing information is just part of their activity.

The organisational structure of the information service points of the Federal Statistical Office is quite heterogeneous. There are points attached to individual statistics, larger specialised information service points covering several areas, and even cross-section information points serving either specific customer groups or answering cross-section enquiries and giving advice.

The advantage of such a decentralised organisation is obvious: Enquiries are always handled in the competent specialised departments or in the specific cross-section units, which is indispensable to ensure high-quality answers in that highly complex field of statistics.

At the same time, however, that structure involves shortcomings, too. Minimising them with a view to the strong customer care of Destatis is a major goal. Generally, the decentralised structure requires longer handling times, involves more complex workflow requirements, or tends to ask too much of the service staff when they have to deal with questions not concerning their own work area. So the content-related preference for a rather decentralised information service is accompanied by non-optimal structures regarding the workflow and the organisational co-ordination.

In 2004, a working group on “optimising the information service points” was set up, first, to find out what the organisational structure should really be like to best suit the enquiry management, what alternatives there are, how the Federal Statistical Office should shape customer care in the future and, second, to develop relevant quality standards.



Filing system in one of the 80 information service points before introduction of the CRM

It arrived at the conclusion that the existing decentralised organisation is clearly superior to a centralised organisation in meeting the quality standards developed and that its structural shortcomings from organisational aspects must be offset by a CRM-Software tailored to the Destatis requirements.

In the following, a clear distinction is made between the CRM-Software and the term “customer care”. This is essential because the concept and the shaping of customer care at Destatis are much more comprehensive than the CRM itself. However, the CRM is of enormous importance as it is indispensable for a highly complex customer care in systematically designed processes and tailored to the specific Destatis requirements. Thus the CRM is the “indispensable core part” of customer care.

Goals of CRM to achieve optimal customer care:

Customer

- ⇒ Getting to know the customer in a systematic manner
- ⇒ Getting to know customer needs in a structured manner
- ⇒ Destatis-wide orientation towards the customer
- ⇒ Consistent public image of Destatis

Goals

- ⇒ Implementation of quality standards
- ⇒ Innovation potential
- ⇒ Same quality in all areas
- ⇒ Uniform answering
- ⇒ Short handling times
- ⇒ Controlling and monitoring of all goals

Implementation

- ⇒ Future-oriented optimisation of work methods in and between information service points
- ⇒ Semantics-based workflow
- ⇒ Handling without switches between communication channels, “paperless office”
- ⇒ Storing standards for answering enquiries

2. Interaction between the web and the CRM

The Federal Statistical Office attaches great importance to its customers getting rapidly and easily to the information they need. The Destatis website is the main information channel here. The idea is that, with just a few clicks, users get to the information they look for and that the information should be offered in the format required. As statistics is a highly complex matter, it will hardly be possible even with great efforts to satisfy all requests for information through the Destatis website content. Therefore, we have, as a second “pillar”, the information service points, which answer the enquiries individually.

The screenshot shows the website of the Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland. The header includes the logo and navigation links: Home | Contact | Press | Imprint | About us | Links | RSS | Deutsch. A search bar is located in the top right corner. The main content area is titled 'Our offers' and contains several sections: 'Search for information', 'Electronic theme leaves / theme packages', 'Regional data', and 'Analyses'. A left sidebar contains a navigation menu with categories like Indicators, Topics, Our offers, Databases, and Research and development. The 'Our offers' section is currently selected and highlighted.

Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland

Home | Contact | Press | Imprint | About us | Links | RSS | Deutsch

You are here: [Start](#) > [Information service](#) > [Our offers](#)

Our offers

Search for information

The **information service** points of the Federal Statistical Office, at request, will undertake for you the searching of our comprehensive database, inform you about available data and possible costs involved and help you establish contacts to partners in different subject-matter areas.

Electronic theme leaves / theme packages

For questions which are very frequently asked such as e.g. on morbidity, on the economic implications of the 2006 Football World Cup or on poverty in Germany we have **theme packages** in store that we will be pleased to send to you. We are gradually extending the availability of electronic theme leaves, so that it will soon be possible for you to find the required information all by yourself.

Regional data

Regional data items are compiled by the statistical offices of the federal states. We will advise you with pleasure about possibilities of access and contact.

Analyses

We annually reply to more than 420,000 data requests from politicians, administrators, businessmen, scientists, media representatives and private users. Here we show you a loose sequence of points worth knowing about the **structure of your data requests**.

Further information

[Contact form](#)

[Start page](#) of the information service area at www.destatis.de

Through the [web form](#), users can ask their questions online; they will then be passed on to the CRM without switches between media. The web form is integrated on many pages of the website, so that users can access it from nearly anywhere and send their enquiries to Destatis. In addition, there is a large “information service” area. There users will learn anything

worth knowing about the Destatis information service points and how to contact them. Then, one “click” will suffice to get to the web form and to send the question.

Another element of the interaction between the web and the CRM is the “sending of links”. When the information service points receive enquiries for which there are answers on the Destatis website, the relevant link will be sent through the CRM. This has two benefits: First, the customer will know next time where to find the requested information and, maybe, he will take the opportunity to browse for a while on the Destatis website. Second, sending links avoids storing too many data within the Customer Relationship Management Software. In the few cases where customers send enquiries by fax or letter or where customers obviously have no internet access, the information available on the website is supplied in a different way.

Through the analysis tool that is integrated in the CRM, the staff of the various specialised areas clearly identify in what part of such an area there is high demand for data or where customer wishes are changing. This allows them to react flexibly to frequent demand and to make frequently required information available on the website.

Feedback given in many written enquiries and during telephone consulting indicates customers’ difficulties in using the main information platform of Destatis, that is the website. Such feedback and indications are very important for optimising both the website content and the user navigation.

The enquiry texts will in the future be subjected to systematic semantic analysis. The purpose is to find out what “language” the various user groups use. In many cases, the statistical terms and the everyday language terms used by the users for (supposedly) identical items are not the same. To improve communicating with all users sending enquiries, we should know their language and, where possible, use it ourselves in direct contact, in the publications and on the website.

3. Development of the overall project

The overall project of the CRM at the Federal Statistical Office actually consisted of two sub-projects, that is the “CRM pilot project” and the project “Introducing a CRM in the information service points of the Federal Statistical Office.”

3.1 CRM pilot project

The goal of the five-month (pre-)project was to find out whether a CRM would really be able to set the right course for a better customer care and to decisively improve the workflows in and between the information service points. So this was a pure test phase whose results however provided a well-founded basis for decision-making with regard to all relevant factors. It would not have been possible to achieve a basis with even remotely the same quality by “just” theoretical reflections.

To allow optimal development and checking of the software with regard to customer care and staff acceptance, a decision had been taken before to develop the system in permanent operation, with a test environment available, too. About 30 Destatis staff members that are involved in providing information participated in that development phase. Thus it was pos-

sible to continuously integrate the experience made both with customer contacts and with system utilisation into the further development and to optimise the latter.

In workshops held regularly with the project group and with developers of the software producer, requirements, functionalities, workflows, and contents were jointly developed in the context of the overall concept. In addition, the operators regularly provided feedback on their work with the software.

Extracts from the final report on the pilot project:

- ⇒ Considerable reduction of handling times to normally 24 hours, for multi-topic enquiries from an average 18 days to an average 3 days.
- ⇒ Massive reduction of paper consumption through reduction of printouts (previously 1 million pages per year at Destatis as a whole).
- ⇒ Verifiable improvement of answer quality already in the pilot phase (standardisations, consistent optimisation of workflows).
- ⇒ Complete integration of tele-workplaces through web-based approach
- ⇒ Multi-channel approach, no switches between media: Contact form on the website opens up new channel for customer contacts; creating a flow of handling without switches between media, starting with the customer typing the enquiry.

3.2 Project on CRM introduction

After successful termination of the pilot project, the CRM software “CONSO+ Web” and the analysis tool of the Coheris company were chosen. The software had been tested in the pilot project and had to be adjusted to the Destatis requirements.

The goal of that (main) project was to introduce the CRM Software everywhere at the Federal Statistical Office by mid-2009. Parallel to the integration of the information service points, the actual software configuration, its integration into the customer care strategy and into the Destatis IT structure, and the workflow development were performed. All software activities were finished by mid-2008, while the introduction at all workplaces envisaged will still take some months.

The general approach – permanent operation during the entire development phase – was also applied in the main project. At the same time, the information service points were continuously connected to the CRM. Here, too, the advantage is that the software is tested and optimised on an ever larger basis and that the direct and rapid application of new functions and developments allows goals to be achieved very early. Experience shows that in projects of that size considerable delays must always be expected either due to capacity or technical reasons. Considering this, successive introduction is a positive factor.

4. CRM components

The Customer Relationship Management Software consists of:

- ⇒ Oracle-Database
- ⇒ Enquiry management with semantics-based workflow
- ⇒ Mailing list management
- ⇒ Feedback management
- ⇒ Web-based analysis tool

4.1 Oracle-Database

The core part of the CRM is the “customer record” containing customer address information. Anything relating to the customer – his enquiries, the relevant answers, his feedback, participation in user surveys, the publications he receives, etc. – is stored in the database by the system with the address information.

The customer records can be accessed from everywhere at Destatis, so that any responsible staff member can rapidly get an overview of the customer and the relevant processes. Such transparency is the basis for competent handling and answering of enquiries. Customer history – what the customer wishes to get and what he received when, how and from whom – can be retrieved any time.

The screenshot displays the 'Kundenakte' (Customer Record) interface. The main form is divided into two columns of input fields. The left column contains fields for 'Anrede' (Ms.), 'Vorname' (Jane), 'Abkürzung' (- Leer -), 'Firma', 'PLZ' (10 NY), 'Land' (USA), 'Telefon', 'Fax', 'E-Mail' (unpress@un.org), 'Nutzerkategorie' (01. Politik und Verwaltung auf international), 'Rechnungssumme' (0,00), 'Erstellt von' (Webformulare), 'Erstellt am' (20.10.2008), and 'Letzter Kontakt' (20.10.2008). The right column contains fields for 'Titel', 'Nachname' (Doe), 'Straße/Postfach', 'Ort' (New York), 'Ländervorwahl' (001), 'Mobil', 'Homepage', '2. E-Mail', 'EU-USt-IdNr.', 'Kassenzeichen', 'Export Haushalt', 'Verantwortlich' (- Alle -), 'geschützt' (checkbox), 'Sonderstatus' (checkbox), and 'Werbung' (checkbox). At the bottom, a table shows a list of transactions with columns for 'Vorgangs-Nr.', 'Eingangsdatum', 'Auskunftsbereich', 'Betreff', and 'Rechnungsbetrag'. One transaction is visible with 'Vorgangs-Nr.' 105251, 'Eingangsdatum' 20.10.2008, and 'Rechnungsbetrag' 0.0.

The CRM “core part” – the customer record

Today, as many as two thirds of all enquiries handled through the CRM are received by Destatis through the website contact form, with a continuous upward tendency. With that form of contact, the address and user information and the enquiry text are directly fed into the system, without switches between media. First of all, a check for duplicate records is performed to see whether the customer is already stored in the system. If so, the new con-

tact is allocated to the existing customer record. If not, a new customer record is automatically created and the first enquiry is allocated to it as an event.

Most of the other customer records and events are due to telephone contacts. If a telephone enquiry entails a written answer (now almost only by e-mail), the staff member creates a customer record and adds the event.

4.2 Enquiry management

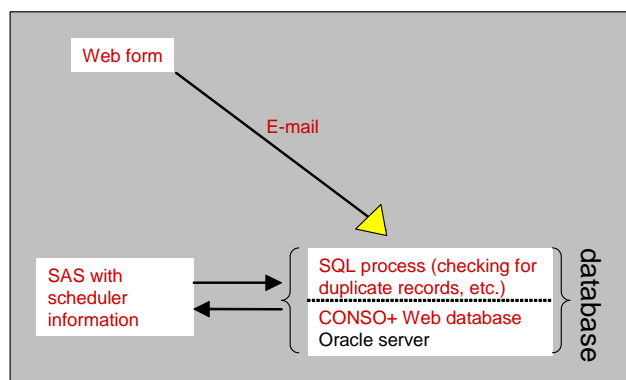
Only enquiries to be answered in writing are handled through the CRM.

The screenshot shows a web contact form with the following fields and content:

- Further topics:** A sidebar menu with categories like Services, Press, Information service, Publications, Library, Events, Databases, Research and development, Data collection, and Intra/Extra-EU trade.
- First name:** Jane
- Last name:** Doe
- Institution/firm:** (Empty text box)
- Please indicate the group of customers you belong to:*** International politics and administration (dropdown menu)
- Street, house number:** S-378
- Postal code*, Place*:** NY 10017 | New York
- Country:** USA (dropdown menu)
- E-mail address*:** pressanalysis2@un.org
- Telephone:** (Empty text box)
- Fax:** (Empty text box)
- I require data for Germany and/or its regions from German official statistics.
- I require data for Germany from official European or international statistics (sources: Eurostat, UN, OECD, World Bank, IMF, etc.).
- Enquiry*:** Dear Sir or Madame, I write this email in order to reach some information concerning the Labour cost index based on the rate for a skilled Worker Category B as concluded between the Employers' Association of

Enquiry in the contact form

An enquiry received by Destatis through the internet contact form will trigger the creation of a customer record for new customers or the allocation of the enquiry to an existing customer record through the above-mentioned check for duplicate records.



Allocating the enquiry to the relevant specialised department is done through the “semantic-based workflow” – a procedure that is extremely efficient, though rather complex. A SAS routine triggers a program which, by semantic analysis of the enquiry text (cf. chart), performs an automated and subject-matter based allocation of the enquiry to the relevant information service

point. Roughly, the procedure is based on the following principle: If, for example, a question on the birth rate is asked, the program searches the enquiry text for specific terms. If such terms are found, the enquiry is given a relevant “tag” and is allocated direct to the competent population statistics unit. There, the enquiry is displayed on the screen of the relevant information service point. Enquiries which cannot clearly be allocated or which refer to several subject areas are handled by the Statistical Information Service (cross-section information service).

Enquiries are answered direct from the system, usually by e-mail. Of course, faxes and letters can be sent, too. Every specialised unit has its own standardised response texts which however can entirely be individualised (deleting, changing, extending text passages). Answering is done in the (electronic) office of the staff member in charge, so that his contact data are direct included into the letter and the handling data are included into the event.

It is crucial for transparency that enquiry and answer texts plus attachments can be opened and read any time. So any staff member responsible can help the customer even if he was not involved in the process.

4.3 Mailing list and feedback management

What is linked to the customer record, in addition to the enquiries and their answers, is information on whether the customer has been put on mailing lists and, if so, what mailing lists that are. Although the mailing list structure is managed centrally, every specialised unit can create and maintain mailing lists. There will be mailing lists referring to Destatis as a whole which will be used, for example, for large mailings of the President. There will also be mailing lists referring to specialised units that will be used by information service points to meet specific demand for their publications, etc. Centralised and decentralised customer surveys are also controlled through the mailing list management.

We attach particular importance to the feedback given by our customers. Therefore, we have a fixed workflow here, as we have for the enquiry management, which ensures that the feedback is carefully analysed and integrated into the optimisation of products and services. For any kind of feedback, the subsequent maintaining of the relation with the relevant customer is especially important. For instance, feedback is answered directly, while later there may be further information for the customer on how the feedback was implemented.

In the “Information service” section of the website, users are informed on how much Destatis welcomes their feedback and how they can most easily contact the Office.

Also, it is very easy to conduct targeted customer surveys. That may refer either to comprehensive customer satisfaction surveys for the entire Federal Statistical Office or smaller surveys for just one specialised unit and specifically covering individual products or services. The latter are very important because they are the only tool to systematically cover, and take account of customer needs for a specific product or service. For that purpose, customers – in some cases only a few selected customers – are asked for their opinion on a product or service they received from Destatis. What is crucial here is not really the number of responses but rather the “quality” of the answers. Experience shows that customers are much more easily willing to seriously participate in surveys if the surveys refer to concrete products or services and comprise a small number of targeted questions. This makes it much easier to achieve the desired response quality.

4.4 Web-based analysis tool

The analysis tool, which is web-based too, allows us to perform analyses over time and at all levels regarding customers, enquiries, products and services and thus to produce detailed analyses of customer wishes. It must be taken into account that customer wishes are continuously changing. Therefore, continuously performing analyses that can flexibly be controlled are indispensable for always having an optimal range of information on offer.

As a separate, web-based programme, the analysis tool provides such flexibility because the up-to-date customer database can be accessed any time. Moreover, it is very easy to use. After a brief introduction, anyone can immediately work with the program.

By separating it from the CRM, the analysis software can also be used by staff not working with the CRM, for example, managers wishing to get an overview of their unit. Access is regulated by granting rights.

5. Staff acceptance of the system

Even the most sophisticated system will not be (able to be) good if it is not accepted by the people who (must) work with it.

Especially the growing number of computer-aided applications, which are getting more complex, require the staff members to familiarise themselves again and again with quite different technical systems. Every time, this makes high demands on the individual's personal flexibility and motivation. In addition, staff members often do not see the purpose of an innovation as they have done the work for a long time without the system, have worked hard and believe to do a good job without the system. Those two components – being afraid of new and complex technical systems and thinking that they are not really needed – can create a very high inhibition threshold regarding acceptance. Things will get difficult especially where many people deal with a system only part of the time, so that they do not easily get familiar with it.

Hundreds of staff members work with the CRM at the Federal Statistical Office. For many of them, providing information services is just part of their activities, which means that they do not work with the system all the time. There are others, however, who spend most of their working time answering enquiries. The system can be successful only if acceptance among all staff members is high enough that they apply it as intended, which means, for example, that they take care to enter all data as required. Also, they should know and use all functions to fully achieve all desired goals.

Prior to developing the CRM concept, a survey was conducted in the Destatis information service points. Apart from the usual questions on the number of enquiries, staff capacity, etc., questions were also asked on how people see things and what their work methods have been. There were some interesting results showing, for instance, that many staff members did not see the purpose of introducing a CRM, that they believed to know customer wishes quite well even without systematic enquiry management and that they saw hardly any potential for optimising their work methods.

From the very start, the results of that survey had a strong influence on the development of Customer Relationship Management and the introduction of the CRM. It was intended to develop not only a technically optimised and efficient system achieving the goals but also a system that would provide to everyone working with it at least some advantage compared with the previous situation.

“Identifying possible benefits for the individual staff member”; that process, too, was performed in the pilot phase, involving the staff of the information service points. Again, the staff not only gave comments but they also tested the system in their daily work. Another important issue in that phase was improving the system’s user-friendliness. As teleworking is widespread at Destatis, teleworkers were involved in all those processes from the beginning.

A training concept has been developed focusing on individual training on the system. Individual training is feasible only because the system is introduced successively, so that only a small number of persons are trained at a time. Training starts at the test system, with groups comprising up to 10 persons. What has been learned can be applied in permanent operation already in the subsequent days – although uncertain staff members can continue to use the test environment for some time. The last step is training at the workplaces, where individual questions are answered and problems are discussed. Telephone support is also available all the time.

Regular reports on the CRM development are published in the Destatis intranet. Analyses are shown, too, to illustrate the additional knowledge obtained through the system.

So far, the scepticism observed before in some areas has been transformed into clear acceptance. So the basis for success has been established by the staff, too.