

A Case on Communication Management

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When Bissantz & Company GmbH, a small software-producing company, experienced a rapid growth in 1997, the need for a strategic concept for communication activities with external partners arose. By that time a research project at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, that dealt with structures and strategies of external business communication, had reached a point, where strategic concepts for corporate communication had been developed.

Bissantz & Company GmbH and the project team of the university decided to co-operate in a case in order to transfer the theoretical results to a practical situation. The whole concept of corporate communication, that includes, e.g., the definition of communication goals and strategies for all communication forms, proposals for the contents of messages and media selection, was applied to the company.

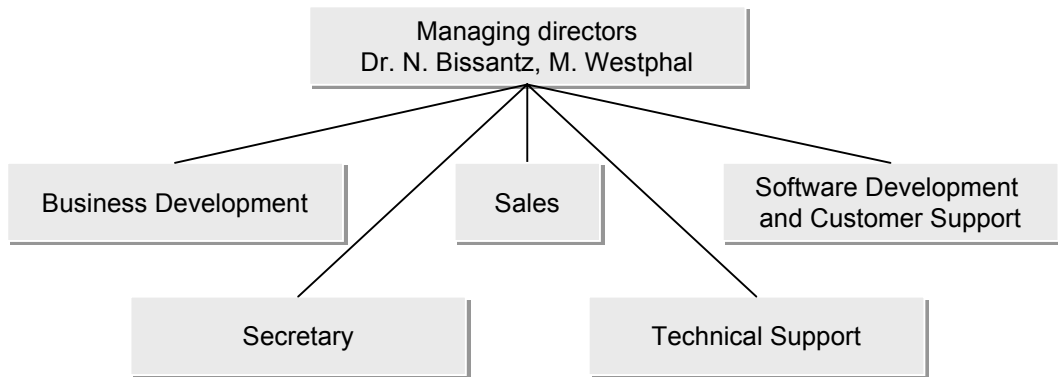
As a result Bissantz & Company GmbH gained valuable insights into its communication processes. The strategic orientation of communication with all stakeholders is still visible and now the basis of e.g., the structure and contents of the company's Web site. A proposal for the use of innovative media for customer care and customer consultation was accepted and initiated the implementation of a database-supported system for all communication activities, especially those with customers.

BACKGROUND

The Company

Bissantz & Company GmbH is a software house, founded in 1996 as a technology spin-off from university research projects. The company is specialising in solutions for demanding business data analysis. It develops tools and analysis technology, which are sold under their own labels and as OEM components. Hand in hand with academic institutions, Bissantz & Company GmbH undertakes basic research. The results are integrated in the standard software for data mining, business intelligence and data warehousing.

Dr. Nicolas Bissantz and Dipl.-Inf. Michael Westphal, the CEOs and owners of the company,

Figure 1: Departments of Bissantz & Company GmbH

started as members of the FORWISS' Information Science Research Group, which is led by Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Peter Mertens. Back then they developed the basis for data analysis automation and proved the suitability of data mining processes for enterprise control.

Bissantz & Company GmbH started with three employees and two managing directors. In 1997 it experienced a rapid growth. New employees had to be hired so that today there are 15 employees and still two managing directors. The main positions in the organisation are depicted in Figure 1.

Communication Management

During the last decade the technical possibilities of communication have steadily grown. Yet there is uncertainty about the reasons for successes and failures of new means of communication on the side of suppliers as well as about the requirements for successful media application on the customers' side. Both groups are aware that there is a demand for active market research and strategic planning in the field of business communication as competition increases. Communication has the power to become a strategic weapon if companies are able to describe their communication needs and to organise all forms of communication consistently and actively in order to achieve their goals.

A research project at the chair of business computing of the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (Prof. Dr. F. Bodendorf) deals with structures, developments and strategies of external business communication. The core of the project is an empirically confirmed explanatory model of media application. Among other applications this model leads to a concept of corporate communication, that takes relevant aspects into account which are important for decisions concerning the process of organising communication contents and media.

External Business Communication

The term "external business communication" is used to describe communication processes of an organisation with three main characteristics:

- It is business communication, which means that the cause of communication is always a business activity and that communication has to serve business goals.
- It is external e.g., with customers, suppliers or other partners of the company. To distinguish between internal and external communication we use the physical limits of the company's location.
- As a third characteristic we only analyse one-to-one communication, which means that our understanding of external business communication does not include mass communication like marketing communication.

An Explanatory Model of Media Application

The explanatory model of media application for a message in external business communication

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