

# Intranet as Central Information Platform

By Thomas Bröckers

On January 1, 2004, CITY BKK, a new insurance provider, opened its doors: "A larger, strong insurance organization offers a chance for more input into the control of contributions from those members who really need the protection of the organization," explains the new CEO Herbert Schulz, referring to the decision of the insurance companies of Hamburg (BKK Hamburg) and Berlin (BKK Berlin), which from now on will be cooperating in the health care market.

## The Road to Merger

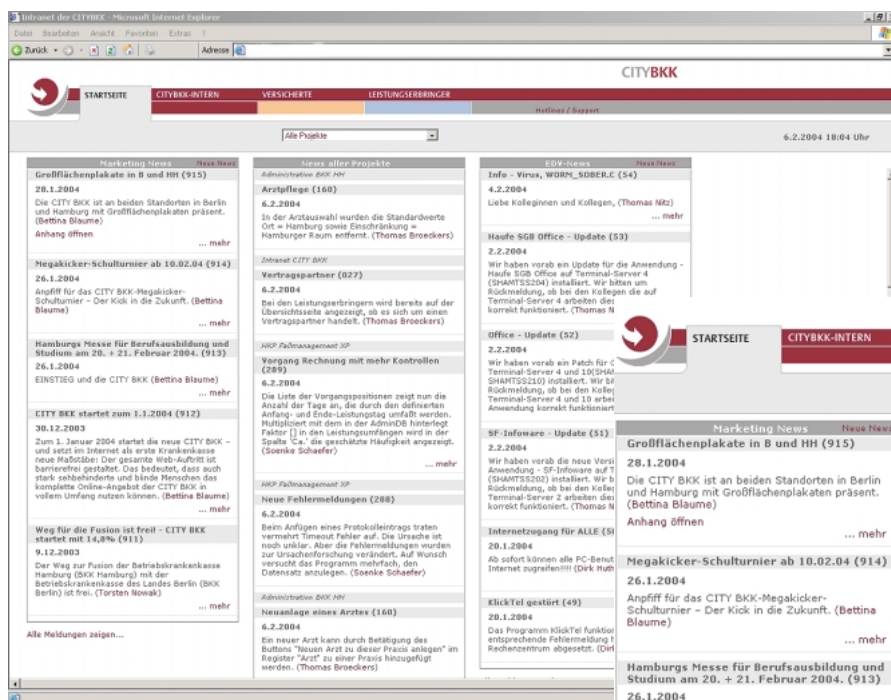
On December 9, 2003, the merger came to its successful conclusion. Besides the City of Hamburg, the BKK Bundesverband, BKK Landesverband Nord, and BKK Landesverband Ost all helped the new CITY BKK come to the market as a nearly debt-free insurance organization, with a competitive 14.8% premium rate in the Hamburg and Berlin regions and the best possible start for success in the highly competitive health care market.

Largely unaffected by political decisions, the organizational and technical preparations for the merger have been run at full speed for months. For both regions, workgroups were implemented early in the process which represented all enterprise-relevant interests of both locations. Wide-reaching project plans documented not only all tasks and responsibilities, but even the day-to-day overview of open tasks.

These broke down into the following general areas:

- Conversion of the technical infrastructure into a signal organizational unit.
- Moving almost all the server hardware into a single computer center.
- Consolidation of the applications deployed.
- Extension of the Intranet as a central communication platform.

The technical migration work benefited from the existing nearly identical basic platforms of the two locations. Both BKK Hamburg and BKK Berlin



Extract from the new, clearly arranged home page



# Clarity Now Leads Quickly to the Information You Want

used Microsoft Windows 2000 Terminal Services and the included server products to serve their clients, while a SQL Server powered the back office.

The application-specific basis for the consolidation was an exact analysis of the business processes of both organizations. The result provided a basis for the creation of a unified desktop which was precisely configured to the needs of the users while taking the particular security needs of the enterprise into account.

## The Intranet as Central Platform

One significant difference between the two companies was the display of general information. Although BKK Hamburg had already been using their Intranet for about a year and a half as a central communications platform, at BKK Berlin there was still only a mail and folder-based information system.

So a unified system had to be created which would allow the 400 employees of CITY BKK, already burdened with extra work due to the merger, to get the information they needed with a minimum of hassle.

The existing Intranet already had all the functionality needed, but had some problems which had to be taken care of:

- Difficult navigation design
- Unclear user help system
- Static 800x600 pixel page size.

The first two critical points meant that the Intranet was often used by advanced users, but less experienced users could find needed information only with difficulty, if at all.

Since the added value of a well-designed Intranet had to be communicated to BKK Berlin quickly, the only choice was a complete redesign.

## Redesign of the Intranet

While the BKK Hamburg Intranet was a typically evolved application with all

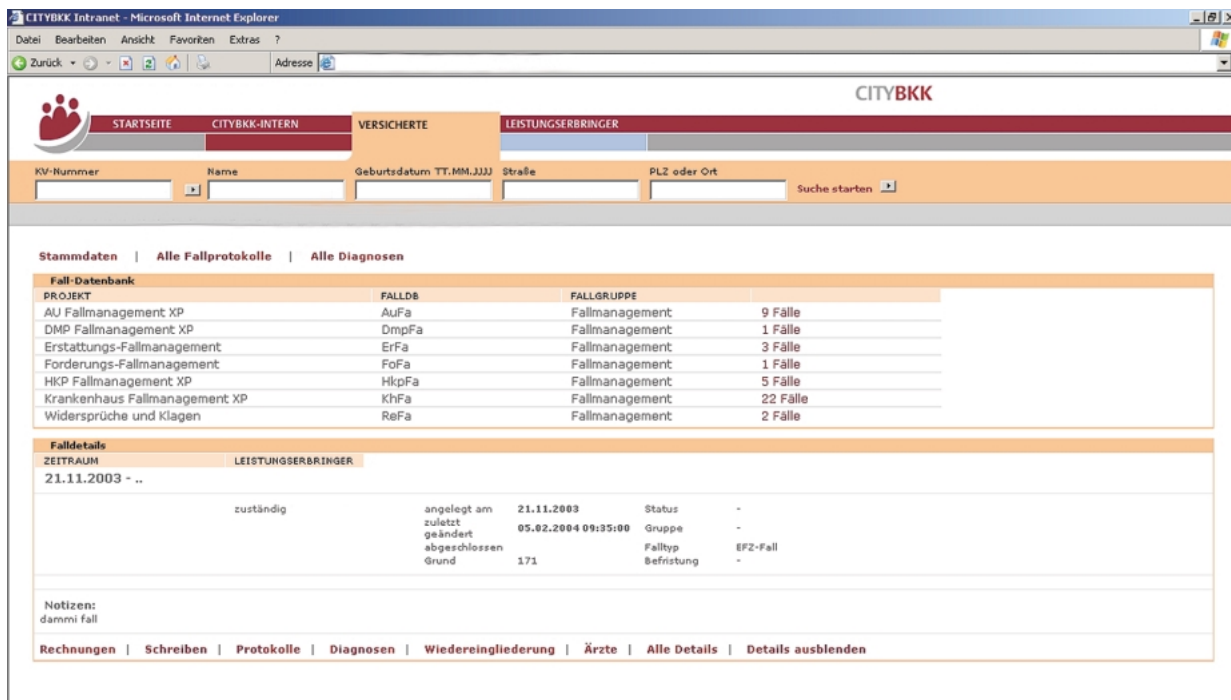
the usual design flaws, difficult source code maintenance, and lack of clarity, the new Intranet should achieve a high user acceptance due to its intuitive ease of use and clear structure.

To reach this goal, a thorough analysis of existing user behavior was launched, along with a survey of employees with various levels of understanding of the advantages and disadvantages. The purpose of this was exclusively to evaluate quality of use; whether the subject material met requirements or not was ignored. The



*Project Team at CITY BKK, from left: Dirk Huth (CITY BKK), Sönke Schäfer, Thomas Bröckers (both MaK DATA SYSTEM), Thorsten Mau, Wilfried Erdmann (both CITY BKK)*

photo: MaK DATA SYSTEM



The new presentation of details about insurants

results were discussed and then used in an abstract form during the creation of the new design. Analysis and design were done by the design firm "human interface design".

Parallel to this, the content was divided into four overall navigational areas. The links as such already existed in the old system, but now, besides a clearer separation of these areas, there was a color component. Each navigational area was assigned a different (company) color. This allowed a strict division between page elements and thus a more easily understood navigation layout.

The last step was to agree on a fixed page structure on which the navigation elements would be identically located. No matter which page the user was viewing, the important elements should be easy to find without forcing reorientation on the part of the user.

The largest content change consisted of the presentation of important information on a start page. This pre-

sented the user with current notices from the administration, marketing, or developers, each time the browser was started.

## The Technical Conversion

The technical requirements remained unchanged. The old system ran on Internet Information Server (IIS) 5.0 under Windows 2000 Server, and was implemented with Active Server Pages (ASP). These were the cornerstones for the new Intranet as well. Since, however, the new corporate standard specified at least 15" TFT monitors, the pages were now optimized for a resolution of 1024 x 768 pixels.

The unified appearance was achieved using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). These allowed the administration of parameters of all important HTML style elements (fonts, colors, format specifications and so forth) in one or more central files. They also represent a significant simplification for later changes to a style element on multiple pages.

Nearly all the program source code was stored in external files in order to achieve at least a first approximation of separating code and layout.

## Commissioning

The Intranet has been used productively since January 1, 2004. Besides intensive training sessions, the users are also informed about the functional capabilities of the Intranet and current news by means of a weekly newsletter. New users are added almost daily who no longer want to do without the comfort and speed of the new Intranet.

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