

Online Automation System Achieves Startling Results in Helping Dutch Citizens Find Jobs and Claim Benefits

Executive Summary

CUSTOMER NAME

The Center for Work and Income (CWI), the Netherlands

INDUSTRY

Public Sector

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

- Reduce workload caused by rising unemployment and new responsibilities
- Decrease manual processes to improve employees' efficiency in helping customers find new jobs
- Streamline operation within a restricted budget

SOLUTIONS

- eIntake—an application that automates the process of registering for unemployment benefits over the Internet
- Add more core processes online and provide online integration with other government agencies

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Increased staff productivity by reducing administrative burden
- Alignment with government to keep citizens employed rather than on unemployment benefits
- Improved customer satisfaction and staff morale, and substantial cost efficiencies

Faced with expanding workloads and shrinking budgets, the Center for Work and Income, in the Netherlands, took the bold step of enabling its customers to apply for unemployment benefits online using an innovative application, eIntake. Today, nearly half of all such applications are now processed over the Internet, reducing the agency's administrative burden and enabling staff to concentrate on helping their customers find suitable new employment.

BACKGROUND

The [Center for Work and Income](#) (CWI) is the “front office” of the social security system in the Netherlands. Established in 2002, it replaced the Public Employment Service, which had given support to job seekers, and took on the additional role of handling applications for unemployment benefits and social assistance.

Under the Dutch system, working citizens pay contributions under a national scheme that allows them to claim unemployment benefits in proportion to their employment history. Social assistance is available to all citizens and provides a safety net for people who are unable to support themselves.

The CWI is an independent administrative body that works on assignment from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. Headquartered in Amsterdam, the CWI has 130 branch offices throughout the Netherlands and approximately 4,500 employees.



Prepared by
Internet Business Solutions Group

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**Cor Franke, board member
Center for Work and Income**

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

Applying for unemployment compensation can be a stressful and laborious process. Filing a form can, at times, be confusing and time-consuming. And, waiting to speak with a customer service person can be an exercise in patience. Then there’s the added frustration of applying over the phone, over the Internet, or in person. Up until now, applying in person had been the only option for job seekers in the Netherlands filing for unemployment benefits with the Center for Work and Income.

When the CWI was established four years ago, all applications for benefits had to be filled out in person using paper-based forms. It was a lengthy process to say the least—each application took 50–60 minutes to complete. And one form in particular, a social assistance application, contained 300 questions alone.

In addition to its new role as a public employment service agency, the CWI was also under pressure from the government to improve efficiency and reduce operating costs. This directive came at a critical time when unemployment was on the rise in the Netherlands from 2002–2004. In response to the growing job-seeker market, the agency began looking for ways to reduce its administrative burden so that its consultants could provide citizens—some 600,000 per year—with more effective support services.

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SOLUTIONS

The CWI had already transferred some of its activities onto the Internet in August 2002, launching a Website where employers could post vacancies and where job seekers could display their resumés. An automated feature would match the resumés with suitable vacancies. This was, and continues to be, a very successful Website and one of the largest of its kind in the Netherlands.

In 2003, the CWI board decided to take a much bolder step and automate its most time-consuming process: the written application for unemployment benefits, which is completed by 75–80 percent of its claimants. Having looked at the process from end-to-end, it became clear to the board members what the online form should contain.

The CWI was already using solutions from Cisco® to run its wide-area network. The agency had also been one of the first public-sector organizations in the Netherlands to introduce IP telephony—based on Cisco Unified Communications. So, board members were familiar with Cisco's track record of using technology to help achieve business goals, and they were open to ideas about how best to implement their new Web-based solution.

Discussions began with the Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG) leading to a meeting in early 2004 when the CWI board shared with the IBSG its concept for eIntake, an application that would allow customers to register with the CWI and apply for unemployment benefits online. At this stage, IBSG offered the board a wealth of resources, including Cisco's own experiences of Web-enabling business processes, such as travel reservations and expenses claims. In addition, Cisco gave examples of best practices from around the world and suggestions for fine-tuning the application and accelerating its introduction.

"With regards to the 'What?' question, we were absolutely sure about the functionality of the software," explains Franke. "As one of our advisers on the project, Cisco IBSG helped us with the 'How?' question, providing very useful input on issues such as the design philosophy for the application. They gave us a number of good ideas that helped us to get a clearer focus on how we should present things to the customer."

IBSG demonstrated some of the applications that are available to Cisco employees on the company's intranet and created opportunities for CWI board members to meet with their functional counterparts in Cisco. These meetings enabled CWI staff to share ideas with Cisco practitioners who had first-hand experience of similar types of process change. Introductions to other Cisco customers who have pioneered Web-enablement in the public sector also proved helpful.

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Cor Franke, board member, Center for Work and Income

The CWI deployed eIntake in June 2004 after extensive testing in an outsourced laboratory available for this purpose. Initially, the CWI offered a Web-based version of the unemployment benefits form with the same content as the paper equivalent.

At the end of 2004, the agency introduced a new version of the form, which uses technology to simplify and speed up the process of entering information. Built-in intelligence allows the software to present to customers only those areas of the form they need to fill in based on their personal circumstances. Unmarried applicants, for example, no longer see the section that requests details of a person's spouse.

The application has also automated the process of information-sharing between agencies. The CWI is the first link in a chain that includes the Social Security Implementation Organization (UWV), which handles claims for unemployment benefits, and various municipal departments that deal with social assistance. Formerly, the CWI would send all relevant data to partners, such as the UWV, through the mail. Now, data is transferred electronically using Extensible Markup Language technology, which makes it easy for organizations to share data between different computer systems and databases.

“We have demonstrated our ability to apply the most modern and appropriate technology to our business processes in order to increase our operating efficiency and enhance customer service.”

Cor Franke, board member, Center for Work and Income

BUSINESS RESULTS

The eIntake solution quickly achieved high levels of acceptance among claimants: the CWI estimates that 50 percent of all those who apply for unemployment benefits in 2006—approximately 225,000 people—will submit their application forms online. The agency expects that, in the future, the number of people who apply online versus using the paper-based method will continue to rise.

Applicants also prefer the added convenience and confidentiality of the new system, according to quarterly surveys conducted by the CWI, with the most important being the ability to fill-in forms at home where the claimant's information is readily available, as well as the option of not having to disclose personal details to strangers in a public setting. In particular, applicants praise the interactive nature of the form, which saves time and cuts out a great deal of duplicated effort such as having to provide certain information more than once.

Claimants also appreciate the fact that they can spend more quality time with CWI consultants talking about job-seeking strategies and resolving any difficulties that arise.

Unemployment applicants are not the only ones benefiting from eIntake. Center for Work and Income employees this year have also shown a significant reduction in the amount of time they spend on administrative tasks by approximately 3,750 hours, or 107 working weeks. These efficiency gains allow staff to concentrate on their primary role of helping people find suitable employment as quickly as possible.

“Consequently, staff morale is much better and the CWI is considerably more effective,” confirms Rutger van Weelden, CWI project manager.

Furthermore, eIntake not only aligns with the government's vision of a service that keeps citizens actively employed rather than on benefits, but also fulfills the CWI's own mission to streamline its operation. These improvements, combined with a current reduction in the unemployment rate, have also made it possible for the CWI to reduce its workforce by 600–700 in branch offices, thereby helping to meet government targets for cost savings as well as efficiency gains.

The eIntake project demonstrates the CWI's ability to innovate and challenge conventional ways of thinking and working. Being progressive has brought the agency in line with other flagship organizations in the Netherlands and other countries and now it is well placed to meet citizens' expectations of public services in an increasingly connected world.

“We have demonstrated our ability to apply the most modern and appropriate technology to our business processes in order to increase our operating efficiency and enhance customer service,” concludes Franke.

NEXT STEPS

The CWI is working on numerous projects to enhance and extend the capabilities of eIntake, which the agency sees as an important building block in its ambitious plans—one of which is a “reverse intake” function that will identify customers as soon as they begin to apply for unemployment benefits online by searching the CWI’s database for any information already on file and automatically populating areas of the form with the relevant details.

Online application forms for social assistance are due to go live at the end of 2006, first as a test pilot and then nationwide. Currently under development, the application will operate as an Internet portal, connecting the CWI’s online applications to those of partner agencies, such as the UWV and municipal social service departments. The portal will also be interactive, giving individuals the opportunity to look at, and amend, any personal information on file at the CWI. These new features, together with the application for unemployment benefits, are part of a wider initiative to create a digital customer file for every citizen using the CWI’s services.

MORE INFORMATION

The Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG), the global strategic consulting arm of Cisco, helps Global Fortune 500 companies and public organizations transform the way they do business—first designing innovative business processes and then by integrating advanced technologies into visionary roadmaps that improve customer experience and revenue growth.

For further information about IBSG, visit <http://www.cisco.com/go/ibsg>



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