

## Case Study

### Homag



Peter Stoll, Servicechef Knowledge Management, HOMAG GmbH © Empolis Information Management GmbH

## HOMAG eSUPPORT: “Google for service” made by Empolis

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With machinery from German (Swabian) world market leader HOMAG, woodworkers ranging from small carpenters to Ikea are getting their work done. The order books are full and customers face a wait of up to two years for one of these sought-after edge processing machines. 1,100 service technicians across the world and a 35 man team at HOMAG headquarters in Schopfloch work around the clock to keep the machines running. And their most important tool? A knowledge database from Empolis.

eSupport is the name of the intelligent system providing technicians quick access to what is now 2.1 million documents for several thousand machines. “I used to have two large boxes full of files and sometimes needed a half an hour to find the machine description I was looking for. Now it takes less than a minute,” explains service technician Joachim Groß on the advantages of the system.

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eSupport has reduced the time needed for a service order by approximately ten percent on average – something that makes customers happier and reduces costs. “We spent approximately 290,000 Euros for the eSupport system. By conservative estimates, we recovered this investment through the time saved by technicians alone within two years,” estimates Head of Service Knowledge Management, Peter Stoll.

eSupport is Stoll's third attempt to collect and bundle all of the distributed knowledge about the machinery lodged in the minds and desks of his employees, and to provide this knowledge to everyone involved. “The first attempt failed on the technology side. The second failed because of costs. With eSupport, things have finally panned out,” says Stoll. Because of the availability of eSupport, data quality has substantially increased. “As a service technician, you quickly realize how helpful a service ticket completely filled with information is to subsequent users. So, all of our colleagues today are putting more effort into the data,” says Groß about his practical experience. Special cases and work-arounds can easily be added.

Stoll took his time choosing the right software provider to ensure the third attempt was a success. “Searching for documents should be as easy as ‘googling,’” was the first requirement. There are full text searches in and searches for similarities. Users can apply filters, such as desired machine type. The hit list is then assorted by the degree of similarity. It was also important to use existing unstructured data available in the company – without having to spend years painstakingly building databases. Because of this, establishing a knowledge structure, based on HOMAG's existing terminology database, was the focus in the joint pilot phase.



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This preliminary work is paying off today: New documents can easily be stored on a drive. They are then automatically indexed and can be found in the database on the following day. This was the only way to add two million documents to the database from the CRM and ticketing system, machine documentation and remote service within just one year – and it continues to grow.

In addition, the software was also needed to allow users from more than 100 countries to independently respond to service requests. To do so, however, the software first needed to understand the users' vocabulary, which of course varied depending on the service professional's language. If the customer says, "The Z-axis is buzzing," the system also finds sentences like, "The Z-axis is making noises, is whistling or is louder than usual," and can match these to the error source. Empolis uses intelligent search technologies such as root word analysis, synonym resolution and similarity searches in six languages (German, English, French, Spanish, Italian and Chinese).

With 14 specialized production companies and 23 captive sales and service companies worldwide as well as around 60 exclusive sales partners, the HOMAG Group is a truly unique system provider. By its own estimation, the company is the world's leading manufacturer of machinery and systems for the construction, wood and woodworking industries. The HOMAG Group has some 6,300 employees in the fields of furniture and component production and the construction of pre-fabricated houses. In addition, the group offers its customers numerous services, as well as software and advice. The HOMAG Group has held a majority stake in the Dürr Group since October 2014.



Proof that Stoll is on the right track with eSupport has not only been confirmed with the Heinz Dürr Award for "Best Service Innovation," but also from the numerous calls from his technicians in cases when the system is temporarily down. "We initially considered eSupport as uncritical in terms of our business operations so we only provided one server. That has changed now. Today, if the system is offline for just an hour, my phone starts ringing off the hook," says Stoll, pleased. The next steps are already in place as well: eSupport is still an intranet solution.

Looking forward, the Cloud will simplify access. At HOMAG, the system is now utilized for e-learning as well to introduce technicians to new machines. This should further reduce training costs. According to Stoll, the system has now caught the attention of other departments. "Sales is currently collecting its information in the system. There is also major interest from the assembly and quality control departments," he says. And the story continues. "eSupport has the potential to become the knowledge portal for HOMAG overall."

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**Peter Stoll**, Head of Service Knowledge Management, HOMAG GmbH

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