

Mobile Customs keeps controls moving

Mobility tools improve speed and efficiency of controls on the road and in the field

“The Mobile Enterprise”: it’s not just for the private sector. Traditional public services can derive plenty of benefits from staff mobility, as well.

The government’s FPS (Federal Public Service) Finance established in 2003 a multi annual and a multi step Modernisation Plan with a strong focus on information technology, based on the idea that the modernisation of personnel, processes and infrastructure depends on it. In 2007 the European Commission decided to launch her Multi Annual Strategic Plan (MASP – first development runs until 2013) for the member states’ Customs and Excise services.

As part of FPS Finance, the Customs and Excise service has been getting a technology ‘face lift’, too. Mobile staff have long been important to this department, and now they are receiving up-to-date tools that improve productivity and efficiency.



Dirk Minnaert, Advisor General, FPS (FOD/SPF) Finances, first presented this case story at the BELTUG/Datanews ICT Summit on The Mobile Enterprise, 14 September, 2010

CHALLENGES

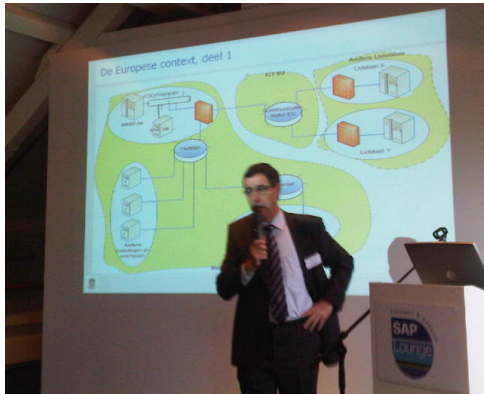
A traditional service goes high-tech

Belgium is a very important distribution centre for Europe, thanks to its central location, many gateways and good transportation infrastructure. Belgian Customs and Excise is committed to providing a world-class service to support the country’s position as a distribution hub. As part of this service, the mobile Customs staff carries out a wide range of different controls. This can include checking imports, verifying the payment of traffic taxes, and more. But one thing these controls have in common: they must be carried out in the field.

Part of the customs service’s long-term PLDA (Paperless Customs and Excise) project included a new system to replace the existing paper document-based system used for and by its mobile customs agents with an electronic system. It would be part of the set-up of several regional dispatching centres that would organise the work of, and support, the in-field agents. The project would include both the necessary hardware and software, to provide an automated tool for management and planning of control work, and safe remote access for some 1000 mobile customs officers.

“Belgium is an important international transportation hub. A modern and efficient Customs service using up-to-date technology enhances the perception of our country on an international scale. Our mobile staff are a key part of this.”

Dirk Minnaert, Advisor General, FPS (FOD/SPF) Finances.



As part of the Federal Public Service Finances, the Belgian Customs and Excise oversees the import and export of certain goods entering and leaving our country, based on European Community legislation and rules. Its staff guards the country against practices that might be harmful for honest trade and the environment, and/or might be of a criminal nature.

It uses a whole range of customs systems and rules which are aimed towards a dispatch of goods flows in the quickest way possible.

The Belgian customs service has built a strong tradition of working electronically, using an automated customs declaration system since 1982. In 2007, the new Paperless Customs and Excise (PLDA) application was introduced. Other modernisation initiatives include the Moto and regional dispatching project, for setting up the regional dispatching and mobile teams, and MODA, which provides the infrastructure and applications for those teams.

SOLUTIONS

Mobility tools improve productivity and client satisfaction

A public tender was published, and Siemens Enterprise Solutions was selected to implement the new system: MODA, for Mobile Customs and Excise. The pilot phase, in Hasselt, began in 2008. The solution included fully equipping the Customs service's mobile vans with semi-ruggedised laptops, docking stations, printers, scanner barcodes, E-payment tools, a mouse/e-ID, USB hubs, Tetras and GSM car kits and battery backups. "These tools already save a lot of time in the field," says Dirk Minnaert, Advisor General, FPS Finance. "This means the productivity of our staff increases, but also that the 'clients' being controlled are happier. And it positions us in Europe as an up-to-date and innovative customs service."

LESSONS LEARNT

Technology opens many doors for Customs

As the coupling with the PLDA networking application has not yet been constructed, the full benefits of MODA are not yet felt. "It should be completed after the summer," says Dirk. "Then all planning will go through the PLDA and the risk analysis application CSPbis, before being relayed to the field agents via MODA."

The system will also be rolled-out to the rest of the regional planning and mobile teams from 2011-2012.

Already, Dirk sees the potential of new technology for the future. "Technology such as scanners will allow us to check the interior of a truck without climbing into it or removing the packed goods. That will save more time. And by scanning license plates and connecting to the central database, agents will be able to immediately see if all the applicable taxes have been paid. Over time, this system will allow us to carry out many more types of controls, all in the field!"