ZF Friedrichshafen AG uses MindManager as a knowledge database

Central IT Purchasing department benefits from information availability during contract negotiations

The ZF Group is one of the world's top ten technology groups in driveline and chassis technology. Founded in 1915, the group, which manufactures transmissions for aircraft and vehicles, today has 122 production companies in 26 countries. Worldwide, this automotive supplier, the third largest in Germany, employs a total of 75,000 people.

THE CHALLENGE

In the central IT purchasing department at ZF Friedrichshafen AG, the team is tasked with managing an enormous variety of information and data formats centrally and in a well-organised way. For the team, it was a matter of finding a platform that supports rapid access to documents from various sources and allows for the creation of job profiles, management of resources and compilation of work packages. In addition, while information regarding enquiries, proposals and contracts was available to various employees, it was not always sufficiently documented for the company's needs.

The aim was to obtain an improved and uniform level of knowledge and ensure the recyclability of clauses, texts and arguments. As MindManager was already available in the IT 'shopping basket' at ZF Friedrichshafen AG and Rainer Knoblauch was familiar with mind mapping methods in a personal capacity, it made sense to use this software as a solution to this problem. It was expected that using MindManager would provide a greater overview and better documentation, ultimately leading to time savings and quality assurance as a result.

THE SOLUTION

With this in mind, this solution was introduced into the purchasing department and put to use in various ways. For example, it became easier to find a large amount of information and access important data at the click of a mouse. The team also made immediate use of the various labelling options with colours, priorities, responsibilities and reminders:, additional task information, notes and resource management functions showed clear advantages straightaway. Improvements in procedures, and, above all, coordination processes, were soon noticeable. "We were able to carry out our tasks more efficiently and have seen at a glance who is responsible for which work package and what related effects this has," recalls Knoblauch.

CHALLENGE

The central IT purchasing department in a company the size of ZF Friedrichshafen AG not only has to manage a wide variety of tasks, but also has to meet numerous legal and commercial parameters and requirements. One of the most difficult aspects of this is that a large amount of information exists on different media - not infrequently on paper. In the case of tenders, internal enquiries and, above all, contract negotiations, it is important that the purchasing managers can obtain an overview of this information quickly. These factors mean that switches between applications are very time-consuming.

SOLUTION

In the central purchasing department at ZF Friedrichshafen, Rainer Knoblauch and his colleagues rely on a cross-platform solution that brings together relevant information and visualises it in a clear manner: that solution is MindManager. With this software, Knoblauch is able to store all the aspects of the contract drafting process in a sort of knowledge map and can also manage all of this day-to-day business via one map, guaranteeing that nothing is forgotten or overlooked.

RESULT

The central IT purchasing department at ZF Friedrichshafen benefits from using MindManager in a variety of ways: on the one hand, this solution forms the foundation of an extensive knowledge database containing information relating to the conclusion of contracts, while on the other hand, it serves as a central organisation platform in the purchasing department that can be used for a very wide variety of projects which require the collection, structuring and management of information. In addition to this, MindManager is also used for organising and managing proposals. For Knoblauch, this solution has become a matter of course: every morning, he starts up "his second brain" - a map containing all his pending tasks - so that he can plan his day.

„The mind mapping concept is ideal for documenting lines of action that are running in parallel without having to think about structures. These practically develop by themselves, without having to have everything squeezed onto a diagram beforehand, which can restrict our thought processes.“

Rainer Knoblauch, Purchasing IT Service Center Procurement, Purchasing Non Production Materials, Schweinfurt

The tool proved its worth most of all in contract drafting and coordination of proposals, processes which are of great importance in purchasing.

MindManager is also of further assistance even in cases of contracts or information which have not yet been recorded in a way that allows for the use of EDP. "We simply add to the map by making a reference to the folder in the cabinet so that everyone is aware of the situation," says the IT Purchaser.

THE RESULT

Knoblauch and his colleagues are now making very comprehensive use of MindManager: whether for drafting contracts, calculating cost estimates, distributing tasks or optimising processes. From the point of view of product planning and procurement processes, the ERP system in question is the central platform at ZF Friedrichshafen AG, reducing associated errors from switching between pure ERP data and additional information that is relevant for purchasing interests.

Links to information held outside of an ERP system are established via document numbers in the text field of the relevant branch. This allows employees to see a large amount of relevant information without having to use the ERP system.

"Other companies work with a CRM system and we're using MindManager," comments Knoblauch. He creates individual branches for major creditors, to which procurement issues and organisational data are added. The main branch, which is given the supplier's name, features a text field in which the address and contact information are stored, enabling Knoblauch to find his contacts and addresses quickly, even without a network connection. "During phone calls, I fill in the branches, which are defined according to schedule, with relevant memos. This means I am up-to-date regarding the progress and state of negotiations and important conversations at all times: using MindManager means I have everything together in one place and can directly document information from conversations in the corresponding branches, which, in turn, allows me to create tasks for myself and my contact and monitor them."