Blue Ant

»Today we have a quick overview of our projects – at the push of a button we can check the status and key figures.«

Stadtwerke Norderstedt is a municipal company that operates independently of third-party shareholders. For almost 40 years now, it has been the city's in-house operation, fulfilling its supply mandate. With a broad infrastructure for energy and water supply, telecommunications, leisure and transport, Stadtwerke Norderstedt (Norderstedt municipal utilities) generates a high quality of life for the region. Stadtwerke Norderstedt has been managing its projects with the multi-project management software Blue Ant, a solution from Berlin-based proventis GmbH, since 2016.

We spoke with Nicolas Fahl, project manager in the area of planning and system integration, about the introduction of the software.

Mr. Fahl, what is your position at Stadtwerke Norderstedt and what are your areas of activity?

I am a project manager in the field of planning and system integration at Stadtwerke Norderstedt and at wilhelm.tel GmbH. Wilhelm.tel is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Stadtwerke.

What is the core business of Stadtwerke Norderstedt?

Stadtwerke Norderstedt is primarily an energy supplier, but there is also a spin-off company with wilhelm.tel GmbH. The company is an Internet provider, but also a telephone and TV provider whose network was initially set up only for Norderstedt. Later on, there was a merger with the partner willy.tel in Hamburg to jointly operate a fibre-optic network. Several hundreds of thousands of households are currently connected to the grid.

Case Study

How should we picture the project landscape in your company?

Our project landscape is divided into two areas: "Site development & network" and "System integration /innovation" projects.

When we acquire new customers, our network expands. We therefore start a construction project with the goal of connecting the customer to our fibre-optic network. The project starts with an approval phase and is planned. Then construction work is carried out on public land and later on in the building itself. As you can imagine, several departments are involved in such a project. In the field of system integration, projects

Stadtwerke Norderstedt, Schleswig-Holstein

are primarily concerned with technical innovations and technical expansion. We also implement "normal" software and hardware projects. These purely technical areas are very important for our company. They ensure our development and innovation.

Why did you want to introduce project management software?

We have well over 500 projects per year, particularly in the area of "Site development & network". These projects were maintained in an Excel list before the times of software support. The progress, process and project

participation of the employees were documented there.

Excel is a good tool, but at some point it becomes hard to keep track of everything. We urgently needed more transparency in terms of progress, overall project design and staff utilization. That was the reason we wanted to introduce project management software.

What led you to Blue Ant?

At the beginning we had to consider which requirements the software should fulfil. Our focus in the selection process was initially on the critical chain, as we needed help planning customer appointments. Since today everyone depends on a functioning Internet, it is very important that the customer receives his connection at the desired time.

It quickly became clear, however, that it was just as relevant to see who from our team is involved, in which projects and precisely how. Because of this, we have moved away from a purely critical chain tool to a way of using a multi-project management tool in individual project management. As we are a municipal company subject to a tendering process, several providers on the market were unable to fulfil our specifications. Ultimately, we looked at several providers, but proventis, with its multi-project management software, best met our requirements for the new tool. Hence the decision to choose Blue Ant.

Are there also ad hoc projects as well as standard projects in your company?

As I mentioned, we distinguish between construction projects and projects in the field of system integration. There are no ad-hoc projects for construction projects, as we always follow a standard and adhere to a template and guidelines. In the area of sys-

tem integration, however, every project looks different. Both variants are handled with Blue Ant.

How did the introduction of the software go?

We knew that the introduction of software, which provides transparency about the progress and tasks of the project participants, could lead to resistance among the employees. That's why it was important to us from the very beginning to keep every individual on board and to clarify the advantages of the software.

We started with a small team of ten employees, who later on informed other team members and discussed processes as multipliers. After that, we trained our colleagues in teams. Throughout the entire implementation process, attention was paid time and again to keeping close contact with staff to ensure that the right templates were being used and that projects were being correctly set up. We were also available to answer open questions. It took about three months then everyone was familiar with the tool and started using it regularly.

How has the introduction of Blue Ant affected your project management?

There has definitely been a professionalization in our project management. Our multi-project management contains a large number of parallel topics that must be prioritized. We have made great progress here. Thanks to the increased overview and transparency, we now know what needs to be done and how to prioritise it. Our staff are no longer overbooked.

Since Blue Ant also provides many interfaces to other systems, our colleagues no longer have to worry about sharing certain information with other co-workers.

Has Blue Ant also changed the importance of project management in your company?

Absolutely! Today, the upper and lower management levels have a quick overview of the number of our projects and can view their status and key figures at the touch of a button. The documentation in Blue Ant has also made it easier for project members to work on projects, which has also increased appreciation of the software.

What do you recommend to other companies in your industry for the introduction of multi-project management?

I would recommend five things in particular:
- Before the introduction consider exactly what is to be shown with the software.
- If management is not the initiator of software introduction, it must be urgently persuaded to support the change.
- The option of piloting should be used to get a basic feeling for the software.
- Staff using the tool in the future should always be included from the very beginning and during the launch.
- Avoid isolated solutions!

Thank you for talking to us, Mr Fahl.