

Paperless proof, the e-government magic act

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A French-developed security platform which turns email into the electronic equivalent of registered mail could help deal with the bureaucratic paper mountains throughout Europe.

In all sorts of dealings and transactions between government departments, between businesses and government bodies, and between individual citizens and government, verification of identity and proof of what has transpired is needed.

As a rule, this has usually meant forms to fill in, signatures dated and physically posting or delivering the completed forms.

A few years ago, a French government initiative set out to develop a secure online platform to handle electronically the many transactions between local communities, or collectives, and the central government and particularly the interior ministry.

These include the 'collectives' having to inform the ministry of all decisions they take, and also to notify the central government of all births, deaths and marriages that occur.

French public financial institution Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations set out to develop and test the Fournisseur d'Accès Sécurisés Transactionnels (Secure Access Gateway Provider) platform or FAST.

Automated, secure document exchange

The system is able to provide automated and secure document exchange,

legally recognised acknowledgement of receipt, electronic certificates and signatures, secure encryption of information, as well as traceability, time-stamping and archiving of electronic documents.

This means collectives all over France no longer have to post off copies of life-event certificates to Paris, but simply file them electronically via the FAST platform. Individual citizens benefit in a number of ways, such as no longer having to provide a physical copy of a birth certificate when making a benefit application.

Now the magic of the system is being brought to the rest of the European Union thanks to a project funded under the EU's eTEN programme for market validation and implementation, the FASTeTEN project.

The project's technical coordinator Jean François Navarre says in France a whole host of new e-government functions have been made possible by the platform and a private company has been established to market these services both in the country and around [Europe](#).

“While this means FAST is not free, people wanting to use it will improve their performance and save themselves money,” he says.

Spanish region, English city

The EU-funded project, which got underway in 2008, has two very different trials of the platform's capabilities on the go.

One is in the Spanish region of Valencia, where it is being used with the local government's e-procurement platform to provide a new level of security by generating legally binding proof of both calls for proposal and of transactions.

The second is in the English city of Sheffield, and the objective here is to develop from scratch a new procedure for the management of contacts within organisations. This is being done by a pilot system to manage the contacts between schools and parents.

Jonathan Gay, the project partner in charge of the Sheffield trials, said: “We took stock of the paperwork being used in the local school system to see what could be put onto the FAST platform to reduce the need for parent-based signatures”. Then ten schools were selected to trial a cross-selection of applications.

Parental consent for events

“We have carried out hundreds of tests on the forms and interfaces, worked with the school secretaries and now we are ready for implementation,” he says.

One of the applications being trialled is parental consent for events, such as school outings. Instead of posting or giving children consent forms for parents to fill in, a teacher can put the detail of an event onto the platform which will then contact all the parents, and send reminders to those who do not respond. Parents log onto a website to give consent via an electronic signature. Parents who do not have access to a PC at home can use a token with an electronic signature on it at a public terminal.

If a problem occurs during the event, a parent cannot claim to have not given consent because of the security built into the system which not only recognises the electronic signature but also records the exact time it was received and then archives it. With an ordinary email there is not the same legal standard of proof. Another application being looked at is paperless exam results.

One difference between the trials is that, in Valencia, the platform is

installed on the regional government's servers, whereas in Sheffield everything is run through the FAST central servers in France. This might change, according to Gay, who said: "We might bring the system here as time-stamping and archiving need input from people and we might be able to create new IT jobs.

"We are implementing FAST with a view to the long term and the project funding is to allow us to come up with as many ways as possible to use the technology and to develop new applications and mechanisms". He mentions the health and emergency planning sectors as potential users of the technology.

According to Navarre, the platform can be used at a municipal, regional, national and pan-national level throughout the EU to provide transparent, secure and easy-to-use e-government services for citizens and businesses.

More information: www.eu-fasteten.eu/

Provided by [ICT Results](#)

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