

5. Results

5.1. Collaboration, project and services

The initiation phase of the project can be regarded as a success. As was called for by the MEDIA@Komm competition, the city of Bremen and numerous private sector partners, both in the IT field and original service providers, have joined forces to develop electronic government and a new means of service delivery: One-Stop-Government counter on the web. Through the use of interdisciplinary working groups and joint project leadership, Bremen Online Services achieved involvement of key public administration officials and private sector partners as well as the university.

The implementation and operation phases, however, present new challenges: the original technology partners were not able to deliver a successful prototype, leaving Bremen Online Services with no tangible result after the first half of the project. A crucial problem was that the weak leadership which comes with the adopted steering method to use broad working groups couldn't enforce a structured and high-paced approach to technological development. Also, since Bremen Online Services had subcontracted all development aspects to independent partners, a substantial amount of energy was spent on coordinating the contractors. The lessons learned from this experience led to a strategy overhaul in early 2001, when Bremen Online Services relieved most of its contractors of their duties and started to develop the infrastructure (OSCI and OSCAR) itself, transforming itself from a lean, coordinating company to a software development house in its own right. However, instead of developing whole packages for all of the application areas, Bremen Online Services specializes in its core competence in integrating electronic signatures and payment into different applications.

This new technical orientation means that Bremen Online Services is actively seeking more and more technological partners who have experience in building specific IT applications for individual administrations and service providers. For example, it cooperates with companies developing legal, procurement, or student administration applications. Bremen Online Services contributes its know-how in online-security and transactions, while the other companies know the customer base and their demands.

Although there was some delay in the technical development, the public administrations and service providers recently entered the first tests of service presentation on the single-window web site (see <http://www.bremer-online-service.de>). They started installment of registration places for electronic signatures and assisted usage places in their offices, laying the basis for a cooperative service delivery model in the online world.

The actual services implemented online so far vary in the degree to which they have fulfilled the promise of better, faster, and more convenient service delivery. In the area of legal administrations, Bremen Online Services and its respective partners in the administration and industry have developed an online query module for the city's register of companies and an online form to process default summons. Both applications have been met with enthusiasm by the users. However, they do not employ the core signature and OSCAR-technologies.

The pilot applications using electronic signatures, payment and OSCAR-technology are still being developed. The biggest challenge is to integrate the disparate signature, transaction, and payment technologies in such a way that they do not cause additional burden on the part of users. For them, use of electronic signature cards is a very uncommon procedure and requires a lot of background (e.g., what is an electronic signature really?) and practical knowledge (e.g., how do I install my card-reader?). While the first online applications have been running since September 2000, Bremen Online Services did not start to market its service until June 2001, after a redesign of the technology and the interface. Actual usage and feedback will show if the maturity of online government achieved in Bremen "makes the glass half-full or half-empty".

5.2. Opportunities/benefits

The opportunity for all partners in Bremen Online Services, of course, is to develop a completely new way of service delivery, both technically and organizationally. Information technology and the specific services developed by Bremen Online Services (like signature and transactions processing technology) will allow legally binding and complete administration processes to be conducted online. Especially in routine cases, this will allow all users to save costs and time on the transactions, and thus enable cost savings on part of the service providers and increased speed and convenience on the part of receivers. While this goal is shared with almost all players in today's economy, it requires large investments because a whole new infrastructure has to be created and a chicken/egg-problem must be overcome: access, infrastructure and applications have to be developed all at once. To do this, Bremen Online Services uses the significant funding of the federal government. However, the key to its success is to bring all important actors from the administration and private partners together and make them share the same vision.

Arguably even more important is an organizational opportunity which comes out of the new electronic service delivery method. It becomes a lot easier to integrate public administration services with private services, and thus offer citizens and customers services not in "silos", but according to their demand patterns. Integrating electronic instead of physically bounded services requires less organizational commitment by the partners, because a third party, in this case Bremen Online Services, acts as a common platform who takes care of the presentation of the interface. For each administration and private service provider this means they have to make an agreement with only one party and open only one (electronic) interface to the platform, while Bremen Online Services is responsible for bundling the services in user-oriented fashion. This, then, is the form of public-private partnership which allows single-window delivery for public and private services.