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ABBYY® FlexiCapture

ABBYY FlexiCapture Scores Big for the Hamburg Football Association

With almost 150,000 members, the Hamburg Football Association (HFV) may not be the biggest association in Germany, but it certainly holds a special position in the German football Federation (DFB). They have a long history or providing comprehensive support and training to their members, who come from all ages and walks of life, and for promoting the benefits of teamwork in the local community.

The Challenge

Unlike the other twenty football associations within Germany, the Hamburgers are the only club that organise themselves centrally. All aspects of matches are managed by the HFV and the evaluation and deposition of score sheets are processed centrally as well. Every week between 1500 and 1800 reports reach the HFV from eight different committees. This means that every year around 60,000 score sheets from both the open air and indoor seasons arrive at the branch office. These reports are filled in manually by the referees after every match and the results are centrally saved at the DFB and the HFV is responsible for the archiving of the score sheets.

Traditionally this has meant that all paper-based templates were typed in manually by members of staff. The staff members at the HFV branch office unpack the score sheets, type the results into their computers and file the results in separate folders for each match. It is an extremely laborious process because acquisition and deposition are very time-consuming. Furthermore it means additional work when score sheets arrive late and members of staff need to sort and backdate them manually. Finally, if the score sheets need to be found again at a later time, for example when clubs assert objection in front of the sports court, then added effort and time is required to find the correct record.

The Solution

For Jörg Timmermann, Deputy Executive of the HFV and IT Director, it was evident that the HFV needed a more innovative process. "We had many problems in managing the overwhelming amount of paper. It was obvious that we needed to find an automatic method to capture and digitise the score sheets. As early as 2007, we evaluated different solutions, but in every instance the price was just too high and the performance not up to our standards," explains Timmermann. "After having invested a lot of time already, we liked the appearance of the proposal from Friedrich Karl Schroeder (FKS), who showed us the Starke Document Management System with ABBYY FlexiCapture Professional."

ABBYY FlexiCapture Professional is ABBYY's newest generation in Document Conversion and Data Capture solutions. It enables Data Capture processes from all kinds of documents including structured or fixed forms like test scripts and questionnaires; semi-structured documents such as invoices and confirmations; and unstructured documents such as letters, contracts and other full-text documents. The product possesses an award-winning OCR technology and is able to recognise typewritten documents in over 180 languages. Additionally FlexiCapture has ICR technology that recognises handwriting in 100 languages. Once the data in a document is converted the extracted data can then be transferred to databases or reused in other business applications.

What initially impressed the football-loving computer expert Timmerman was that both FKS and Starke quickly proceeded on an advanced testing and demonstration phase. Stefan Radtke, Software developer for FlexiCapture Certified Partner Starke said, "we wanted to show the customer what the solution could do. After a short time for development, we were able to test the converting application during the first presentation with over fifty documents in a live setting and to present the results on the spot."

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In order to retrieve individual fields of information from the score sheets it was necessary to incorporate a Data Capture component such as FlexiCapture. Because the software must recognise the fields on a score sheet – date, location, teams, scores, goals, etc. - Radtke developed a template that searches the documents and locates the correct data. Timmermann performed a test with over fifty types of score sheets so that any potential errors could be worked out in advance. The results of the test persuaded Timmermann: "FlexiCapture's automated recognition worked right from the beginning with an astounding rate of accuracy."

Instead of time-intensive manual typing, the work in the branch office is now carried out in the following way: a member of the staff puts the score sheets on a scanning device in order to input it into FlexiCapture. Special hardware is not necessary for that stage because the branch office can uses an existing scanner together with a normal PC workstation. After the documents have been fed into FlexiCapture the system then recognises specific fields of data including the score sheet number and the amount of goals for each side.
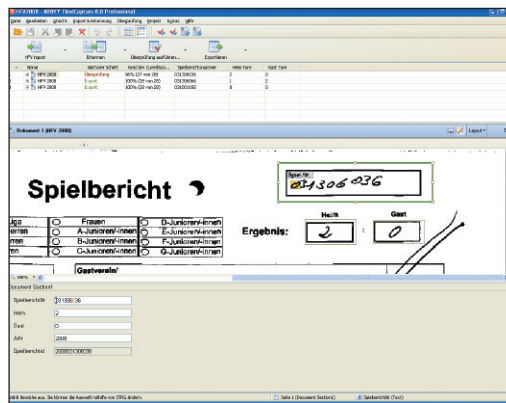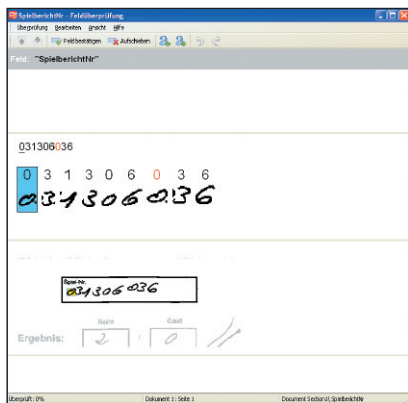
Although the aim of a Data Capture solution such as FlexiCapture is to eliminate manual processes, the program still allows for human intervention in order to verify results. "We have consciously not completely automated the solution", explains Timmermann, "so that staff members can control if the data recognition works correctly." In just 5% of the cases however do employees need to engage directly and change the recognised result.

In addition to the Data Capture feature, another server runs in the background with the installed document management system which saves all of the scanned reports. When archived score sheets are needed again, the members of staff do not need to look up in folders but can check the database via DMS in a couple of seconds and the required report is shown. Additionally the results are automatically delivered to the web site of the DFB where they can be checked centrally.

The Outcome

"Our main advantage is the cost savings," says Timmermann. "Instead of 50 hours of work per week, we now only need a few hours to complete these tasks. The purchase costs for the solution turned out to be half as much as the competitors – and the results are excellent." Another very positive aspect of the project was the short implementation time. "It took us only three days on location until we were ready to start," says Timmermann. During this time FKS and Bernhard Starke installed the in-house document management system, set up the needed document types and deployed ABBYY FlexiCapture with the preliminary templates. Afterwards the members of staff were quickly trained and the association was ready to go.

The Hamburg Football Club is so enthusiastic about the solution that they have implemented FlexiCapture in other areas of their operations. Currently all correspondence, totalling over 7,000 letters per year, is scanned and captured. Next the club plans to digitise documents in other departments totalling 40,000, including the 15,000 documents per year generated by the Accounting department. "When all areas of operation run over the Starke Document Management System we are able to capture and process in total around 150,000 documents each year with FlexiCapture," says Timmermann.