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CUSTOMER STORY

Austria Card



SQS comes up trumps for software development at Austria Card

Background

The company known as Austria Card-Plastikkarten und Ausweissysteme Gesellschaft m.b.H. dates back to 1981, when it began to produce Eurocheques and cards – which are now ‘ancient history’ compared to today’s electronic payments. As early as 1984, machines were deployed for the entire plastic card production process. Expertise and research were given major stimulus during subsequent years. Microchips were first introduced in 1993, when 2 million such cards were manufactured. In 2008, the Greek company Inform Lykos acquired 85% of the shares in Austria Card from the Österreichische Nationalbank and has held a 100% stake since June 2011. As a result, Austria Card became part of an international group of companies.

Around 300 employees in Austria now produce some 70 million cards per year, two-thirds of which are exported to target markets in CEE (Central and Eastern Europe), Scandinavia and the Middle East. Innovative software solutions are vital for the use of plastic cards. Austria Card has always positioned itself as an ‘early adapter’ within this sector.

For example, the ATM chip card developed by Austria Card and introduced by the Austrian banks in 1995 made it possible to conduct the first offline transactions, which was a milestone for the commercial success of cashless payment transactions. These cards are now read millions of times every day – in shops, cash machines, restaurants, etc.

Challenge

In May 2011, under the leadership of Christian Scholze, Head of Service Center Operations, a project was launched by Austria Card to support the further development of a software quality assurance system. In response to the internationalisation with Lykos, another two sites were added, where software had previously been developed to varying standards. There was a huge rise in the number of applications and functions. The aim of the project was to create a common standard throughout the group, guarantee quality standards – despite the increased frequency of applications – and manage the software throughout its life cycle. It also aimed to automate regression testing.

The TQO department (Tools and Application Quality Assurance and Operations Support) was first created as a 'quality watchdog' for the group and also acts as a service provider, in parallel with software development.

In a competitive tendering process, SQS acquired Austria Card as a new client. Decisive factors included providing the best price and technical specification, combined with the expertise of SQS employees, who Austria Card felt best understood its needs. For 30 years, SQS has specialised in software quality and has developed over the years to become the market leader. About 80 consultants in Austria and 2,200 worldwide enable us to stay close to our clients at all times and introduce best practices, as well as countless tools from over 7,000 projects.

Solution

PractiQ® was used, which is the SQS methodology for consistent service provision in projects – together with the products SQS Early Error Detection, SQS QuRE® (Quality in Requirements Engineering) and SQS HealthCheck® (for the verification of test procedures and processes). The approach was based on a precisely defined procedure: First of all, a common strategy was developed, in which HealthCheck® conducts a site survey and gap analysis. The strategy was based on reference models, standards such as ISTQB® (International Software Testing Qualifications Board) and SQS Best Practices. The relevant sub-processes, processes and methods were specified on this basis – for requirements management, quality assurance, configuration management, release management, bug and issue tracking and governance of software development. The next step involved selecting the appropriate tools for software quality assurance.

In order to bed in the new Quality Assurance Strategy, it was first fine-tuned as part of a pilot project, then training sessions were provided. "It was crucial for the acceptance and success of the project that the SQS consultants should adopt a structured approach and work closely with the Austria Card software testing and development teams. Based on well thought-out methods, the individual phases were implemented in a transparent way, by means of workshops for all Austria Card employees," says Christian Scholze, before adding: "At the workshops, SQS analysed in detail how Austria Card 'functions' and the senior management was brought on board at an early stage. Software requirements and interfaces were determined systematically and areas for individual improvement were determined."

Benefits for the customer

The project was only recently completed and has already proved successful. Two pilot projects have already been successfully implemented according to the new Software Quality Assurance guidelines: one of these focused on the Vienna site, while the second provided evidence that the software was functioning across the group, as architecture and quality assurance were handled in Vienna, while the software was developed in Poland. A new software product went live without any problems in 2012.

The objectives were therefore met: it was possible to plan, control and measure the quality of software development and the benefits of quality assurance (QA) could be proven – which was important for the management. Early QA also reduces troubleshooting costs and project risks. Moreover, the processes were in line with the audits conducted at Austria Card by MasterCard, VISA, ISO and similar checks, as QA activities and test results are documented in the appropriate ways. As Christian Scholze sums things up: "SQS fully lived up to this positive initial impression and expectations. A reliable and reproducible software development process is now in place. The system saves a great deal of time when developing and updating software. It is also interoperable and equipped for future changes. The partnership with SQS was not only efficient and happy – the work already completed is highly beneficial for our company and all our sites."

Contact

If you are interested in SQS' service offering regarding testing and quality management, please do not hesitate to send us an e-mail: info@sqs.com