

# FEDICT



fedict  
innovating government



“If you want an image, you have to work at it”

**When public services wants to communicate with the general public, the rules that apply are often different from those in the private sector, and usually this does not make it any easier.**



“For instance, we can only communicate about current policy and not about future plans,” says Peter Strickx, Chief Technology Officer at Fedict, the federal public service that supports other federal public services with their information and communication technology.

“But in no way does this mean that we think that communication is of minor importance,” he continues. “On the contrary, it has to help us implement our strategic objectives. In this respect, government communication is no different to that of a private company.”

On the other hand, at the government Fedict is the odd one out. “We are one of the few

public services that communicates very actively with the outside and has, for example, good relations with the trade press,” explains Strickx. This is mainly the result of Fedict deliberately choosing to present a young, dynamic, engaged and customer-oriented image. “We are proof that not every government organisation has to fit in with the traditional, old-fashioned image of the civil service,” he says. For instance, the communications manager also gives training to members of the board to show them how to interact with the press. With this strategic approach too, Fedict aims to stand out from other government services.

#### **Authoritative source of information**

The federal public service Fedict is building on the e-government strategy in Belgium and would like to be regarded as the reference in this area. “We want to be generally considered as the authoritative source of information

when it comes to e-government,” says communications manager Mila Druwe. “Our communication strategy is fully geared up to this. If you want a certain image, you just have to work at it.”

***“In public services, communication is as important as in a private company.”***

The nature of the organisation has a big influence on the approach taken. “At Fedict we are continually having to compromise and come to agreements with policy managers,” says Strickx. “This also has repercussions for the way we manage our budgets. These are not linked to profits and sales figures, but depend on the initiatives taken. So it could be an initiative from Fedict itself or equally an initiative from the government. Some of the activities we can plan for beforehand, but others we cannot. This means we can modify our budget over the course of the year.”

#### **Logical step to an external communications agency**

Over the past few years, the communications policy of Fedict has evolved greatly. When Fedict was established in 2002, the organisation did not even have a communications manager. It quickly became apparent that this was a shortcoming because what was needed was a well thought out strategy, for internal as well as external communications. But since 2006 Quadrant Communications has been on hand as an external agency to take care of Fedict’s public relations. “We came to Quadrant Communications via Belnet,” says Druwe. “This was an important reference for us since it is also a government organisation. Add to this the extensive experience in the ICT sector and Quadrant immediately stood out from the other candidates.”

The expertise of Quadrant Communications was, among other things, used for writing the handbook about crisis communication. “Crisis communication is very important for us,” explains Druwe. “Currently we are working on large-scale projects such as eID, Tax-on-Web, one-stop shops for businesses and FedMAN, and if at any stage something goes wrong it can quickly have a major impact. The handbook for crisis communication gives us something to hold on to in such a situation, so that the need to improvise is minimised.”

According to Druwe, the step to an external communications agency was very logical. “It illustrates our professionalisation. PR quickly gained in importance at Fedict and that’s why we wanted to outsource it to an organisation

***“Communication with the press often occurs in concentrated bursts and then having the right approach is very important. If you want to communicate well, you need an external partner to help you.”***

where this is the core activity. If you want to communicate well, you need a partner to help you actively do this. Communication with the press often occurs in concentrated bursts and then it is important to do it well.”

“Moreover, an external agency offers a fresh look at the impact of what we are doing for the day-to-day lives of the public. We ourselves are too close to the information. The trade press

also has – partly thanks to the direct contacts that we have built up – a lot of interest in our activities. But making it into the general press requires a lot more effort. We see that generally they have little interest in ICT subjects. The impact of IT technology on all aspects of soci-

***“Making it into the general press requires a lot of effort.”***

ety is still too often underestimated. Quadrant can definitely still play a part in getting this message across,” concludes Strickx.

### **Why does Fedict communicate?**

- to explain clearly the impact of ICT on all aspects of society
- to create a dynamic and customer-focused image
- to correct the outdated image of the civil service

