

The solution of eliminating queues and the stress is "The virtual pay-office". This project was initiated by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology and will replace human clerks with virtual ones.

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Making an efficient public payment system presupposes not only the introduction of IT systems on a large scale but also the elimination, as far as possible, of the human factor from the citizen-authorities equation. If it has a friendly and facile interface, an internet site can be preferred by the contributor in the detriment of a pay-office clerk. In order to collocate these aspects, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology initiated an ordinance through which urban localities are obliged to develop electronic payment solutions for duties and local taxes. In this way, the idea emerged of taking over the western model of creating a virtual pay office which could ensure the interface between the contributor and the payment issuer. For further details about the online pay-office we discussed with Madalin Matica, the operation executive in Europe for DotCommerce, the card processor.

Which are the main coordinates of the MCTI project, "The Virtual pay-office"? Specifically, which are the involved parties in the projects creation and how much has been spent for its implementation?

The project "The virtual pay-office" is a MCTI project assigned due to a public auction to a triumvirate composed of Softwin (integrator and project leader), Kondiment Solution (web development) and DotCommerce Romania (assistance, consulting and development of security and interface with the card processing systems). I add that this application does not perform card processing directly with the card issuer organizations, but through a processor or through several banks which were later selected through a separated procedure. The functionalities of "The virtual pay-office" are clear: it ensures interfacing with any payment issuer (fees, duties, taxes, etc.) regardless of the already existing technologies and applications of these authorities; ensures the secure communication and the reporting of all operations; ensures the registering of all operations in the data bases of the National Electronic System and, last but not least, interfaces with any card processor selected and approved by the operator of "The virtual pay-office".

As you can see, the emergence of the "Pay-Office" makes online payment for any type of centralized or decentralized public authority possible, regardless of pre-existing applications. The standardization of applications and of the type of data bases being utilized is a big problem at the national level.

"The Pay-Office" notifies while at the same time confirms the carrying out of the respective payment to the citizen. The implementation and creation costs of the system have already been defined as being "minor." Despite this fact, the majority of "great names" in the Romanian IT industry participated to this auction.

How much will the costs be reduced if the administration will implement at a large scale the online payment systems of taxes, duties, fees etc?

I think this is a normal approach, however still I personally consider it a bit brutal. I keep hearing - both from the public and the private area - this issue: the

The IRS will be in your computer too

In the near future, the citizens will be able to pay online the taxes towards the state



Madalin Matica de la DotCommerce arată cum se vor concentra toate ghișeele într-unul virtual

reduction of costs in a direct manner. Nothing is that simple. "The Pay-Office" can definitely reduce these costs from the point of view of both types of users:

a) the citizen - who can carry out this payment directly from his home or his office without standing in a endless queue, without dealing with the clerk's insolence or without filling various redundant forms in three different queues. Add also the wasted time away from work, the cost of gas, parking, stress/nerve etc. If we estimated the "savings" resulting from not going to a physical Pay-Office, we would see the project as an excellent system.

b) the payment issuer authority which has immediate access to these funds has elaborated and clear reports, does not waste time and money gathering, from the other centers, data about the carrying out (or not) of the payments.

I do not think that someone makes these calculations, not even persons belonging to the private area, although they are obvious. That "common sense" invoked by the majority is not that common. The good news is that the situation evolves. Daily.

How much do you think it will take until the online administrative payments will take over the traditional ones?

This is a difficult question. The DotCommerce domain is the online payment with cards and these numbers and statistics represent good news but we never deceived our part-

ners or the media. Lying characterizes other companies. The situations and numbers reported by everybody seem fantastic but the right questions are not asked. A clear answer: in Romania there are about 7 million cards. Almost double the active population of our country. It sounds good. Still the average of the monthly transactions per card is under three transactions. If we take into consideration the existence of a mass of users who carry out over 15 transactions per month, we obtain an average of two transactions. Namely, the advance and the liquidation!

The tendency is increasing, very good, the performances are among the best in Europe; but I prefer not to get too excited. We are businessmen not poets, IT specialists not dreamers in order to believe in IT or mentality miracles. I do not believe that in the next five years we will reach 50%. There is not even a competition between the offline and online payment because they are complementary methods with different targets. The one who talks about the online payment as a mass phenomenon did not study the psychogrammes and the analysis of the last two years. Not even USA can pretend to have something like this and they have an eight year advance compared to us.

Which do you think is the reason why people give up the traditional payment method (the physical presence in front of a pay-office, in front of a clerk and payment is carried out with cash) and become users of these systems?

There are several reasons known by any Romanian tax payer which will generate the success of the system. Firstly, we talk about the huge waste of time, nerves and energy necessary for the carrying out of direct payment at the pay-office. Secondly, I refer to the huge and sometimes kafkanian bureaucracy of the collecting system. We also have to mention the convenience (not to call it laziness in a good sense) that the online payment systems offer.

Besides the financial aspect, which are the additional advantages of carrying out the administrative payments through the online environment and of the elimination of the human factor in the citizen-state relation?

The medium and long run effects could be the following: a better tracing of the payments; the impossibility to fraud the IT system or of modifying the collected data, the reduction of the money collecting time, the reduction of the administration personnel and its relocation in other areas in which these well prepared clerks are needed; the increase of citizen satisfaction as far as the authority relationship is concerned.

As you can see, this project can lead to many improvements but it can also generate, in the long run, undesired changes. This is the reason why, the system will always run the risk of being stopped, modified or subordinated to interest groups. The IT systems are impersonal and unaffiliated to economical, political or other types of interests

According to your experience, what external model can the Romanian authorities follow?

I was never the adept of reinventing the wheel. Unfortunately, this opinion is not generalized and huge sums are used for "reinventing" it. The Romanian authorities can follow any successful model but they will be forced to follow the "compatible" successful models. I say this because USA have the most developed and used system of this sort but Romania is about to enter the European Union. In EU, the Nordic states have advanced and functional systems. In the projection of the "Pay-Office", we brought North American and British know-how adapted to the EU stipulation in the domain.

Would you bet on the "Virtual Pay-Office"?

If the person in the ministry, in charge of the project, will succeed in maintaining it independent and within the free market parameters then I can answer affirmatively. Today, I personally trust the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Zsolt Nagy and several of his co-workers with whom I have collaborated directly in the creation of the concepts that surveys this project. Therefore I would bet that this project will be a winning one on the short run. Coherence is a too often used word but unfortunately non-existing in practice.