

# Fast and Legally Secure

Axel Springer SE installs electronic process for generating reference letters more quickly



From recording task portfolios to generating assessments and signing reference letters – the HR department of the media group uses SAP integrated software by EASY SOFTWARE AG for these processes. The overall process is based on standard SAP functions, and runs in the SAP back end as a web solution, as well as in the Manager Self Service of the SAP HR portal.

Creating reference letters is certainly not a favourite activity in most HR departments. Often, there are simply more urgent things to take care of, meaning employees sometimes have to wait a while on their references. Until recently, this was the case at Axel Springer SE as well. To change things up, the media group installed an SAP integrated process by EASY SOFTWARE AG for reference letter generation. It effectively supports managers and the HR department in generating

reference letters. Employees receive legally secure and high-quality information using the system.

The HR departments at the Hamburg and Berlin locations of Axel Springer SE manage around 5,000 employees and prepare an average of 500 reference letters every year. This used to be done by hand using a variety of communication methods, which meant the process took quite some time.

“We need a balance between standardisation and customisation” said Ulrike Ruhrmann, Team Leader of HR administration in the personnel department of Axel Springer SE, “every employee wants a customised reference. However, in the HR team we also have to be faster and more efficient, which is why we want to support the reference letter process by adding software”.

**axel springer**

CLIENT

**Axel Springer SE**

Axel-Springer-Straße 65  
10888 Berlin  
[www.axelspringer.de](http://www.axelspringer.de)

INDUSTRY

Media

SOLUTION

EASY PCM Process2Design



## About the Company

**Even one of the largest media companies in Europe got its start in a garage. Axel Springer founded his publishing house in Hamburg in 1946; for the first year, the editorial department worked above a warehouse for tea and spices, often going without electricity and writing on borrowed typewriters. With the creation of the HAMBURGER ABENDBLATT, the founding of HÖRZU and BILD, and the early acquisition of DIE WELT, Axel Springer laid the groundwork for the success of the company. By consistently expanding its international presence, and becoming more efficient through digitisation, today Axel Springer SE is not only a market leader in German print journalism, but also has subsidiary companies, joint ventures, and licenses in 44 countries. Axel Springer SE generates more than a third of its revenue through international business and using digital media. Even today, digital media channels are responsible for over a third of the group's revenues, more than any other business unit.**

### Numbers

**Employees working in Berlin and Hamburg: around 5,000 Final and intermediate letters of reference per year: around 500**

Axel Spring handled this dichotomy in two ways: an electronic process for initiating and processing reference requests, and by providing pre-written text modules that can be modified and used again and again. They used the product EASY PCM Process2Design by EASY SOFTWARE.

### Browser-Based Application

The technical challenge in this project was that employees work with different operating systems within the group. Therefore, the project required a browser-based application that runs on all operating systems while at the same time being integrated into SAP for data import and export. It also needed to be expandable, since complex organisational structures like the ones at Axel Springer can make it difficult to roll out a standardised application, as Ulrike Fuhrmann knows. EASY SOFTWARE AG scored points in all of these areas, which is why we were chosen for the job.

### Involving the Worker's Council

The system isn't yet in use throughout the entire group, but rather was tested first in the group's subsidiaries Media Impact GmbH & Co. KG and Bild Digital GmbH & Co. KG for three months. The goal was to then discuss the bene-

fits of the solution with the entire Worker's Council over the course of 2013. Employee representatives are always interested in technical changes in the HR department. Is a standardised reference letter creation process truly in the interest of employees, and how can they benefit from it? The entire preparation and roll-out phase was marked by close collaboration with the general and group workers' councils.

### Security in Formulation through Text Modules

It took a whole year for the group to go from formulating a list of requirements to writing a call for tenders, selecting a product, technical design, and then final implementation. Before the first reference letter workflow could begin, the HR department had to first create a foundation by generating text modules they drafted with EASY PCM Process2Design to save in the SAP system. This was a major project that required a large amount of customisation; Axel Springer decided to categorise modules under eleven topics, and used a rating system ranging from very good to sufficient. Classic HR topics were covered, such as professional knowledge, continued education, perception, judgement and thinking ability, motivation, etc. First, the HR department drafted

texts for commercial clerks, planning to create texts for editors next. There are six text modules for each topic and rating, both for final and intermediate letters of reference. Some job descriptions were already available in the system; these could then be supplemented or edited, with some new descriptions being created.

All of these texts are now stored in the SAP back end system, and are accessed using PCM Process2Design for the reference creation process. For managers and employees in the HR department, this means they no longer have to create new texts every time they want to write a reference. Instead, they can refer back to standardised modules. To ensure references don't start sounding too rigid, reference creators can add anything they like to standard texts or expand them, then save their new versions as text templates. This means that the company is able to continue increasing the level of customisation in its references despite standardisation.

### HR Department Employees and Managers Initiate Processes

This means reference letters can be created with just the push of a button. This is how the process works in practice: Every line manager can initiate the creation of an intermediate reference for an employee assigned under them in the Manager Self Service

area of the SAP HR portal. In general, this process is triggered when the employee requests such a reference. HR clerks can do the same thing, although they use the Business Workplace in the SAP back end system instead of the HR portal. Unlike managers, they can initiate processes for all employees and also initiate final reference letters, which generally follow an employee's decision to leave the company.

During the first step in the workflow, the employee's master data is transferred from SAP HCM. Then, the system automatically suggests a manager to the reference letter recipient from the organisational management system. This manager then handles the assessment and signs the final reference. The initiator writes an introduction; the manager saves or adds to the job description, and then assesses the employee based on the eleven topics and using the ratings provided by selecting the right text module from the six available.

Once this is done, the manager generates a reference preview as the basis for their discussion with the employee. Employees can then submit any requests for changes based on it. Finally, the HR department is responsible for fine tuning and any necessary changes. The electronic workflow reminds the HR employee responsible



**“Every employee wants a customised reference.” However, in the HR team we also have to be faster and more efficient, which is why we wanted to standardise the reference process as much as possible. We handle the job with EASY PCM Process2Design”.**

Ulrike Fuhrmann, Team Leader of HR Administration at Axel Springer Personalservice GmbH



## HEADQUARTER

### GERMANY

#### EASY SOFTWARE AG

Am Hauptbahnhof 4  
D-45468 Mülheim an der Ruhr  
Phone: +49 208 45016-0  
Email: [info@easy.de](mailto:info@easy.de)  
Web: [www.easy.de](http://www.easy.de)

## SUBSIDIARIES

### AUSTRIA

#### EASY SOFTWARE GmbH

Mauermannstraße 8  
A-5023 Salzburg  
Phone: +43 662 461546  
Email: [office@easy-austria.at](mailto:office@easy-austria.at)  
Web: [www.easy-austria.at](http://www.easy-austria.at)

### GREAT BRITAIN

#### EASY SOFTWARE (UK) PLC.

Reflection House, The Anderson Centre,  
Olding Road, Bury St. Edmunds  
Suffolk, IP33 3TA, UK  
Phone: +44 1284 727870  
Email: [info@easysoftware.co.uk](mailto:info@easysoftware.co.uk)  
Web: [www.easysoftware.co.uk](http://www.easysoftware.co.uk)

### SINGAPORE

#### EASY SOFTWARE (ASIA PACIFIC) PTE. LTD.

4 Battery Road  
Bank of China Building, #25-01  
Singapore 049908  
Phone: +1 610 3508677  
Email: [info@easy.de](mailto:info@easy.de)  
Web: [www.easy.de](http://www.easy.de)

### TURKEY

#### EASY SOFTWARE Türkiye

Phone: +90 216 53774 50  
Email: [info@easy.de](mailto:info@easy.de)  
Web: [www.easy.de](http://www.easy.de)

### USA

#### EASY SOFTWARE INC.

102 Pickering Way, Suite 503  
Exton, PA 19341 USA  
Phone: +1 610 240 9260  
Email: [sales@easysoftware.us](mailto:sales@easysoftware.us)  
Web: [www.easysoftware.us](http://www.easysoftware.us)



if the process is delayed. If any involved party has the reference letter for more than seven days, they automatically receive a reminder. "Using EASY software, we always have an overview of which reference creation processes are currently under way, and what their status is", explains Ulrike Fuhrmann. The HR department has reserved the right to edit the layouts of references after the manager completes the assessment process. This allows them to fine tune between the selected text modules, as well as work in older intermediate references after the fact. These are only available after the introduction of SAP HCM in 2008; the HR department employee has to add any earlier information from the contractual data manually from the employee history.

After fine tuning, the HR department employee gives the reference to the manager for a signature, as well as to

the responsible HR Business Partner, who functions as an interface between the specific department and service areas of the HR department. This is where the only media shift takes place within the entire process, as reference letters are still signed by hand. The signature concludes the reference workflow, and the employee receives their reference. The HR department saves the workflow for another three months, in case any changes or questions come up, then deletes the reference in accordance with data privacy requirements. Only a PDF of the final reference remains in the employee's electronic personnel file.

The days when employees had to deal with long waits for their references are now over for the two pilot departments. Piece by piece, the group plans to expand the workflow for other areas, all while maintaining close collaboration with the Worker's Council.