

Information is king

The Italian Chambers of Commerce are public bodies entrusted to serve and promote Italian businesses through over 300 branch offices located throughout the country. InfoCamere ScpA, the technological arm of the Italian Chambers' system, helps them in pursuing their goals by managing their information stores and providing state-of-the-art digital services. Years before the Internet came into being, it pioneered a telephone-based network connecting all of the Chambers of Commerce and continues to be an innovator more than 40 years later.



Managing Director Paolo Ghezzi

InfoCamere started life as Cerved (Centro Regionale Veneto Elaborazione Dati, or the Data Processing Center for the Veneto Region), when it was founded in Padua in December 1974. The then-President of the Chamber of Commerce and Professor of Probability at Padua University, Professor Mario Volpato, had the vision to use the emerging potential of computer and telematic technologies to improve the efficiency of the Chamber of Commerce. His insight led directly to the digitization of the

business registers, making the information they contained available from any Chamber of Commerce office within the Veneto region. "It was the first time that this had been done for a public office and revolutionized the ease of access to information for businesses and professionals," says Managing Director Paolo Ghezzi. "Within ten years, the whole of Italy was covered by the network."

Today, InfoCamere manages the information kept by all of the Chambers of Commerce in Italy. It uses state-of-the-art servers and software to manage a database

with information about more than six million registered companies. The information is stored in an advanced data center based on open environments and integrating market-leading technologies in the fields of virtualization, systems hardware, storage systems, control systems and software. "The architecture is designed to meet the dual requirements of storage and retrieval to make the information searchable according to a wide range of different parameters," explains Mr. Ghezzi. "We have also developed sophisticated systems for integrating the information contained in the databases of

the Chambers of Commerce with other public information systems, making it possible to supply data in bulk, rather than delivering pre-existing, individual official documents, such as search results or balance sheets. Our records are accessible to all – the public, public authorities and industry professionals."

The information held by the Chambers of Commerce consists primarily of the business register in which all Italian companies are listed. The register also contains ten million listed individuals: entrepreneurs, shareholders, directors, auditors and managers. The register is in constant flux as new start-ups are added or existing companies cease trading. Keeping the register up to date is an ongoing process that is greatly facilitated by digitization. "Italy was the first country in Europe to have a completely digital business register," says Mr. Ghezzi. "The emphasis on digitization continues today along with the Government's effort to reduce our digital gap with Europe." Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi has



To coincide with Expo 2015, InfoCamere translated all six million entries in the business register into English



InfoCamere's operational offices in Padua

thrown his weight behind digital innovation and is pushing for access to public administration services for every citizen via a personal login. InfoCamere has already begun the process, and 1.5 million of the ten million individuals listed on the register already have access to the Chambers' database – as well as other public online resources – via CNS certificate (National Service Card, a standardized digital identification system). “We are working to allow each entrepreneur to access public administration services, including the register, via a single point of contact known as the SUAP (Sportello Unico Attività

Produttive) entrusted to each of the 8,000 Italian municipalities,” says Mr. Ghezzi. “We look forward to achieving this goal very soon, thanks to the portal www.impresainungiorno.it, which InfoCamere created to help local authorities fulfill their task through standardized procedures already available in more than 3,400 local municipalities.”

Despite the high-profile backing of the Italian Government and Italy's early adoption of a digital business register, digitization is not seen as the top priority for all Italian businesses. “Astonishingly, when we

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conducted a survey of companies at the beginning of the year, four out of ten company directors said that they did not see the Internet as vital for their business,” says Mr. Ghezzi. “However, our research shows that if companies fail to engage with the Internet and the e-commerce revolution, they significantly weaken their competitive position in the market. It is a cultural issue that we must engage with.” Nevertheless, InfoCamere is forging ahead with its pioneering approach. To coincide with Expo 2015 in Milan, the company translated all six million company entries in the business register into English. “In the first three months of 2016 alone, we had over 25,000 foreign enquiries from 82 different countries hoping to get in touch with a specific company on the register,” says Mr. Ghezzi. “These enquiries generate income for the Chambers of Commerce and business opportunities for the companies listed.” InfoCamere is able to guarantee the accuracy of the information it delivers through a variety of security measures including QR codes embedded into registra-

tion certificates. Being at the heart of the national business information system, InfoCamere has taken up a number of projects on behalf of the Chambers of Commerce, such as helping them play the role of LEI (Legal entity identifier) within the global LEI system, a framework of trusted institutions which in every country provide trusted identification to recognize and authorize worldwide bank transfers. “Last December we celebrated our anniversary with the claim ‘40 years of future’,” Mr. Ghezzi says. “I believe this encapsulates very well who we are: old enough to be trusted, young enough to take up the challenge of continuous innovation.”



InfoCamere's servers contain information about six million registered companies and ten million individuals



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