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Management Consultants

B BRENNTAG

Data Excellence with Hyperautomation

Virtual Assistant for Product Requests

Client Success Story

Virtual Assistant as Part of Larger MDM Initiative

Establishing guided product creation with conversational AI

The Brenntag Group is a world market leader in full-line chemical and ingredient distribution. Brenntag North America introduced a virtual assistant for the creation of new products in the SAP MDG master data system as part of a larger MDM transformation initiative with a focus on North America.

The virtual assistant created a standardized, digital process for product creation in the leading master data system. This applies to more than 5,000 product requests that were made annually by the business and processed by SAP experts (data stewards).

The main problems were:
- decentralized inquiries
- little to no standardization in incoming product requests
- delays in product creation
- data redundancy in master data due to duplicate product creation
- initial errors in product creation
- no consistent reporting on product requests possible,
- limited potential exploitation of the master data governance workflow
- and a high employee workload.

The virtual assistant collects and standardizes all relevant product information to guarantee high data quality for further processing.

The implementation of the virtual assistant enabled the creation process to be channeled, digitized, and standardized. As a result, nearly 500 business users can centrally perform a guided product creation via a Microsoft Teams integration. Several scenarios for product requests are integrated into the backend of the virtual assistant to support users for each product type.

Stephen Rostick, MDM & Data Governance Director Americas,
Brenntag North America

With digital data introduction processes, we are laying the foundation for further growth: they help us standardize and harmonize in a decentralized organization, thus increasing process efficiency. The process transparency we have gained helps us daily in operational control.

New Products in the Chemical Industry: A Time-Consuming Process

In the chemical industry, new products are established in close contact between vendors and the distributing company. When entering new product information into a leading master data system, a high level of accuracy and quality must be ensured. Typically, this process requires intensive exchange and interaction between vendors and distribution companies, resulting in frequent and extensive unstructured email and phone communication to gather all necessary information.
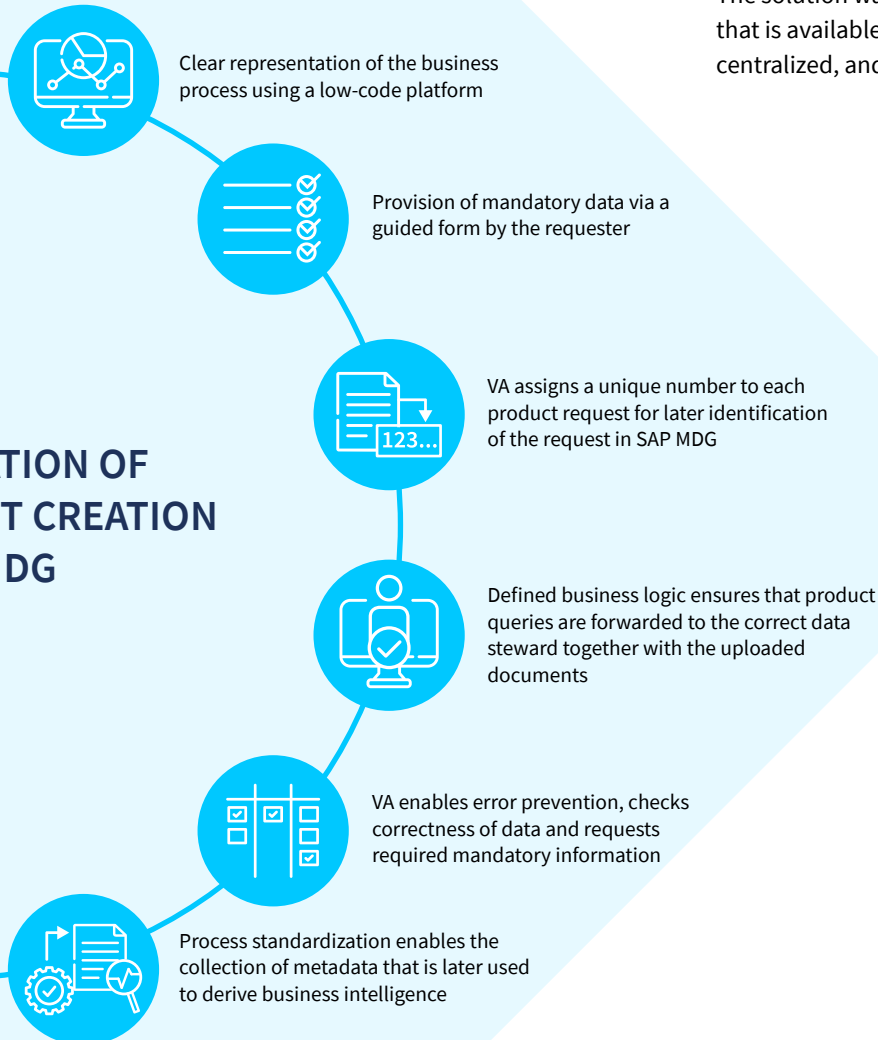
UP TO 24 HOURS

▶ Sales employees work with suppliers and vendors on new products (= product requester)

▶ Information (producer, name, packaging information, quantity, sales, etc.) is provided about a new product

▶ Product creation for new products using the service requires experts (data stewards)

▶ Data stewards receive requests through multiple channels (paper, phone, email, etc.)

▶ Data stewards check that the data are complete and enter the information into the master data system (SAP MDG)

▶ If the information is incomplete (documents are missing, information is incorrect), there is a need for communication between the requester and the data steward

▶ The missing information is updated by mail / telephone in a non-standardized process

AI-based User Support for Product Creation Workflow

One-stop-shop for submitting a product request

There were two goals for the new solution: accelerating the product creation process for North America and standardizing the workflow in order to collect all necessary information to set up a new product in the leading master data system.
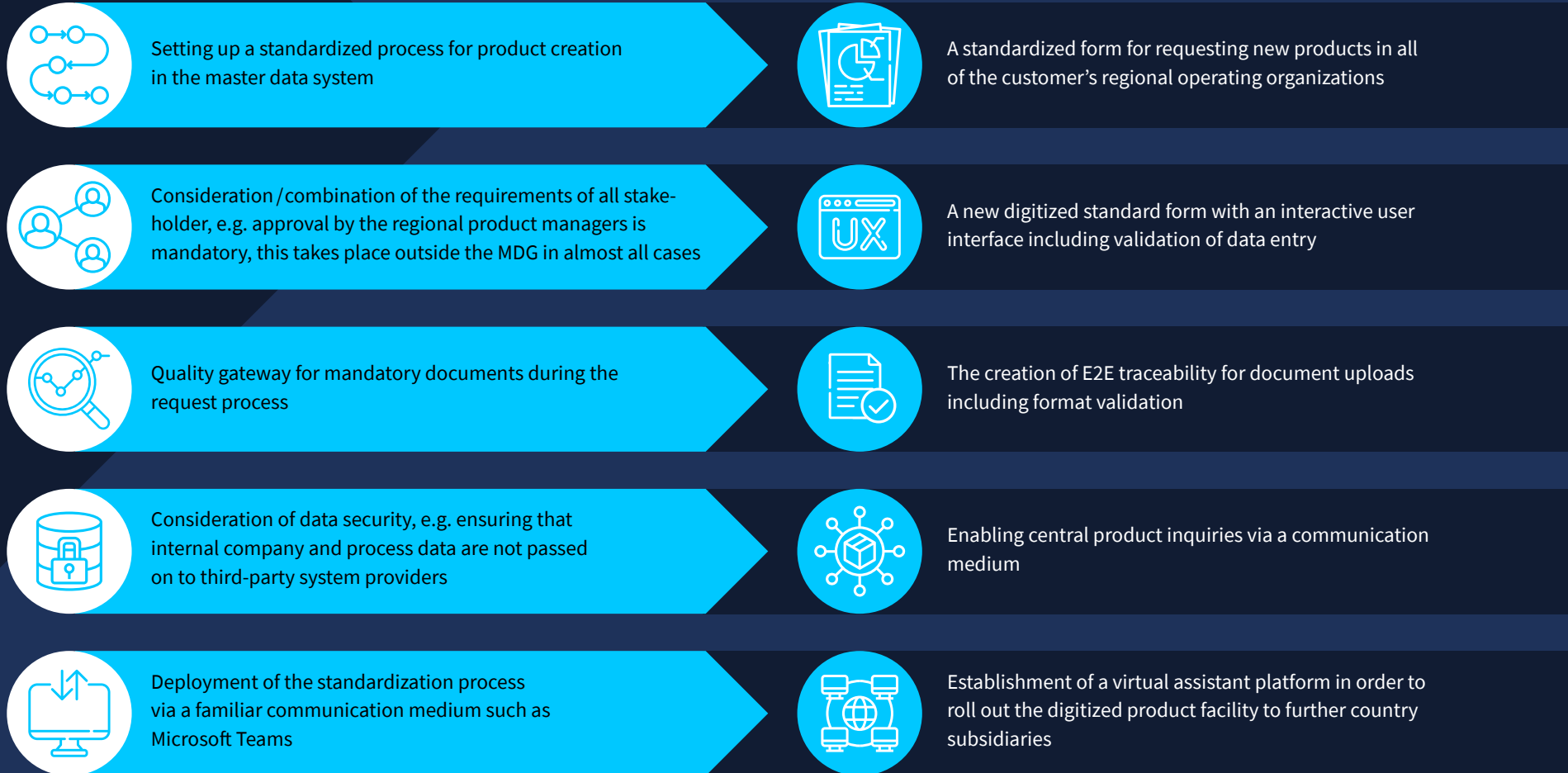
The solution was an artificial intelligence (AI)-based Virtual Assistant (VA) in Microsoft Teams, that is available 24/7 across multiple channels. It enables requesters to initiate a standardized, centralized, and digital pre-process for product requests for Brenntag North America.

Clear representation of the business process using a low-code platform

Provision of mandatory data via a guided form by the requester

VA assigns a unique number to each product request for later identification of the request in SAP MDG

AUTOMATION OF PRODUCT CREATION IN SAP MDG

Defined business logic ensures that product queries are forwarded to the correct data steward together with the uploaded documents

VA enables error prevention, checks correctness of data and requests required mandatory information

Process standardization enables the collection of metadata that is later used to derive business intelligence

The virtual assistant is available 24/7 through Microsoft Teams and can be used from PCs and mobile devices. When using the service, a requester must answer a series of predefined questions and upload mandatory documents to proceed through a predefined process. The answers are standardized, summarized, and displayed to the requester for final confirmation. Once the request is confirmed, both the requester and a designated data steward receive an email confirming the request and the data that have been submitted for further processing.

Applying the Hyperautomation Framework enables organizations to automate processes end to end. Combining various automation technologies to process data across different master data systems and multiple channels enables a seamless integration of data transfers across interfaces. In this particular instance, conversational AI was implemented to support sales users/business users in a conversational environment in performing product requests without subject matter expertise in master data management, reducing the effort needed for management on the part of master data stewards.

Finding

In order to address and reconcile all stakeholder requirements and the many variants of the different operating organizations, a standardized product creation process is required.

Setting up a standardized process for product creation in the master data system

A standardized form for requesting new products in all of the customer's regional operating organizations

Consideration / combination of the requirements of all stakeholder, e.g. approval by the regional product managers is mandatory, this takes place outside the MDG in almost all cases

A new digitized standard form with an interactive user interface including validation of data entry

Quality gateway for mandatory documents during the request process

The creation of E2E traceability for document uploads including format validation

Consideration of data security, e.g. ensuring that internal company and process data are not passed on to third-party system providers

Enabling central product inquiries via a communication medium

Deployment of the standardization process via a familiar communication medium such as Microsoft Teams

Establishment of a virtual assistant platform in order to roll out the digitized product facility to further country subsidiaries

Overcoming Communication Hurdles with Automation

The Virtual Assistant establishes a user-friendly product creation process via Microsoft Teams. It guides the users through the process with questions and prompts them to upload information. This reduces the average processing time for the creation of a product, since all mandatory information must be provided in a structured manner. This involves more than 5,000 product requests.

The project was carried out digitally and virtually with stakeholders from various organizational units of Brenntag North America, including Master Data Management, IT, and Sales.

In addition, two country organizations (USA and Canada) with different focal points were integrated into the virtual assistant implementation project. A hybrid deployment of our consultants from Germany and a local team was chosen. Test workshops could thus be carried out in an integrated manner's trust in modern communication channels.
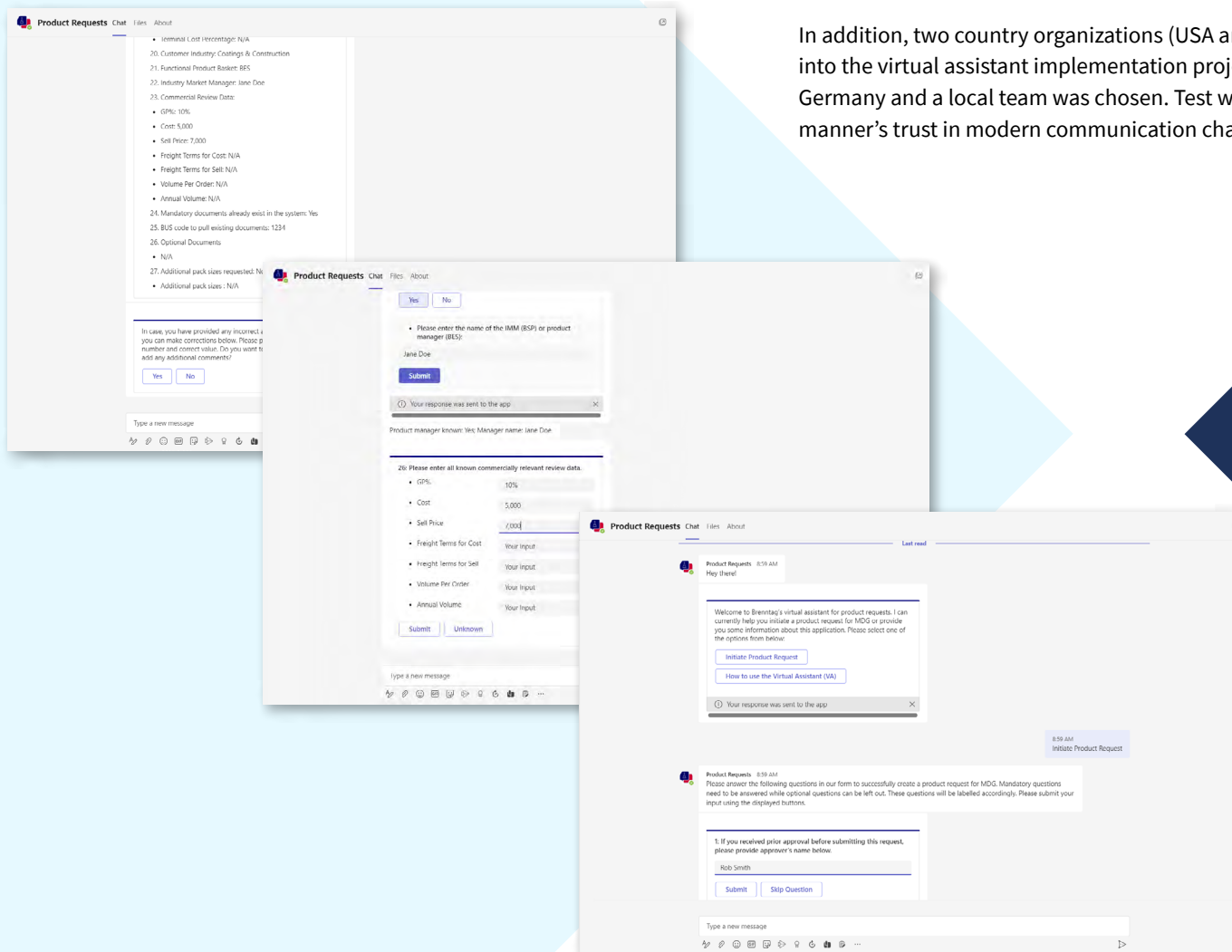
CLIENT SATISFACTION

The use of new technologies like AI enables the time- and location-independent creation of new products. This helps overcome delays in product creation stemming from communication hurdles. Sales staff can request product attachments in the master data management system while they are engaged in supplier negotiations. This leads to an increase in the quality of the relevant data. It also strengthens employees' trust in modern communication channels.

The Companies

Brenntag North America

Brenntag North America is a subsidiary of Brenntag SE, the global market leader in chemical and ingredients distribution. We offer comprehensive solutions as well as individual chemical products throughout North America.

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Camelot Management Consultants

We are a global management and technology consulting firm focusing on value chain management. Our mission: turning our clients' value chains into a competitive advantage and creating lasting impact where our clients need it most. By combining our industry focus, value chain process expertise, and technology know-how, we guide our clients from strategy to sustainable technology adoption.

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