

# iSpis

## SaaS – Software as a Service

Let's start by expanding or simply refreshing our understanding of the concept and explaining the meaning of the above acronym, which is not yet widely known in our environment but this surely due to change in the coming years.

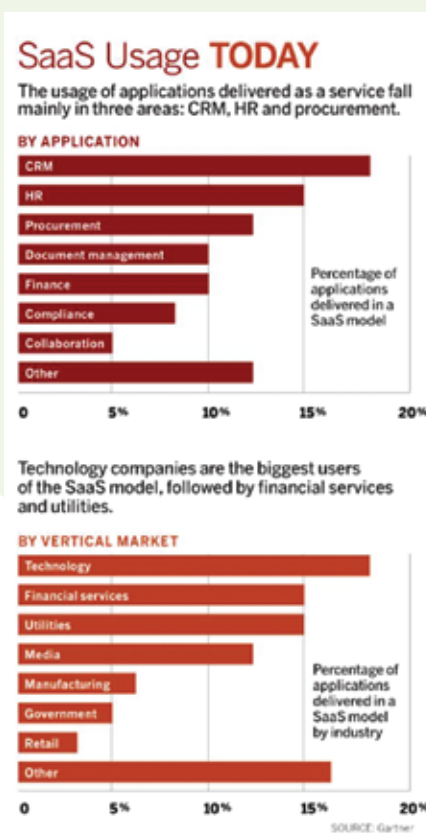
Let's take a look at Wikipedia and examine a few basic facts:

- SaaS stands for "Software as a service".
- While the concept of software as a service is now in its teens, the acronym itself dates back to 2001 (Strategic Backgrounder: Software as a Service; Software & Information Industry, eBusiness Division, February 2001).
- In 1999 the concept of SaaS was considered to be "gaining acceptance in the marketplace" (Service Based software; Bennet et al., 1999).
- The basic characteristics of the SaaS are: network/internet-based access to, and management of, commercially available software, the software is installed at central locations on a remote server (usually on the service provider's premises), where maintenance, administration, upgrading and other activities take place, and no action is required on the user's premises ...
- The application is adapted to the user's environment (i.e. web browser) and requires no additional investment into the user's infrastructure.
- The fee for using SaaS application normally depends on the number of users and the term of the lease; initial costs are minimal or even non-existent, and current costs are entirely foreseeable, which is especially important in times of recession (which seems to be

iSPIS is enlisted in IBM Lotus Business Solutions Catalog

Ready for

**IBM** | **Lotus**  
software



Picture 1. Structure of SaaS applications – Projection for 2008  
(source: [http://www.cio.com/article/109706/The\\_Truth\\_About\\_Software\\_as\\_a\\_Service\\_SaaS\\_](http://www.cio.com/article/109706/The_Truth_About_Software_as_a_Service_SaaS_)).

approaching). There are practically no extra costs or even need for increasing the user's IT staff as a result of using SaaS applications.

- Internet systems today are fast and reliable enough, the security procedures are transparent and trustworthy.

Another positive characteristic of the SaaS concept is that services can now include archiving, back-ups, data importing and

Interesting reading about SaaS:

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Software\\_as\\_a\\_Service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Software_as_a_Service)
- <http://alexbarnett.net/blog/archive/2008/01/13/8-trends-in-software-as-a-service-platforms.aspx>
- <http://blogs.zdnet.com/SAAS/?p=432>
- <http://blogs.zdnet.com/SAAS/?p=160&tag=rbxccnbzd1>
- <http://blogs.zdnet.com/SAAS/?p=323&tag=rbxccnbzd1>
- <http://www.computerworld.com/action/article.do?command=viewArticleBasic&articleId=9017780>

exporting etc. - all of this at a much lower cost than we as users could afford. We are therefore on our way to accepting SaaS applications as a service.

SaaS applications are now entering all important areas of application and all major market types. Figure 1 illustrates a projection of SaaS application usage by type and area of implementation for 2008.

## Decree on Administrative Operations (DAO)

The Decree on Administrative Operations applies to all public administration bodies, administrations of self-governing local communities and other legal entities and natural persons, unless provided otherwise in this Decree or other regulations. DAO contains provisions for administrative operations, which includes business and working hours, office hours, use of premises and equipment, management of documentary archives, communication with customers and other publics, official actions, conducting business in languages of ethnic communities and supervision of implementation of this Decree.

The main purpose of the Decree is to increase the expediency, efficiency, improve customer relations, transparency, efficiency of use of the public bodies' business hours, eliminating disorder present in certain public administration bodies, and not simply record documents and cases which would serve as proof as to which documents were received, resolved and archived by an administrative body for later use.

It combines the rules which govern these



### Legislation

DAO:  
[http://zakonodaja.gov.si/rpsi/r02/predpis\\_URED3602.html](http://zakonodaja.gov.si/rpsi/r02/predpis_URED3602.html)  
<http://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?urlid=200520&stevilka=690>  
 General Administrative Procedure Act (ZUP):  
[http://zakonodaja.gov.si/rpsi/r03/predpis\\_ZAKO1603.html](http://zakonodaja.gov.si/rpsi/r03/predpis_ZAKO1603.html)  
[http://zakonodaja.gov.si/rpsi/r04/predpis\\_ZAKO4814.html](http://zakonodaja.gov.si/rpsi/r04/predpis_ZAKO4814.html)  
<http://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?urlid=200624&stevilka=970>

bodies' customer transactions, public relations, use of premises and equipment, management of documentary archives, tasks and responsibilities, serving writs, performance of official actions (obtaining and forwarding information). Most solutions are based on applicable regulations, amended or supplemented on the basis of practical experience from everyday administrative activities.

SRC.SI created an application to support electronic transaction of employees in public administration staff, which complies with Decree on Document Management by Public Administration Bodies and the appertaining Instructions for Implementation of the Decree.

## iSpis – the why?

SPIS (this time without the initial lowercase 'i') is an application developed by SRC.SI, well-known by public administration employees since it has provided them with a fast, easy electronic document management support, which complies with the relevant legislation (see links). iSpis application was inspired by the idea of offering a similar application to users working in relatively small user groups for whom large investments in IT would be unrealistic and could never become part of their financial plans for the following year.

Who are these target users? When designing the iSpis application we had in mind mainly smaller municipalities and public institutes which are also bound by the Decree on Administrative Operations. Of course, iSpis can

also be available to those not legally bound by these regulations (ZUP, DAO) to conduct business in this manner, but still choosing it as a guideline to improve their operations involving procedures, to introduce traceability, to gain a better overview over procedures... and last but not least, to keep abreast with the times without large initial investments and with foreseeable current costs, allowing them to transfer their documents and procedures onto an electronic medium.

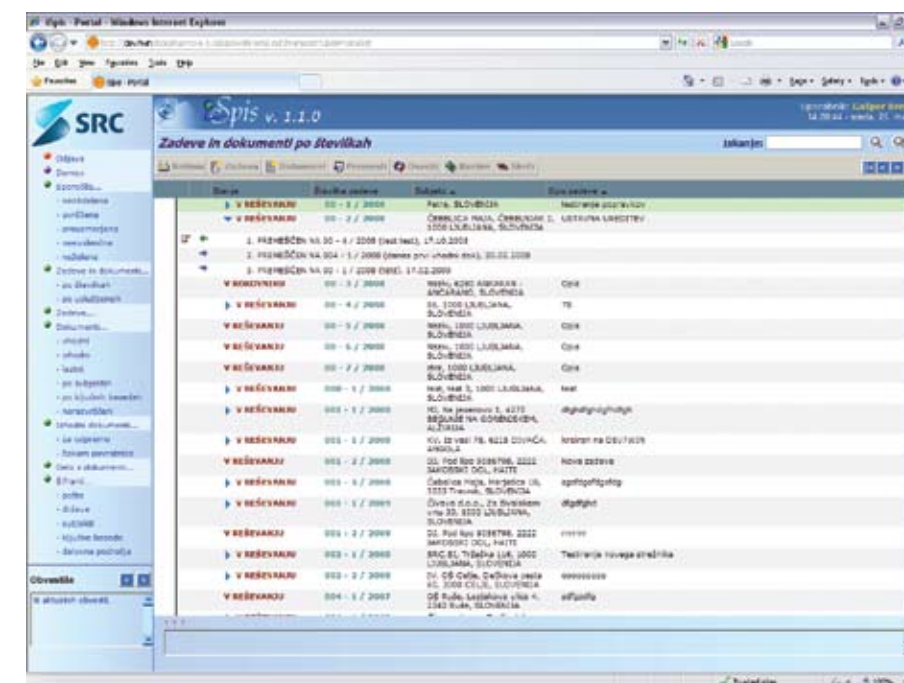
And so we asked ourselves: "How should we go about finding a solution for this?". The answer is: by sticking an "i" (as in "internet") prefix in front of SPIS and putting it on the internet.

## iSpis – the where?, what? and how?

First, a few technical facts about the application. As a data (document) repository and application, iSpis resides on the Domino server. Those of you who are familiar with Lotus Notes and Domino will immediately think of the high level of security offered by its ACL (Access Control List) system which ensures that only authorized persons have access to a particular document, setting or data.

iSpis application consists of a large number of databases. I will not tell you the exact number

Picture 2. iSpis application

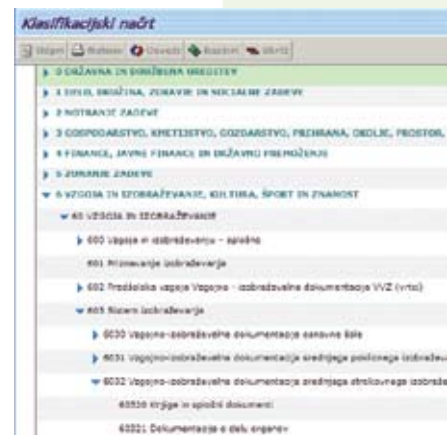


as that is irrelevant from the user's point of view. Allow me to mention only those which are directly accessible and visible to the end user. These include: Mail collection (Messages), Cases and documents, Operating database and Permanent database. There are more databases which the user does not notice directly in the course of their work, but can be seen in selection lists - I will speak about these later. The entire range of databases can be accessed through the basic portal structure, so the user is intuitively aware of the fact that they are dealing with multiple document databases. They only see the application itself which helps them manage documents and work with them within these databases (Picture 2).

Logging plan, Classification plan and Office orders are databases we prepare in the service initialization phase (when setting up the application) for a known user. The Classification plan (prescribed by the MPA and mandatory for all public bodies) is directly accessible to the end user (Figure 3), but cannot be changed; the data from the Logging plan and Office orders databases can be seen when working with documents in the form of selection lists.

Another important database is the iSpis - Code register. This contains a list of countries and Slovenian post offices, which must be

Picture 3. Excerpt from the Classification Plan



supplemented by lists of entities, keywords, fields of activity and case types. All code registers, including the two provided, can be managed, edited, modified and supplemented. Of course, the most extensive code register will most likely be the register of entities which they work with. Because the user already has such a list in one electronic format or another, it would be useful if the user to convert and import it into the iSpis code register, as they probably don't want to be forced to re-enter hundreds of entries from scratch. The reason they chose to use the procedure management application is most likely that they want to use it to manage procedures quickly and efficiently as soon as possible.

### Electronic documents and working with iSpis

The basic unit of the electronic document database is a "case", which can contain three types of subordinate documents - incoming, outgoing and internal documents. Cases can have different statuses depending on the stage within the procedure (e.g. pending, cancelled, resolved etc.), and these statuses can change according to the predefined office

orders. During the procedure documents can be added or moved into another case, and outgoing documents can be sent, outgoing mail delivery slips can be logged etc. We can request opinions for outgoing documents, send them for approval or signing, or simply forward courtesy copies of documents. We can also provide opinions, approve or sign the documents ourselves. The user can view different types of histories across the entire document management process, e.g. history of documents assigned to a case, history of actions performed, history of sending (Figure 4), moving, signing etc. Locating a specific document is easy using different database views, e.g. by file, by employee, by subject, by keyword, by document type... and if that is not enough (let us not forget that our document database can become rather large), we can also perform full-text searches of the collection to search all documents for a text string in any field.

Picture 4. Example of the history of mailed items: sent by delivery receipt on 21.4., delivery receipt returned on 13.6



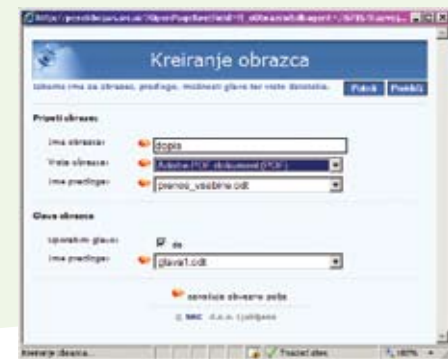
We can also use special filtered lists, such as outgoing documents, documents pending mailing, documents awaiting delivery receipts, documents pending approval or signature, etc. All views also feature thumbnails which indicate a particular detail about the document, e.g. type of document (incoming, outgoing,

internal), status (outgoing document in preparation, pending mailing, sent). (Figure 2.)

### Forms

In the myriad of specifications perhaps we should devote a few words to forms. In iSpis the term "form" refers to documents laid out for printing and mailing. Forms can be generated

Picture 5. Creating a form in PDF format.



based on outgoing documents. The basis for the forms are predefined (OpenOffice) templates which, in addition to general text, also contain information about content fields which need to be filled into the form from the electronic document. When the create form command is initiated, a special application (running on another server) fills the template with relevant data taken from the active electronic document and attaches the completed form to the electronic document as an enclosure. The user can choose between a variety of different form formats: PDF (Adobe Acrobat), DOC (Word), ODT (OpenOffice) and optional addition of a header (Figure 5). The completed form can then be used for printing or e-mailed directly. Preparation of form templates is currently available as part of a variety of extra services.

### User friendly = fast and efficient

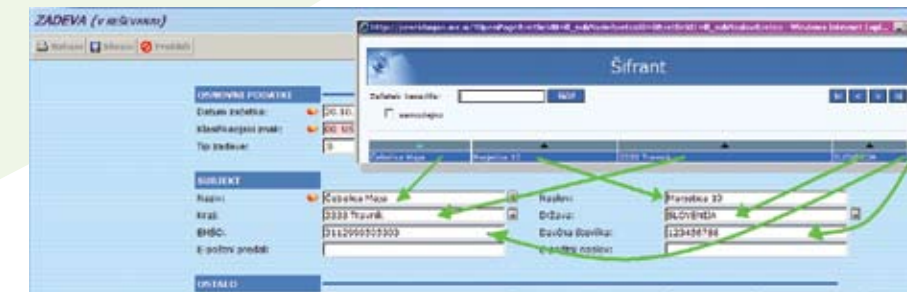
Allow me to describe a few approaches which we didn't come up with ourselves but we sifted through the many "hip" things available today and gladly included them in the development of our application, as they allow the user to work quickly, accurately and transparently. In order to enter data comfortably, it is essential to select existing records from code registers using selection lists. We tried to make these (visually and technically) well-organized, intuitive, clear and quick. We added the automatic search option which dynamically "moves" the user to the relevant part of the list as they type the search string in the search box - all that the user has to do is to click the right selection (Figure 6); after selecting the desired result, as many fields as possible are filled in, even those which were not visible in the selection list (Figure 7); in the case of less intuitive lists (classification plan) we also enabled full text search for comments (Figure 8 - the search will return all hits where the search string appears anywhere in the description field - comment).

We could point out many more gems for the user but it should be enough for a first impression.

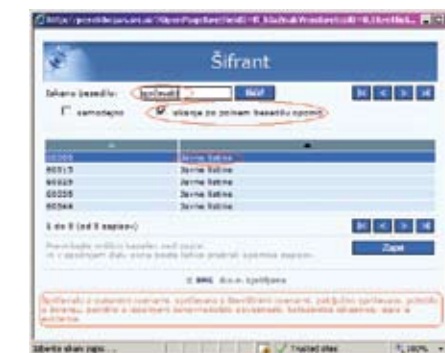
Picture 6. Autosearch function: the user types in the string "spo" and as he typed that the application displayed the relevant number of records out of a list containing 458 post offices without a touch of the mouse or press of any key.



Picture 7. Upon selection of the entity all the relevant fields are filled-in (eight fields if the code register contains all the necessary data).



Picture 8. Search by classification plan (the search string "certificate" ("spričevalo")) returns 5 hits, and the full description of the first item is displayed in the lower portion of the window.



### SaaS and iSpis – yea or nay?

SaaS won us over - and so we made iSpis. Let SaaS win you over, too - iSpis, a powerful tool at your fingertips.

Bojan Pesek  
Julijana Horvat

### What does an iSpis user need?

Not much: a PC with an internet browser (Internet Explorer and Firefox are currently supported), a good internet connection and the desire to conduct electronic procedures and manage relevant documents in a manner which is a little different than what we were accustomed to.

From a satisfied user:  
"We have been using iSpis for about a year. We made our first steps with a little support from SRC.SI, and today iSpis is a familiar tool we use every day and are very satisfied with."  
secretary, Drava Student Dormitories, Maribor

