DOTTING THE I’S IN IT
VDAB innovates with information

more information on vdab.be
Imagine if we didn’t have internet banking, no booking.com, amazon.com or zalando.be, no emails or text messages, no Google, Wikipedia, etc. All the things we take for granted today but which didn’t even exist yesterday. We learned - often in our home environment and from our children - that sending short text messages via our mobile phone is much handier than writing a long letter. We discovered that emails are faster and don’t need stamps, and that we can book a hotel and a flight in the evening without needing the travel agency to be open. Yet quite often VDAB still has paper on its mind. An A5, an A7 or an A7b.

Imagine that socially vulnerable groups were the early adopters of mobile phones and were the first to own flat screens and “digicorders” (digital recorder set top boxes). Young people that flow into the labour market today are digital natives, obsessed with smartphones, the internet, apps and social media. Do we optimally use this group’s precious channels, with which it is so familiar, to approach these individuals? Is digital perhaps synonymous with antisocial? Or do these innovations offer numerous unknown possibilities for making new types of connections between supply and demand in the labour market in a totally different and more interactive manner?

There is still a considerable lack of knowledge, ignorance and sometimes suspicion of these new media and channels. And yet these innovative, intelligent tools and apps offer us the opportunity to focus more on those who really need us! Undoubtedly also because there are experienced people behind these tools: mediators, instructors, counsellors, consultants, as well as service line staff, e-coaches, social media teams, etc.

And for those who have any doubts: to me, digital is also decidedly social!
Organisations such as VDAB must make maximum use of innovation (IT), technically but also in terms of processes and work organisation. Flexible where necessary, always helpful and reliable and certainly also proud of our knowledge, abilities and operations. This also involves requirements in terms of IT implementation. Our first work information system (WIS) computers were to the labour market what the Commodore 64 was to the home market. Today, we use apps, web-based learning, Twitter, useful websites, virtual fairs and tools to impress you.

Just imagine, VDAB is sitting on a mountain of information about job vacancies and job seekers. What impact would we make in the labour market as the orchestrating “trusted advisor” that makes optimal use of this info and makes it available to all our partners in the labour market? Round-the-clock solutions, online forms and CV screening, why would it be so strange? You can stop, rewind, fast forward and record a TV programme. But what about work? Just imagine a labour mediator and trainer that couldn’t keep up with the times.

Fons Leroy
Managing Director VDAB
A warm welcome bridges the gap between employers and job seekers.

Everyone’s a mediator? Then I am too.

Maggy Lecoq was named “friendliest receptionist” and is a mediator just like everyone else.

An effective quality matching process already starts with the welcome. A warm welcome makes job seekers more enthusiastic about working with the consultant to find the right employer. A customer-focused reception immediately identifies the employer’s wishes. This will enable the company to recruit the best candidate.
Introduction

An IT team can only elevate an organisation to a higher level if it works closely with the business actors. And of course vice versa! Technology transcends the bits and bytes. IT staff must be aware of what is taking place in the labour market. How is it evolving? What do job seekers expect? What are the shortage occupations? What are the needs of your organisation’s staff need to be a true “orchestrator” in your sector? An orchestrator that, nota bene, is not constantly trailing behind trends, but one that knows what is about to happen and knows how to use this information to develop an even better service.

During a recent VDAB management visit to the “HP Labs”, they were struck by the following remarkable statement: “the T in IT is becoming smaller and the I bigger”. An effective IT approach is about revolves around information and how it can be converted into value. It is this essential “I” in IT that smart organisations focus on.

Since its foundation, VDAB has used technology in order to accomplish its mission and objectives as best and as quickly as possible. To continue to be a valuable player - a frontrunner, one that steers the market, IT is still and will increasingly act as the driving force behind the VDAB strategy.

The first chapter, “Tools to better manage the labour market and develop competences”, focuses on the VDAB applications. What tools are there and which ones do we continue have to develop? We present a review of, for example, the development of the “My Career” platform, competence-based matching, the Personal Development Plan (PDP), competence development tools and the job vacancy platform for companies.

Applications generate a considerable amount of data, which we can convert into information. In Chapter 2, “Innovating with information”, we explain how we can better analyse internal and external information sources, and especially how we use the results of these analyses to allow us to be more proactive in responding to the needs of our internal and external customers. Encouraging open data also creates new possibilities. As an orchestrator in the labour market, this enables VDAB to assume the role of “trusted advisor” within our knowledge society.

In Chapter 3, “Our cooperation platform in the cloud”, we explore the new ways of cooperating made possible through the introduction of the Google cooperation platform in VDAB in more detail. Information is not only more accessible internally, but also enables faster and more flexible cooperation with all external stakeholders.
Chapter 4 “Job seeking tailored to young people”

In this chapter, we zoom in on the needs of our young people and the digital services specifically tailored to them.

For those less familiar with the VDAB strategy and the ICT possibilities, the appendix includes two additional chapters that you can read first or in between.

- In “A strategy tailored to the labour market”, we provide additional background information related to the VDAB strategy and how it translates into additional and/or new ICT components.
- If you first want to review all the trends that play a role in our modern technological world, don’t hesitate to consult “Today’s top IT trends”.

“Dare to inspire, to be fair and to show respect” (“durF Inspireren, Eerlijk te zijn en Respect te tonen”): these are our VDAB values.

In other words be PROUD (FIER). And we are. Not only of our IT achievements in recent years or of the work done by our teams, individuals or projects, but especially of achieving our joint final objective, together “Everyone’s a Mediator” (“Iedereen Bemiddelaar”).

We are happy to demonstrate how our IT staff are also mediators.

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1. In the spring of 2013, VDAB introduced an internal change process called “Everyone’s a mediator” which focused heavily on the core mission “mediating between supply and demand” in the labour market.
Tools to better orchestrate the labour market and develop competences

“You can’t ask customers what they want and then try to give that to them. By the time you get it built, they’ll want something new.”
(Steve Jobs)

If your target of approximately 220,000 active job seekers shifts to around 4.5 million people of working age in Flanders, it is obviously no longer possible for everyone to be personally supported by a consultant. In recent years, VDAB has focused on exploring and testing modern service channels to support the face-to-face approach. Two pillars in this area are the VDAB website and our service line, which have both been extensively developed and offer a broad basic service. We also cater to a modern audience’s communication needs with the judicious use of a mix of channels. Here are some examples of our achievements: automatic matching of CVs and job vacancies, a “career platform” where the citizen manages his or her career, customised emails and the development of an E-counter with an online appointment calendar. Options also include online chatting and job application coaching with “hangouts”.

We use consultants as much as possible for supporting job seekers that need more than the self-service and e-tools that are available. Their experience and know-how is most relevant in this role and they offer an obvious added value. When supporting these job seekers, the consultants identify their individual needs and use them as a basis to provide tailored help and support (balanced, tailor-made approach).

Competence-based matching for a smart version of “MY CAREER”

“My Career”, our digital platform, is essential in our role as career orchestrator. This powerful tool allows active Flemish people to save, fully manage and use their personal career information efficiently. It means they are able to make career choices and transition into the labour market more easily.

One fine example of competency-based matching “tailored to the client” is the “Job Indicator”. These are smart reports comprising data from the various VDAB applications that our consultants can retrieve with just a few clicks. These “Job indicator” overviews combine data from several sources: data from customer and job vacancy databases are combined with information from our campaign tool, competency matching
and “customised emails”. What’s more, the “Job Indicator” is being further developed. Our customers will also be able to consult this information in the future.

It will allow someone, for example, to be suggested a position with a number of competences that are similar to his or her previous position as a “communication consultant”, but which he or she may not have thought about before. The right job is not always the most obvious choice.

The underlying objective of this approach is to expand the scale of possible jobs and to increase the number of suitable job vacancies. This working method allows jobs to be suggested to the client using a tailor-made approach.

This smart way of managing supply and demand in the labour market can be highly beneficial, especially for filling a number of shortage occupations - such as technical profiles and those from a large number of specialist construction professions or nurses, IT experts, specialist white-collar employees, etc. It is the VDAB’s task to ensure that job seekers who possess relevant talents and similar experiences can also find jobs themselves easily and quickly.

Potential employers can also submit their vacancies by indicating the competences that are important to them. Sometimes, from a traditional point of view, they appear less relevant to a certain job, but for specific positions they are actually essential. This ensures that employers can assess a person’s suitability for their specific job offer more accurately.

It is no coincidence that working with competences plays a key role in our strategy and was also literally incorporated in the five pillars of our management agreement. We are definitely proud of this first in HOPES² (meeting of European Public Employment Services). Our demos have received considerable acclaim at various international forums. We regularly welcome foreign delegations that want to learn about our innovation in competence-based matching.

The competence-based version of “My Career” is not only a useful tool for citizens. It is also an extremely rich reference database on job seekers. By entering several competences, necessary for a particular job vacancy, employers can see in real-time how many job seekers fit this profile. By entering more or fewer competences, they can increase or reduce the number of compatible job seekers. In addition, the tool is a valuable source of information for our consultants. It helps them better understand their customers and offers more of an insight into their needs. They can, for example, identify missing competences and suggest a training course on this basis.

It offers a more targeted screening process, in which consultants can concentrate on the customers that need personal support the most. Furthermore, this extensive collection of “knowledge and ability” offers a significant boost when filling the urgent needs of the labour market. It also provides employers and intermediates with a more refined and more transparent picture of the resources available in the labour market. Refining competences allows the specific requirements of positions to be communicated more effectively to attract the right candidates or to fill shortage occupations.

VDAB also wants to offer added value by validating (or organising validation for) competences, qualifications and proofs of experience. A job seeker’s CV can be validated by retrieving information from authentic sources such as the Certificates of Learning and Experience Database. In addition, competence certificates or references from employers can be provided alongside (self-)assessments or training course certificates. In this way, knowledge and competences developed on-the-job are not only made visible, but are also highlighted, validated and stored by our employers.

Our new “My Career” information platform is essential in our role as a career orchestrator. It allows active Flemish people to save, fully manage and use their personal career information efficiently.
I WANT to learn wherever and whenever I want
A personal development plan

A new application was recently developed at VDAB, the personal development plan (PDP), which offers citizens the opportunity to reflect on their current or future job and on the next steps they want to take in their career. If necessary, they are also steered towards the objective of a new job. It therefore involves a process as well as an application.

For two years, people at VDAB have been working on developing COMPETENT, a new database of professions and competences, based on ROMEv3. The new database and new competences are already being used to produce matches.

COMPETENT can be used:
- For training and courses: to identify which competences are necessary for practising a particular profession.
- By an employee to reflect on his or her current job: What competences do I possess, which ones could I improve and how can I do that?
- By the employer: to formulate working points and objectives in assessments.

Eventually, if a candidate does not know what his or her future might just be, he or she can utilise the vocational orientation instrument COMEET embedded in the PDP application. It is based on interests and job working levels. The result of this job-aspect evaluation is a maximum number of 45 occupations in which there should definitely be 10 careers that could be interesting for that citizen. This choice may involve a PDP.

Competence development: Lifelong learning whenever you want

In our current labour market, lifelong learning is necessary to bridge the gap between supply and demand. We want to diversify the range of training courses as much as possible in terms of approach and availability in order to optimally align them with participants’ personal requirements. In addition to the more traditional “group learning” in our training centres, we also offer a more personalised approach. We currently offer 270 internet courses via “Web-based learning”, which combine internet, video and online coaching in a single package for the modern student. Not only will you find courses that focus on PC use, office work, languages, personal skills and job applications, there are also vocational courses for basically all sectors and we are constantly expanding the selection. Our web-based learning colleagues regularly blog about their latest courses. The web-based learning blogs can be viewed at http://joblog.vdab.be/webleren/.

Another modern form of learning is our Flex-iTraining. This method enables you to quickly achieve results thanks to the unique combination of independent study via the internet and workshops led by a coach. The web-based courses and Flex-iTraining are free and both are accessible to job seekers as well as employees.

We are constantly perfecting and expanding our broad range of over 700 web-based courses. These flexible courses, which can also be tailored to the individual, are certainly appreciated by employed citizens that want to expand their knowledge or refocus their career.
Learn more with web-based learning

VDAB continues to invest in its mobile presence. Not only do we have a mobile version of our website, but we have also developed useful mobile apps. They are compatible with Android and iOS platforms. Job seekers can use them to find a job wherever and whenever they want, to easily find jobs in their neighbourhood thanks to the geolocation options and to save their searches. A second recently developed app, the “VDAB Job fairs” app, provides job seekers with information about upcoming job fairs in their neighbourhood.

And that’s not all: the VDAB mobile learning apps: Frans@work, Engels@work, Spaans@work, Duits@work, Help, ik moet solliciteren, Tablet op het werk and Heftruck (French@work, English@work, Spanish@work, German@work, Help I have to apply for a job, Tablet at work and Forklift truck) offer an on-the-go learning package for the modern student.

VDAB is focusing its efforts on social media: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.

VDAB uses various tools to follow social media to find out what is happening in the labour market and about our customers’ perception of us.

There are several interesting blogs on our website. You can find an overview of the different blogs on http://www.vdab.be/blogs/.

We accept contributions from job seekers, employees and employers. They all share their specific experiences in the labour market. You can find an overview of the different job bloggers on http://www.vdab.be/blogs/.

Are you already on Pinterest? If so, follow our VDAB account via http://pinterest.com/vdabdiensten.

CV service for job fairs

In 2012, VDAB launched a CV service for job fairs. The online CV service consists of reviewing and improving CVs emailed by job seekers attending a job fair.

Job seekers can send their CVs to jobbeurs@vdab.be. This mailbox is monitored by e-coaches. Feedback regarding the CV is provided as quickly as possible (before the job fair). The online CV service is promoted via the calendar on the website, via mailings about job fairs and in the regions where the fairs are organised.

Online job application coaching

The objective of online job application coaching is to offer a fast primary job application service. Job seekers and employees submit their request for online job application support. This service is provided via several online channels. If people contact us by email, they receive a reply to their request for job application support within two working days. If people submit their request during a chat, they immediately receive a reply from the e-coaches. The final option is to book an appointment for a video chat during which you can simulate and practice an interview.
**MasterVac**

To offer employers improved support for filling their job vacancies - as described in our management agreement - we have developed a new self-service application for them that is referred to internally as MasterVac (Master Vacancies database).

The entire process that a vacancy goes through is now automatically displayed and managed via MasterVac. This provides the employer with maximum control. As soon as the vacancy is submitted, he or she receives feedback about any illogical aspects of the vacancy. If it appears that there are fewer candidates than expected, we provide targeted advice for adapting the job offer. The employer is proactively informed that professional support is available from a VDAB staff member.

The manager of the vacancy will also be able to indicate from whom additional assistance has been requested so the vacancy can be filled more quickly. Employers can also see which citizens were referred to their vacancy and can indicate whom they did or did not recruit.

Here, too, consultants and employees work on the same platform with regard to a vacancy’s format, mediation, monitoring and closure. This means there is less risk of any communication misunderstandings, the margin for error is reduced and the quality of the published vacancies is improved.

So MasterVac not only encourages self-service, but interaction as well. It not only allows employers to work more efficiently, but our own staff members can also receive feedback about the vacancy process so that they can adapt it if and when necessary.
Any organisation that wants to be innovative must invest in a structural manner. If you want to achieve a fundamental transformation, then you must separate the existing structures. Innovation always starts with the question, “How would we approach this challenge or implement this innovation if VDAB did not exist today?”.
Innovating with information

“They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.”
(Andy Warhol)

VDAB started out with a quasi-monopoly position providing labour market-related services. The competition in our landscape is, however, becoming increasingly effective. A public body such as ours will not be spared the consequences if we simply maintain the status quo. We must also continuously reinvent ourselves as much as possible in order to continue to be relevant in the market.

Obtain information to steer the labour market

VDAB’s “core business” is mediation. If you want to interact and conduct a dialogue with your audience, you need to know your audience extremely well. And if you want to get to know someone you need information about him or her. Today, technology is powerful enough to gather, filter, manage and pass on information. It is a permanent and cyclic exercise with information at the heart of the matter.

It is crucial for a services organisation such as ours to put the customer first. We must be able to guarantee the “labour consumer” the speed he or she expects. If you can simply enter one search term in Google to find what you need, why would anyone struggle with another three different fields with rigid menus only to obtain what he or she is looking for many clicks later? Today’s labour consumers will not put up with it.

Together with our stakeholders: co-creation

Today, a flexible company must shift its priorities to speed and relevance. Where possible, our systems must be able to respond to the “Perfect Enough” principle that rules technological innovation today. This is absolutely vital for anyone wishing to reach young people, as revealed by the submissions to our “Create your job advisor” competition. Students were given the opportunity to indicate how they view “Find a job”, and developed several interesting prototypes of mobile apps, web applications and games based on our data. Allowing them to think about how they see the VDAB services of the
future was an extremely interesting exercise. Would you like to know more about our “Create your job advisor”? Read more about it in Chapter 4.

Business Intelligence and Big Data

VDAB has already made significant progress in processing our data into far-reaching insights. However, the potential our data offers goes much further. We can only really evolve to become a genuine labour market orchestrator if we utilise all the possibilities it offers.

A fine example of this is our “Job Indicator”. These are smart reports comprising data from the various VDAB applications that our consultants can retrieve with a few clicks. The “Job Indicator” overviews combine data from several sources: data from customer and job vacancy databases are combined with information from our campaign tool, competence matching and “Customised Emails” (Mail op Maat). What’s more, the “Job Indicator” is being further developed. Our customers will also be able to consult this information in the future.

When people refer to “Big Data” they also refer to the three Vs: Volume, Velocity and Variety. And in all honesty, we have already made considerable progress with two of these aspects. Many organisations have had to cope with a very large volume of data for some time now. But although the technology for rapidly analysing this amount of data has already existed for several years, unfortunately many companies have not come very far in analysing their data capital in (almost) real-time and in effectively converting them into value.

VDAB has been making a vast amount of data available very quickly for some time. For seven years running, our in-memory database Elise has automatically compared and linked around three million search objects. New jobs are compared with existing CVs and vice versa in real-time at a speed of fifty searches a second with an average response time of between 17 and 20 milliseconds. A considerable degree of intelligence and IT know-how is involved in performing a targeted “match”. (Because obviously we also want to ensure, for example, that we do not suggest one particular job vacancy to 5,000 job seekers, to avoid the employer in question being flooded with applications.)

VDAB can safely call itself a frontrunner in the “Volume” and “Velocity” aspects of Big Data. To continue to encourage this pioneering dynamic, we are now also focusing on the third “V” - “Variety” - by analysing internal as well as external (un)structured data such as the e-information from our weblogs.

This increased focus on “Big Data” resulted from a study that was part of a master’s thesis that two students from KU Leuven worked on with us at the beginning of 2013. They researched and assessed which behaviour we need to monitor online in order to improve our dialogue with visitors to “My Career” and other applications. The synergy of the KU Leuven students’ young talent, their innovative methodology and the experience of our ICT team appeared to be extremely valuable.

As a result, we founded the “CAReer Management Analytics” (CARMA) chair together with the Faculty of Applied Economic Sciences at KU Leuven. It is currently concentrating on three groundbreaking areas:

- Streamlining communication with job seekers and employers,
- Optimising our monitoring activities,
- Further improving the services offered by our online platforms.

The CARMA chair focuses, for example, on conducting comprehensive data analysis based on a combination of external and internal data sources. The first objective of this innovation track is to enhance communication with our customers to approach them in a proactive manner. This is our VDAB
Amazon function, with which we provide information that is customised using data mining.\textsuperscript{3}

By the “VDAB Amazon function”, we mean the frequently used system on commercial websites, with which you receive all kinds of suggestions such as “other users of this website also purchased this” or “these accessories may be useful”. Amazon is not the only company that uses this technique, but it was one of the first to apply it on a large scale.

How can you translate this model into the VDAB’s operations? Here are a few examples: if we see that someone with the necessary experience as a painter is consistently looking for jobs as an electrician, in principle we must be able to ask him or her if he or she has completed additional training in this field? So he or she can mention this in his or her profile and automatic matching can also take this into account. Or we can suggest additional training. Here’s another example: when experienced technical candidates register, we can inform employers based on their previous “consumer behaviour” even if there is no job vacancy posted at that time.

A second priority of the CARMA chair involves research into the behaviour of job seekers. One of our core tasks is to support job seekers to help them find a suitable job, which is why we want to maximise the time consultants can spend on their supporting role. VDAB was also entrusted with a number of control and monitoring activities as part of the sixth state reform. We want to primarily achieve these by applying data mining that provides information about the behaviour of job seekers. The consultant as well as the job seeker can make adjustments based on this analysis. The control tasks can be optimised and focused on risk cases based on internal and external data sources.

The final objective is to further improve the online platforms. The combination of our internal customer data and our rich weblog data allows us to gain a detailed insight into customers’ behaviour when they use our applications. These combined analyses are only valuable if they are permanently monitored in order to identify new patterns and trends in a timely fashion. This allows us to monitor use of our online platforms, especially My Career and MasterVac, in detail and further develop them utilising specific user information.

Managing data innovation and analyses effectively without losing our human approach represents an important balancing act. The insights we acquire into job seekers must be indicative and, where necessary, be combined with our experienced consultants’ intuition. We aim for a measured combination of information-oriented steering and flexibility.

\textsuperscript{3} For those less familiar with IT terminology, data mining is the targeted search for (statistical) links in data sets with the objective of compiling profiles for scientific or commercial use.
Open data: divide and multiply

A powerful information strategy not only focuses on data, content and the insights that can be gained from it. Today, one of the most important aspects of managing information is sharing it in an accessible way that guarantees interoperability. It constitutes the type of sharing that makes you richer, not poorer. The concept of open data is fully consistent with this idea.

Cooperating is essential for anyone that wants to innovate and incorporate new trends. It is no coincidence that expanding partnerships is part of our management agreement. Anyone that cooperates or shares information also becomes smarter as a result. Also making your data accessible or using your partners’ data is fully in line with this approach.

To a certain extent, VDAB also currently strives to make as much useful information, which can also be processed, available as possible on easily accessible platforms such as “Wegwijs”4, which displays labour market information per municipality and per district.

However, a public body cannot simply place all its data on an open platform and must continuously safeguard its customers’ privacy. Of course solutions exist, such as making personal data anonymous data so that nobody can misuse it. Security and privacy are sensitive issues. That’s why we deliberately opted for a “Smart Disclosure” approach. We apply a number of strict user terms and conditions such as explicitly requesting permission before using the data. A more comprehensive application of smart disclosure is one in which a customer assumes control of sharing personal information - such as his or her CV - in a safe manner with other applications (e.g. a mobile app or a professional social media network).

You achieve innovation by collaborating and creating easily accessible knowledge networks. A cooperation platform in the cloud is therefore the ideal environment.
Chapter 3

Our cooperation platform in the cloud

“In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed”
(Charles Darwin)

The Google Apps project is one of the most typical examples of how VDAB succeeds in integrating technological innovation and strategy with cost reduction. We became a true pioneer among public bodies when we transferred our email environment to the cloud platform in 2011.

The Google Apps project is perfectly consistent with our development policy and the changing market. You achieve innovation by collaborating and creating easily accessible knowledge networks. Innovation is stimulated by combining ideas and mutual inspiration. A cooperation platform in the cloud is therefore the ideal environment. The migration to the cloud is also totally in line with our increased focus on external partners. It allows us to efficiently involve them in several processes and provide them with a number of handy tools at the same time.

A flexible step-by-step rollout

Our cloud platform was flexibly rolled out step-by-step. We started by migrating our emails and appointment calendars. As a result, our employees can now consult them whenever and wherever they want. We now also use the cooperation functionalities to continue to inspire our internal as well as external partnerships and to increase the rate of development of new applications.

The Google Apps system offers numerous advantages compared with the previous system. These range from greater storage capacity (100 times more than before) to more handy functionalities such as video and audio communication. Moreover, our tools and documents are now permanently available from any connected device. This means we can respond efficiently and securely to the growing BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) trend in which an increasing number of employees use their own personal devices for work purposes.

We estimate savings related to usage, hardware, the cost of licenses and developing applications and websites, resulting from our use of Google Apps, at around EUR 1 million a year (approximately double the original estimate). We reinvest this amount in other innovations to allow us to further develop and implement our strategy.
We originally focused on boosting internal cooperation. Documents were shared efficiently, in real-time, via Google Drive, our steering committee held meetings, if necessary, via video conference and our “E-wijs” project was introduced internally via video conference. Once the effectiveness of the collaborative system had been proven internally, external applications were also launched.

A customised platform

Each player in the labour market can be helped much more efficiently if VDAB can provide it with relevant and personalised information and services in a direct manner. Our “cloud approach” enables us to quickly develop platforms customised for specific needs in the market without constantly inundating our IT team with requests. Self-service by our own business users and consultants is significantly increased by the flexibility, usability and the intuitive operations of the Google Apps environment. In this respect, “Google Sites” plays a unique role as a binding agent for the various Google components. Setting up a site is not only extremely simple, but the ease with which various components can be integrated in a site is remarkable.

Meanwhile, 150 sites have been created. Here are a few examples:

- A virtual job fair for foreign job seekers to fill Belgian shortage occupations,
- Posting the necessary information online as quickly as possible for all parties involved in the collective closure of a large car assembly company,
- Providing recent graduates with job application advice by webcam,
- A platform for cooperating with our partners on the range of training courses available for truck drivers.

Increasingly flexible innovation

The various building blocks of the Google platform were repeatedly used in an optimal fashion to find a fast and user-friendly solution. Small project teams - compiled from IT specialists, business experts and the Google support team - were responsible for doing so. The relatively low cost and quick time to market offered by this approach - we aim for a turnaround time of between several weeks and maximum three months from idea to delivery - increase our business staff’s innovation rate and give them more room to manoeuvre.

The possibility of reacting quickly and even proactively oneself is also a major added value offered by this cloud strategy; one that is not only fundamental for external use, but also boosts our internal flexibility.
Websites that suit our customers right down to the ground

The flexible cloud approach plays a major role in the challenges presented by our shortage occupations. When, for example, VDAB cooperates with international job fairs to fill profiles that are in short supply - such as engineers and nurses. VDAB always tries to involve as many Flemish stakeholders as possible.

Flemish employers often do not have the time, manpower or budget available to travel abroad to conduct interviews. VDAB can develop a special virtual platform for them that can be used by foreign applicants to submit their CVs and for conducting job interviews via video conference.

Thanks to Google Apps, our business specialists are also able to rapidly respond to crisis situations in specific niche situations with limited intervention from the IT department. They created a suitable website with crucial information for Ford’s employees and suppliers. It included all the steps that had to be taken by employees involved in this collective closure, as well as all kinds of relevant job vacancies in their vicinity that they could apply for.

Recent graduates are also an important target group for our services given the fact that it is not easy for them to find their way through the maze of the labour market. Anyone that wants to play a role in their extensively digitised environment and help them in their own way must also be able to offer appealing online services. With this philosophy in the back of our minds, we developed the interactive “School’s Out” platform that we use to launch activities each summer holiday. It provides young people with job application training and support from an e-coach with whom they can also make an appointment in an online appointment calendar.

Social media

“Social media platforms are here. So use them!” It sometimes sounds much easier than it is in reality. What information do I include? What do I do on my own behalf? How do I follow up on what informed citizens or employers are saying about my organisation?

VDAB has been active on diverse social media for years and is now also developing various ways of making all internal employees familiar with them. Therefore, E-wijs was born! We used this “road show” to provide an initial response to the above questions.

We are also currently developing a Google+ social media strategy to further boost internal cooperation. The objective is to innovate in terms of communication. The expectation is that the use of emails will become less popular and the need for interaction increasingly important.

The principle “be where your customers are” also applies here. Tomorrow’s job seekers are today’s social media users; no less than 75% of young people belong to one online community or another.
Thanks to our self-service options and e-tools, our consultants can support the people that really need them.
I WANT to score on my job application
Chapter 4

Job searches tailored to young people

The youth, our future for a thriving economy

In 2013, the economic crisis underlined youth unemployment. Young people find it more difficult to find a job anyway due to their lack of experience, but this crisis made it even more difficult for young people to find sustainable employment. The aging population and the declining youth dependency ratio mean we must nurture our young talent and offer young people as many opportunities in the labour market as possible. On the one hand, we want to offer an appealing, technologically driven service tailored to our young people, and on the other to provide an intensive service for young people who find themselves considerably distanced from the labour market.

Youth panels

Youth unemployment is also high on the policy agenda of all political authorities and that of the European Commission. We must invest in young people. This means that we must also listen to what they have to say. The youth councils from each country play a major role in this respect. Young people have the right to participate in decisions and to define their future. Their voice is important. VDAB also wants to engage in dialogue with young people.

Setting up youth panels on the recommendation of the Flemish Youth Council proved very fitting for this purpose. The opinions, ideas and experiences of young people can help VDAB to improve its services and its image among young people. We want to use the youth panels to find out what young people think about VDAB and what they expect from it. What if they could reinvent VDAB? Improving the image young people have of VDAB was also on the agenda. To do so and to counter feedback, we enlisted the help of the youth broadcaster JIM. On the one hand, we want to demonstrate that VDAB is keen to work with young people and do something about youth unemployment; on the other, we want to effectively attract young people to our panels to generate outcome. VDAB launched a recruitment campaign together with JIM TV, in which we reached a diverse audience. Young people also learned about the youth panels via our tender partners including Skillbuilders, Jes, SD Workx and GTB.

The young people present were evenly represented in terms of age, origin, level of education, gender and work experience. To engage in a dialogue with them, we looked for a format that would appeal to them and that would allow us to reach a diverse audience. We came up with the concept of a talk show in which they acted as the guests.
Before the talk show, the young people were subdivided into different groups:

- To brainstorm about a new VDAB,
- To provide their frank opinion at the round table about our services,
- To share their comments about online products in the online corner.

A few conclusions:
Young people are surprised about the services offered by VDAB. This means efforts to increase awareness about our services are also a priority. The young people advised us to promote our activities more. We should definitely increase our presence at festivals and youth events. They also believe it is necessary for us to be present at schools, particularly secondary schools. Young people must be familiar with VDAB and their services because they can definitely use our valuable help. People also want to be approached personally.

**A separate App-roach**

The mobile component of our channel mix is becoming increasingly important, especially for reaching younger generations. These consumers expect all information to be permanently available and adapted to the small size of mobile screens. Anyone that wants to reach them must adapt. According to Deloitte, no less than half of consumers possess a smartphone today and this number is only set to rise. It is expected that smartphone usage in the five largest European markets will increase by 150% by 2016. Another 573 million of the predicted 2,707 million internet users will have a permanent connection by 2015 and 2,134 million will surf online using a mobile device.

**Part of the social network**

A strong presence on social media is just as vital for reaching young people. Therefore VDAB actively communicates on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. VDAB has its own video channel on YouTube, called VDAB.tv. The channel features videos that are also available on the website: [http://vdab.tv](http://vdab.tv). For example, you can view career films, training films and productions for TV channels.

**Digital Job Advisor**

In the context of a personal approach for young people and to obtain an insight into the way in which they look for work or want to look for work, VDAB challenges Flemish IT students to develop innovative prototypes of tools or concepts to allow young people to search for a job in their own way. Searching for a job can be broadly interpreted. It not only involves finding the right vacancy, but also, for example, identifying what the young person is good at (vocational guidance), compiling a good CV (job application tips), and finding or following the right course to brush up on the right skills (training).

The five best entries must present their application during the awards ceremony organised at the Flemish Parliament. Applications are assessed on, among other things:

- **Relevance and usability** for young people’s search for work,
- **Data architecture**: the extent to which use was made of data mining, open data, data exchange, data combination, social media, etc.,
- **Usability & user experience**: the extent to which the application is user-friendly,
- **Design**: the extent to which the application looks attractive,
- **Creativity and innovation**: The extent to which the creator thinks “out of the box” and takes an innovative perspective or approach.
Characteristics of the winning concept in 2013 included:

- Interaction with social media,
- Matching competences on three levels (job seeking, support, employer) via an algorithm (competences based on [http://cobra.vdab.be](http://cobra.vdab.be)),
- Supplementing the competences based on tests,
- Mobile functionality, including the use of geolocation,
- Usability and accessibility (see, among other things, mock-ups for responsive design).

In 2014, VDAB organised the second edition of the “Create your digital job advisor” competition. What was remarkable was that almost all the entries were submitted via social media. The competition also taught us that young people appreciate simplicity and speed more than 100% perfection. They want vacancies to be displayed quickly, after which they will refine the parameters if the results do not offer an adequate fit. They are not interested in the reverse - first carefully entering what they expect and can do step-by-step, in order for fully relevant options to be displayed. The smartphone represents young people’s basic tool in their search for a job.

Another noteworthy finding was the importance young people assign to their employer’s office environment. “Is it a job that means I will have to work far away from home?”, “What is the area like where the company is located?”, “Are there lots of cosy restaurants?”, “Do my friends work in the neighbourhood?”, etc. These are questions that young people find important. One of the winners developed a “job advisor” that was visually focused on a vacancy’s location. The various steps in the search process were visualised using Google Street View: a picture of the street in which the company was located, the local VDAB, the slip road to the closest motorway, etc.

Therefore the theory was proved in practice. Our teams are examining with the business how we can apply the concepts that were presented in our applications.

### Summer campaign school-leavers

Every year during the summer months, VDAB launches a summer campaign for school-leavers. This campaign targets school-leavers, who are just starting out in their career and will apply for jobs for the first time in the autumn. A lot of skills are involved, especially during interviews. The applicants often have more to offer than they think, but must learn to identify, name and “sell” their competences. During the summer campaign, VDAB aims to offer school-leavers support and “training” for conducting an interview, without any obligation.

Job application support is offered in two ways:

- Via a video chat session: In a video chat, the school-leaver can talk to an e-coach. He or she can individually practice an interview and receive advice and tips on interview techniques.
- Via a regional workshop: During a half-day workshop, groups of school-leavers discover how to successfully apply for a job. Practical tips and feedback are also provided.

### Online mediation for the highly educated

In accordance with the European Directive on the Youth Guarantee, VDAB decided to implement efforts to activate young people when they had been unemployed for four months at the latest. One of the activities involves online mediation for highly educated young people.

Online mediation means that the process is offered exclusively via online channels. We use the online appointment calendar, email, telephone, video chat, text chats and social media.

At the start of the process, the young people are assigned a personal coach and are provided with online assistance in their search for work. Young people and VDAB find this as an efficient and fast working method.
Online job application coaching and e-coaching for highly educated young people (work in progress)

VDAB has provided e-coaching (or online guidance) for job seekers since 2011. E-coaching offers several benefits for both the PES and the job seekers. Currently, the team of e-coaches offers two services:

The first service focuses on the application process. A dedicated team of e-coaches is available to answer questions or to provide advice with respect to the different phases in an application process (curriculum vitae, application letter, job interview, assessments, etc.). Customers are helped by email, text chat or video chat.

The second service is guidance provided completely online for highly educated job seekers under the age of 25. The team exclusively offers guidance through online channels. These online channels are an online appointment calendar, email, telephone, video chat, text chat and social media.

Infographics

To attract the attention of young people, VDAB uses this fun tool to share information in an appealing manner. We use short texts that are supported with images to clarify the message.

The power of an infographic mainly lies in the way it can be effortlessly combined with social media. You can easily post it on Facebook, LinkedIn and Pinterest, etc. It immediately catches the eye and can be easily shared. These are VDAB’s most viewed and shared posts on Facebook.

Webinars

A webinar is an interactive online course. The participation threshold is lower than that for a traditional seminar. The participant does not have to travel to a different location and can simply follow the course from behind his or her PC. This allows us to attract people that we would not reach otherwise.

We always provide links to other VDAB services that relate to the subject discussed (a web-based course, e-coaches, etc.) The webinars are free. The recordings are posted on the VDAB YouTube channel and can therefore be viewed again later.

At the moment, there is one webinar available: “Applying for a job via LinkedIn”. Several other webinars will follow in the near future as well as via Facebook, Twitter and Google.

Web-based learning is now also looking at the possibilities of integrating webinars in its web-based courses.
I WANT to find someone who fits in my company
“The biggest risk is not taking any risk... In a world that is changing really quickly, the only strategy that is guaranteed to fail is not taking risks.”
(Mark Zuckerberg)

Everything around us is changing at a phenomenal pace and the labour market is no exception. Not only are we living in economically challenging times, Flanders is also heading for a shortage economy with real shortages in technical professions, among others. Furthermore, we have to cope with an aging population.

In such a challenging social environment, it is more crucial than ever to invest in citizens and businesses so that they can continue to develop and provide our economy with the boost it needs.

Our management agreement

When your environment changes, your organisation must also adapt. Darwin’s theory is particularly relevant to public bodies. Therefore VDAB is investing heavily in expanding its services and tailoring its operations to its customers’ needs. This transformation was set out in our 2011-2015 management agreement. It establishes the mutual commitments of the Government of Flanders and VDAB for the next five years. The agreement comprises five strategic objectives:

1. To maximise efforts for activating all job seeking and other inactive citizens in the labour market, with a view to their sustainable integration into the latter,
2. To provide career services for employed citizens,
3. To ensure a comprehensive approach for all employers,
4. To organise a future-oriented range of services for recognising and developing competences,
5. To expand partnerships.

One of the most striking differences with the previous management agreement is the increased focus on services for employers, career services for employed citizens and partnerships. In other words, the scope of our tasks has been expanded. All the separate elements in the labour chain are inextricably linked and if one finds itself in difficulty, the others will also suffer the consequences.
The labour market as a whole and the economy therefore benefit from a holistic approach. That’s why VDAB wants to ensure that our various target groups optimally succeed, and support and complement each other as efficiently as possible.

VDAB is committed to applying a **tailor-made** approach as far as is possible. Today, everyone - from employers to employees and job seekers - expects this increased personal approach. Anyone that does not respond accordingly will lose customers. We also devote special attention to those who experience more difficulties in the labour market, such as vulnerable job seekers or small businesses.

**Today, VDAB must reach more people than ever in the most personal way as possible.** This is not a straightforward challenge! On top of this, there is one of the most popular slogans of our time: “achieving more with less”. The crisis obliges us to make the best of what we have. Fortunately, this amounts to a great deal and we live in a time that is bursting with technological potential.

VDAB has always played a **pioneering role** among public authorities when it comes to IT. We do not view IT in terms of bits and bytes, but as a resource for implementing our mission in a more efficient, more sustainable and more budget-friendly manner. An effective use of ICT resources is crucial for achieving the objective of the management agreement and our long-term vision.

Our new services are **heavily driven by technology**. In addition to improved (cost) efficiency, faster response and an increasingly personal approach, technology also ensures that we can offer our citizens as many **self-service** options as possible. This promotes citizens’ self-efficacy, which is crucial for smoother market operations and increased prosperity.

**VDAB is expanding its scope**

**From**

- > 200,000 active job seekers
- Standard processes
- Automatic matching for supply and demand
- All contacts in the job shop for all support
- Multi-channel website, offices and service line

**To**

- > 4 million active job seekers
- Flexible approach
- Working with competences and refining matching
- Customisation, self-service and e-support from the outset
- Optimal channel mix and 24/7 availability for core services
The VDAB’s mission and task

The Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB) was founded in 1989 and falls under the responsibility of the Flemish Minister for Budget, Finances, Work, Spatial Planning, Sport and Heritage.

As a labour market orchestrator, we create room for all Flemish citizens to optimally develop their career themselves. We do so with the aim of facilitating smoother labour market operations and prosperity for all.

As a service provider, we help citizens develop their career in response to the demands of the market. To this end, we work in a transparent manner with other service providers. We devote particular attention to citizens from underprivileged groups.

IT, a driving force behind our strategy

An organisation that takes the management, strategy and approach of its business in a new direction will only achieve its goals if the business team works closely with the IT department. Technology is becoming increasingly important. To quote the Gartner research agency: “Every budget is becoming an IT budget”. Even though this is a somewhat oversimplified statement, it cannot be denied that an increasing number of companies’ revenues, processes and services are being digitised. Therefore it is only logical that IT has become a driving force in today’s world, and an increasingly strategic force at that.

It is essential that the IT department of the future transcends purely operational processes such as technology management, programming and application maintenance. Therefore our IT team closely supports our business colleagues in implementing their long and short-term objectives.

Using IT to get closer to the citizen

Further personalising our services - for citizens, companies and employees - is one of the most important challenges facing our IT department. The increasing automation of our services - with a particular focus on efficient budget management in difficult economic times - produces new tools. This approach allows us to appeal to our extended target group comprising all active citizens in the most direct and effective manner.
“When people talk about the good old days, I say to people, ‘It’s not the days that are old, it’s you that’s old.’ I hate the good old days. What is important is that today is good.”
(Karl Lagerfeld)

In the past, new technological (IT) developments mainly affected the business community. Only a few novelties slowly filtered through to the consumer market. Today, the reverse is largely true. New IT is first made available on the home platform and is brought to the workplace by the empowered consumer.

A computer, tablet or smartphone is far from being an exclusive product these days; we are frontrunners in Europe with regard to high-speed internet, and mobile data is also integrated more and more frequently.

Give me what I want or else!

Job seekers are part of a network. When they are looking for work, they post this fact on Facebook. If they want to check out an employer, they read what the company’s tweets. If they believe they have been unfairly treated by an employment service consultant, they post their views on a forum. Employers that are fed up of talking to unsuitable candidates set up their own specialist LinkedIn recruitment groups with colleagues.

Everyone in the labour market is more critical than ever and moreover, communicates in a very loud voice if displeased about something; a voice that reverberates across the entire digital universe. Relevance, speed, usability and a personal approach are just the main items on their shopping list, and if they don’t receive these, they disappear. Loyalty no longer applies today. Anyone that does not adapt his or her business model to this demanding “Consumer version 2.0” will face challenging times.

From data to value

The digital consumer leaves behind traces. On social media, websites, along sensors, on blogs, open data platforms, on his or her smartphone, laptop, tablet, TV, bank card, smart heating
system, etc. It is an ever-increasing mass of data. By 2020, data output will increase 44 times in size compared with 2009.

The most innovative and even “disruptive” IT trends in recent years were all developed in their own way as a response to this vast and increasing mass of data. A typical example is Big data analytics. Three Vs can adequately explain this concept: “Volume”, “Variety” and “Velocity”.

In simple terms, Big data allows you to compare and analyse rapidly increasing amounts of data in real-time. This data may originate from internal or external sources and be in structured or unstructured formats. The results of this analysis offer the possibility of identifying certain patterns that facilitate smart predictions.

Big data allows an organisation, for example, to combine different sources:
- Own internal sources - data conveniently structured in databases,
- “Semi-internal” and unstructured data from its own websites,
- The incredibly rich potential of externally available - and often barely structured or totally unstructured - data sources such as Facebook, Twitter, European financial statistics, traffic cameras, weather forecasts, elections, etc.

The most remarkable examples of Big Data analytics are the micro-segmented “recommendations” such as those employed by Amazon (“Often purchased together” or “Customers that purchased this item also purchased X”) and by LinkedIn (“People you may know”).

### Open data

The more data there is, the richer the insights. This is why an increasing number of organisations are examining how they can securely share their information with others. This is the open data concept, which is gaining in popularity. The aim is to make data available - on publically accessible platforms - in an open source to third parties so that they can use it for useful studies or for developing all kinds of handy apps.

Making data publicly available is the subject of a sensitive debate. Privacy and security must not be compromised at any time. One possible solution is to make data anonymous, but this does not go far enough for particularly sensitive information. For this purpose, there is something called “smart disclosure”, whereby an organisation makes data available to a third party, but only after a request from the person involved and following a comprehensive analysis of his or her motives.

### Your data in the cloud

Of course the “cloud” has already existed for some time, but it has ultimately made the leap from “groundbreaking but remote” to “the most ordinary thing in the world”. Since employees are using cloud services more and more (mainly in a private situation), they are increasingly demanding that their IT department also provides these services at work.

iCloud - the brand name speaks for itself - but also other cloud services such as Dropbox, Twitter, Facebook, Hotmail, Gmail, YouTube, Instagram, Netflix, Spotify, etc. are used on a daily basis all over the world by millions of people without them even giving it a second thought.

At the end of 2012, Gartner Consulting produced an analysis predicting that the personal cloud would gradually replace the PC as a location where individuals save their personal documents and other content. This personal cloud will become the centre of our digital life. In this way, the focus shifts from the device that we carry around with us to a way of providing services that can be accessed from any device.
Data anytime and anywhere: mobility & apps

This “anytime, anywhere” evolution brings us to another insurmountable IT trend. Anyone who wants to access the web anytime and anywhere is increasingly doing so on the small screen. Users also expect “suppliers” to be able to give them what they want, in a way that is adapted to this limited visibility and their personal demands. It is no wonder that mobile apps are becoming increasingly popular.

The fact that apps are not an excessive luxury for those entrepreneurs that want to reach their customers has been proven by hard numbers: 13.4 billion apps were downloaded in the first quarter of 2013. This represents 11% growth compared with 2012 as a whole.

Firstly, applications must be designed and developed from a "mobile-first concept": organisations must examine which customer needs they want to satisfy in mobile terms and what technological choices this requires, starting with the functional analysis.

Anyone that embarks on “the step to the app” must also adopt an umbrella strategy. Mobility is not something that exists separately from other channels, but must be approached in an integrated manner.

Customers jump easily from one digital and physical channel to the other: from your office to your website, to your mobile app, your social media or your call centre. It goes without saying that organisations must be able to follow the customer, wherever, whenever and however he or she wants. Therefore an optimal channel mix is absolutely crucial for those offering services in today’s 24/7 society.

Ensuring that you have a coherent picture of your target group when it moves from one platform to another is just as essential as being effectively present on all the channels. Relevance is the key word here. If a job seeker has spoken to a consultant on the phone to inform the latter that their appointment must be postponed because he or she has an interview, but still receives an automatic email reminder of the appointment on the day, this will cause frustration. A near real-time centralisation and verification of all the data collected is also a basic element of an efficient strategy.

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD)

BYOD is part of the consumerisation trend. Devices that employees receive from their employer are usually less smart, slower and less efficient that those he or she uses at home. An increasing number of people are using their own devices at work, usually mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones.

BYOD is often viewed as a potential cost saving. Studies indicate, however, that the volume of internet traffic increases significantly as a result. Additional investments in Wi-Fi access points and making the company network secure can bump up costs.

However, there are also advantages; the organisation saves costs on purchasing the devices that employees do not want to use now anyway and observes a rise in productivity and an increase in employee satisfaction.
more information on vdab.be

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