Case Study

Organisation:	The Australian Parliament - House of Representatives
Industry:	Government/Parliament
The Challenge:	Fast, accurate searching of the *House of Representatives Practice Manual* including the *House of Representatives Standing and Sessional Orders* and *The Australian Constitution*
The Solution:	eComPress Electronic Publishing and Distribution Software from Eurofield Information Solutions
The Benefits:	- Instantaneous highly relevant search results reduce the time required to provide the Speaker with requested information, minimising delays on the floor of the House of Representatives
	- Easy-to-use intuitive user interface minimises training and provides a streamlined transition from printed publications
	- The software is easy to update and distribute to users
	- Printing costs are reduced as more users turn to the eComPress electronic documentation

DEPARTMENT *of the*
HOUSE *of* REPRESENTATIVES

The House of Representatives is one of the two houses of the Australian Federal Parliament. It's a high pressure environment where 150 elected Members vigorously debate, pass and amend laws, scrutinise government administration, represent their local citizens' interests and control government expenditure.

The Members are supported in their roles by the 1,000 page House of Representatives Practice Manual and an additional 150 pages of Standing and Sessional Orders. Together these books provide a guide to understanding the structure and rules of conduct within the House and are an invaluable reference for Members, Ministers, the Speaker and other staff whenever advice is required relating to parliamentary practice and procedure.

The Clerks and Assistant Clerks are frequently called upon by the Speaker to refer to the manuals to resolve issues raised in the House, especially during question time. Their answers are expected to be both immediate and accurate, and are likely to be put under the microscope by at least one – if not all – of the major political parties present. Paul Thomas, Assistant Director of Information Systems at Parliament House says, "The level of scrutiny is like refereeing a grand final football match every day."

The challenge

Thomas continues, "The House of Representatives Practice Manual is an imposing book. Our struggle was how to help users quickly get the information out of the manual while in that pressure situation."

For some years there had been discussion about an electronic version and there were even attempts to create HTML and PDF versions for use in the House of Representatives chamber. However these efforts failed to gain support because, as Thomas explains, "They just weren't fast enough for searching."

eComPress™

" I hadn't – and still haven't – seen a product that comes close to what eComPress will do"
– Paul Thomas, Director
Information Systems & Publishing

The solution

It wasn't until 2006 that Thomas discovered the eComPress Electronic Publishing and Distribution Software from Eurofield Information Solutions (EIS). The software was the engine behind one of the most widely used applications at Parliament House, the WordGenius Macquarie Dictionary software.

Installed on approximately 600 Member and departmental staff desktops, WordGenius provided Thomas with an example of eComPress's electronic capabilities in action. The software was easy to use and navigate, staff were comfortable with it, and it offered exceptionally fast search capabilities. The dictionary was encrypted, meaning users could not change or edit the content, and what's more, the compression techniques used by EIS meant that the software required a very small footprint compared to any alternative electronic publishing solutions.

"I hadn't – and still haven't – seen a product that comes close to what eComPress will do," Thomas states. "The fact that it could be installed as a stand-alone product on a laptop and didn't rely on being tied to a separate program or database was impressive."

"We wanted a solution that offered a quick turnaround at times such as when making amendments or when releasing a new version of the manual. This was something that EIS was able to guarantee, so we handed them a Microsoft Word version of the document split into 19 chapters with many appendices and attachments. All up there were close to 25 or 30 documents. EIS merged it all into a single product very quickly. It was outstanding," Thomas adds.

This first electronic version of the House of Representatives Practice Manual provided the basis for a six month pilot program among a small group of high end users. "We identified some small refinements to the documents but on the whole it was very well received. Most users could see that this was a huge leap forward," Thomas explains.

Feedback from the pilot program was used to create a final, definitive electronic manual containing the Practice Manual, Standing and Sessional Orders and The Australian Constitution. "Together they form the Bible for how to do things in the House," Thomas smiles. By mid 2007 the electronic documentation was released to all members and departmental staff.

The benefits

Thomas believes that the simple user interface provided by eComPress has been an important factor in the acceptance of the software. "It has a structure and navigation panel common to a lot of other documents so it appears very familiar to users." The manual even allows users to split the viewing screen into two so that both the Practice Manual and Standing Orders can be searched and displayed at the one time.

Search capabilities have lived up to expectations, providing instantaneous results regardless of whether the search involves an entire paragraph of text or is conducted across multiple documents at once. "Speed of search is so fast that the limiting factor is now the people," Thomas notes.

Copy and paste functionality allows users to select blocks of text from the manual and paste it into any Microsoft Office document with all the formatting intact, complete with automatic citations and accurate page references to accommodate those members still using the printed publications. The annotations capability also allows users to make and share notes about the content for future reference.

Both the search and copy/paste capabilities are used extensively in messaging communications between the Clerk and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Electronic updates to the documents are released to users approximately every six months, while completely new versions are issued every three to four years. "The turnaround from EIS is always first class," Thomas says.

With the release of the next version due soon, Thomas expects demand for hard copies to decline as more and more users appreciate the advantages of the electronic edition. "It's a big document and it's expensive to print. We expect to see significant savings in future printing costs."

Portability is also important, especially for senior staff and the Speaker. "With the manual on the laptop you can take it anywhere. It's much easier than handling paper copies." Thomas concludes, "eComPress makes the manual a very small package when compared to PDF or HTML. As a Word document, for example, the Manual is about 16 megabytes in size. The eComPress version is just over one megabyte including the viewer. It's a very compact and efficient way of publishing and distributing a large document."

About eComPress

Eurofield Information Solutions (EIS) is an Australian technology company and the developer of a market leading electronic publishing and distribution solution, eComPress. Designed for organisations with a need to produce, distribute and maintain large reference publications, eComPress is a highly secure electronic publishing technology that provides efficient compression, very fast highly relevant searching and powerful annotation capabilities, with an intuitive easy-to-use interface. Microsoft Windows-based, eComPress produces electronic publications as diverse as operational and service manuals, dictionaries, standards, procedure manuals, handbooks, statutes, legislation, medical journals and directories.

Leading organisations globally and in Australia have discovered the powerful eComPress technology. Customers include the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB), the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the Australian Federal Department of Health and Ageing, and most recently the Australian Army.

The company's innovative solutions have received numerous awards, including the Australian Technology Showcase Award and a Consensus Software Award. EIS is also a Certified Microsoft Sales Partner. For more information about the company, please visit www.eis.com.au.

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