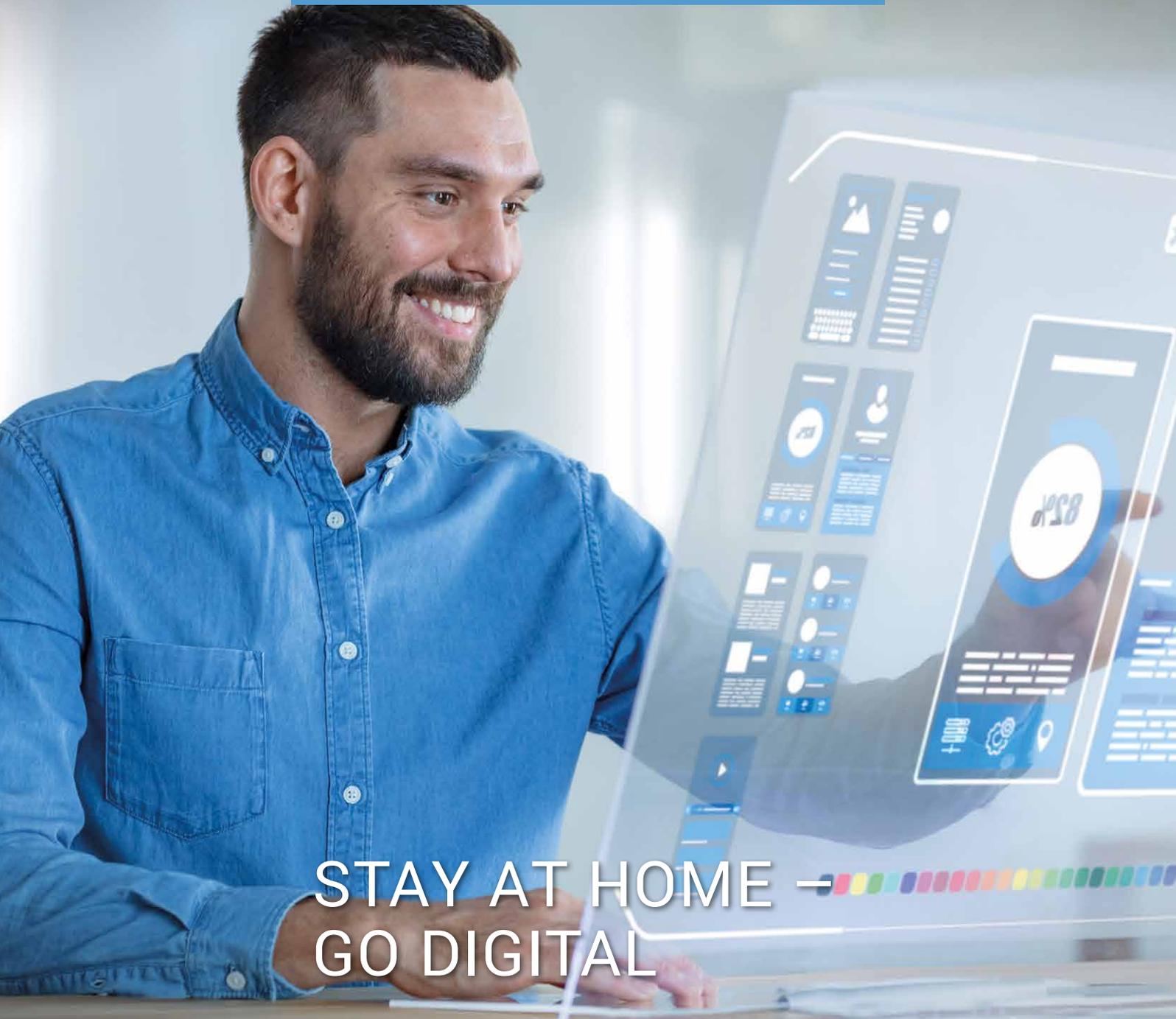


IN THE LIMELIGHT



STAY AT HOME — GO DIGITAL

Digitalization makes new forms of cooperation possible. House of Digitalization and DIHOST are two examples of new solutions that link know-how carriers and companies. In times of the Corona crisis, they have proved particularly effective and were able to react quickly to new needs. There is a lot to learn from this for the time to follow as well.



Using [meinschaufenster.at](#), merchants can conduct a personal sales conversation via smartphone.

STAY AT HOME – GO DIGITAL

The House of Digitalization and DIHOST were able to react quickly when digital solutions for new forms of collaboration were needed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Social life had to be maintained under very special circumstances in the past weeks. The restrictions imposed due to the rapid spread of the viral disease, COVID-19, necessitated different ways of working and cooperation in almost all areas of society. In many cases, the era of “social distancing” became a testing ground for the use of new digital tools. “People are currently trying out new tools such as cloud solutions or conference systems and learning how to use them in many office environments,” Peter Brandstetter explained. But trade and commerce required new digital support solutions with sudden urgency as well.

In this situation, platforms and networks that were already designed to bring together various stakeholders for the purpose of the digital transformation of business processes had a considerable initial advantage. Brandstetter is Lower Austria’s digitalization manager and, together with the House of Digitalization, is responsible for such a platform. The Lower Austrian ecoplus Business Agency had already begun to bundle the digital competence available in the province at six nodes and to network them with each other in 2017. “The node managers working at each of these locations have a decisive role to play here, coordinating the transfer of knowledge within their own node and between the nodes,” said Claus Zeppelzauer, Head of the Business & Technology Division at ecoplus. This laid the foundation to which further levels could now be added. First, a “virtual house” was set up, an online platform on which the competencies, resources, projects and business ideas for digitalization already existing in Lower Austria were collected and which served as a hub for their multiplication.

The partners networked in the House of Digitalization also formed the core of a consortium that submitted the formation of a “Digital Innovation Hub” to the BMDW’s funding program of the same name. In June 2019, the company was awarded the

contract as one of three projects funded throughout Austria and began building the “Digital Innovation Hub East” (DIHOST). In comparison to the House of Digitalization, DIHOST focuses primarily on making the opportunities offered by the numerous digital technologies that have become available to small commercial and industrial enterprises in recent years. “In this funding model, it is not the companies that receive funding, but the experts represented in the consortium. They can therefore develop solutions tailored to the needs of the companies free of charge,” explained Johannes Essmeister, who is in charge of the project.

Fast solutions required

In times of the corona virus, it was now possible to access the networks created as part of “House of Digitalization” and DIHOST quickly and easily. Trade in particular needed rapid and straightforward forms of support. Ecoplus started with the “Lower Austria is supplied locally” campaign and the platform [www.ecoplus.at/online-handel](#). This is available to companies in all sectors that have already built up their own solutions in the area of online trading. But what should be done with small commercial businesses and enterprises that have not established their own online store thus far, that consider their core competence to be personal sales consultations, which suddenly became impossible?

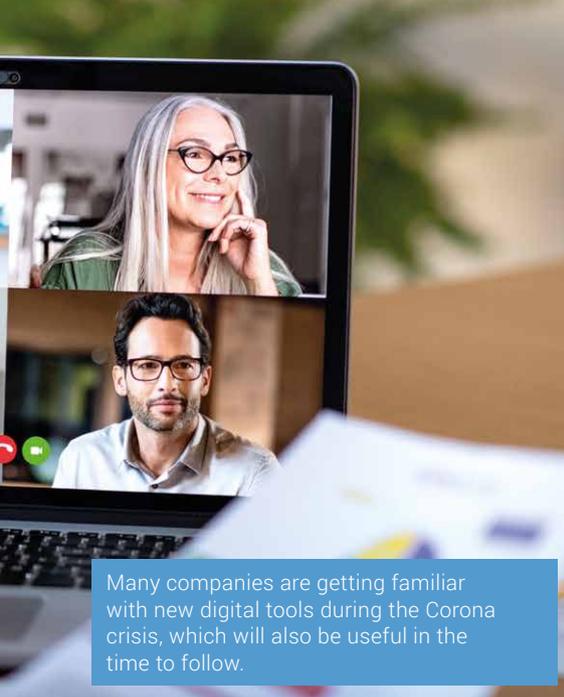
Since the COVID-19 restrictions entered into force, Essmeister has been working feverishly to bundle the capacities of the DIHOST consortium partners towards the realization of an application that can remedy this situ-

ation. The result is [meinschaufenster.at](#), a free service that allows small and medium sized businesses to connect with customers directly through WhatsApp. The implemented technical solution allows access without previous knowledge and without a digitally recorded product catalogue. The retailer can show the prospective customer around the store using the camera from a smartphone or laptop and recommend products that suit customer needs, which are then shipped. Business people can decide for themselves how much time they want to spend on a call and how many salespeople they want to use at the same time with one mobile number.

“We set up the technical solution for this within six days, this is only possible in such a consortium”, reported Essmeister about the intensive time of development. Various scientific institutions have combined their strengths to achieve this. “FH St. Pölten contributed its know-how on digital media technologies, while IMC FH Krems is analyzing various payment models,” explained Essmeister. Nine programmers from FOTEC, the research subsidiary of the University of Applied Sciences Wiener Neustadt, were on duty almost around the clock for the operative implementation.

The House of Digitalization had also already done good preparatory work, which could be used in view of the corona measures. Particularly at the Wieselburg node, ideas and structures had emerged from the FH e-commerce study program which could now help. The head of the course, Rainer Neuwirth, founded myproduct.at which develops web shop solutions for customers in all industries. In addition, the munic-





Many companies are getting familiar with new digital tools during the Corona crisis, which will also be useful in the time to follow.



The know-how necessary to react quickly to COVID-19 restrictions was available at the Wieselburg node of the "House of Digitalization".

ipality of Wieselburg has launched a delivery service that provides free delivery for all goods ordered online at www.wieselburg-handelt.at.

Course units for the time to follow

The experience gained under these special circumstances should also be very useful for the time "following Corona". "We, at ecoplus, have also switched to working from the home office and learned a lot. Many companies are currently experiencing such a learning effect," said Zeppelzauer. That is Brandstetter's assessment as well. "The way we work will change permanently because many companies are seeing how much they could actually handle online," Brandstetter is

convinced. This has numerous advantages. Many things can be done in less time and with greater efficiency. The CO₂ footprint is smaller as well. "This is a win-win situation because it addresses two key priorities of the innovation strategies at state and federal level: digitalization and greening," said Brandstetter.

The House of Digitalization is particularly committed to this goal. The www.virtuelleshaus.at website will soon be relaunched. "It is a solution that is growing continuously and is very well accepted. More than half of the users are companies," said Zeppelzauer. "The relaunch will build on this experience and optimize some functions." The next stage of development will be a real House of Digitalization in Tulln, which is intended as a

meeting zone and showroom for players of the digital transformation. It is in the planning phase at the moment. The aim is also to demonstrate the possibilities offered by digitalization for optimizing building technology and thus for the sustainable operation of such a building, as Brandstetter explained. However, the data exchange with the energy supply company required for this necessitated special attention to aspects of cybersecurity. "We are currently discussing this with industrial partners such as EVN or Verbund," explained Brandstetter.

The fact that the network nodes, which have been set up, are already well established is demonstrated by the large number and variety of projects that have been launched by the network part- | [next page](#) ▶



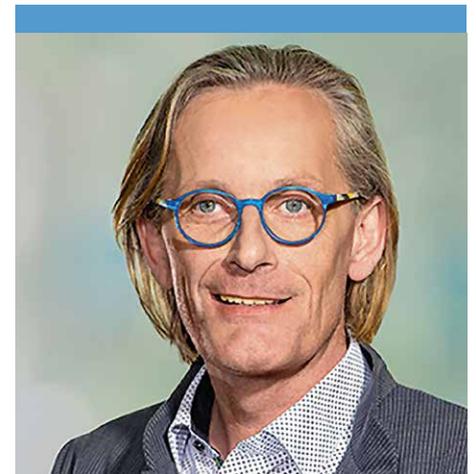
Claus Zeppelzauer,

Head of the Business & Technology Division at ecoplus, believes that the current situation offers a lot of learning potential for the "time following Corona".



Peter Brandstetter,

Lower Austrian digitalization manager, wants to provide companies with low-threshold access to new digital tools.



Johannes Eßmeister,

DIHOST project manager, together with three universities of applied sciences, set up the meinschaufenster.at app within a very short time.



THE PROJECT

The House of Digitalization

The digitalization strategy of the province of Lower Austria is designed to support companies, qualify employees, and raise awareness among a broader section of the population. The flagship project is the "House of Digitalization". It is an important interface for the digital transformation and is currently being set up as an interactive platform with personalized services and an automated suggestion system for networking Lower Austrian companies with research and educational institutions and as a meeting place for the interested public in the field of digitalization.

The "construction" takes place in three steps. In a first step, which was completed in 2018, digital nodes were set up in St. Pölten, Krems, Tulln, Wieselburg, Klosterneuburg, and Wiener Neustadt, where specific competencies already existing in the state are bundled and networked with each other. The second step was to build a "virtual house" with ten levels. As a third step, a real house of digitalization will be built in Tulln by 2022.

www.virtuelleshaus.at

DIHOST

The "Digital Innovation Hub East Austria" (DIHOST) is one of three projects funded within the framework of the BMDW's "Digital Innovation Hubs" call for proposals. DIHOST was commissioned by the Lower ecoplus Austrian Business Agency. In addition to the Province of Lower Austria, Burgenland and the business chambers of Vienna, Lower Austria, Burgenland and Upper Austria are also involved in the project. In terms of content, the company intends to focus on the priorities of 3D printing, block chain & IT security as well as the Internet of Things, sensor technology & connectivity and has brought on board the expertise of the St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences, IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems, Fotec, ABC Austrian Blockchain Center and Research Burgenland.

<https://dih-ost.at>

Many companies need low-threshold access to new digital solutions.

ners so far. "The network meetings at the individual locations are attended by 50 to 60 people every time," said Brandstetter. Such meetings took place for example on "Smart Farming" or "Virtual Reality" for shop solutions. "Furniture stores already offer to virtually explore rooms as part of interior design planning. Why shouldn't a carpenter's shop do that as well," asked Brandstetter.

It is important to make access as low-threshold as possible. Brandstetter, "When we talk about Big Data and Cloud Solutions, people get scared. But it is important that the companies use the technology, not that they know the terminology."

Translating "Computer science" to plain English

Essmeister can only agree with this. "The language of computer scientists is the new Latin, which is only spoken by the class trained in it. This must be translated into a language that is understood in small businesses." An example: If you tell a tiled stove builder about the "Internet of Things", he won't be able to visualize it's relationship to his working world. "But if you explain to him that the aim is to get the temperature of the tiles to the residents' smartphones, ten minutes later he will have three ideas on how to use it," says Essmeister.

In order to use the expertise of the DIHOST consortium for the benefit of the regional economy, it was therefore important to find out what the companies really need. And that presupposed the creation of "awareness". Essmeister toured all 23 Lower Austrian district offices of the Chamber of Commerce to create awareness and collect ideas. "In addition, we have launched a crowdsourcing campaign that has already resulted in specific projects," Zeppelzauer added.

The topics that could be taken up are extremely varied. On the one hand, com-

pletely new formats of qualification and further training were created. The first block chain summit was held at the St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences, which was attended by 60 companies. A summer camp is being organized at which mechatronics apprentices learn programming and teachers at building construction polytechnic colleges are trained in the field of Building Information Modelling (digital 3D models of buildings are created which can provide a consistent database from the planning to the management of a building).

Some more far-reaching technical solutions have also already been implemented. Together with the Food Cluster of Lower Austria, for example, a system for estimating the risk of late frost in viticulture has been established. The small-scale measurement of small weather data is carried out by sensors, the continuous data transmission is energy-saving via a Long Range Wide Area Network (LoRaWAN). Another project created a route optimization app for bakers. ■

Contact:

Peter Brandstetter

Digitalization Manager
Niederösterreich-Ring 2, Haus B
3100 St. Pölten
Tel.: +43 2742 9000-19643

Ing. Johannes Eßmeister

Project management DIHOST
Niederösterreich-Ring 2, Haus B
3100 St. Pölten
Tel.: +43 2742 9000-19641



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