Why the City of Cologne relies on Rocket.Chat for secure and compliant digital collaboration

Case Study

“We wanted to make daily work for our workers as seamless as possible and equip them with the tools they need without compromising on data security and privacy. Rocket.Chat was the perfect choice for us and has always been stable and scalable.”

Rene Jahnke
Solution Architect, the City of Cologne
Customer

City of Cologne (Stadt Köln)

Cologne was founded by the Romans over 2,000 years ago. Today it is the largest city in the western part of Germany and the fourth largest city in the country with over 1 million inhabitants. Cologne is renowned for its positive outlook and celebratory nature. The city is a matter of the heart and a constant state of optimism. It hosts more than 30 museums and hundreds of galleries. There are many institutions of higher education, most notably the University of Cologne, one of Europe's oldest and largest universities.

Challenge

Combatting risks of shadow IT and stopping it in its tracks

When employees use unauthorized applications to get work done, it's commonly known as 'shadow IT'. More often than not, shadow IT systems are born from a good place, which is the willingness to be more efficient. But they undermine one of IT's most important aspects — controlling the risks associated with the use of unauthorized applications in the organization.

The explosion of hybrid work environments has led to a proliferation of shadow IT. It's not unusual to find colleagues using personal apps to share work-related information, owing to the familiarity and convenience. These users are just trying to get their jobs done. While there isn't malicious intent, shadow IT can have severe consequences for organizations. Since these tools are unauthorized, the data within them is neither secured by IT nor is it managed according to the industry regulations the organization must follow — meaning data leaks and exposure of sensitive information is just a matter of time.

The City of Cologne faced a similar situation. Since the onset of the pandemic, a major chunk of the City's workforce was working from home at least once every 3 days. While it's true that it was essential to keep communication afloat during such unprecedented times, it was also important to secure and protect sensitive data. So it was crucial for the City to support the collaboration needs of the hybrid workforce. Therefore, it became essential for them to choose a collaboration platform for secure and compliant internal as well as external communication with citizens and partners.

"We chose Rocket.Chat because it's secure, open source, and can be operated on-premise. The performance and stability of Rocket.Chat over the years convinced us to migrate from the Community to Enterprise edition".

Rene Jahnke
Solution Architect, the City of Cologne
Solution

An on-premise, open-source solution to put to rest insecure modes of communication

Rene Jahnke is the Solution Architect from the IT department of the City of Cologne. Rene is passionate about giving customers new tools to improve their routines. At the City of Cologne, he is responsible for monitoring new technologies available on the market and evaluating whether they are relevant to the city.

Rene has been using the Community Edition of Rocket.Chat since 2018 for the city administration. As the number of users increased, the need for a more robust and secure collaboration platform became evident.

The IT Department at the City of Cologne wanted to:
- Provide a better digital experience for the hybrid workforce by equipping them with the tools they need to get work done
- Achieve regulatory compliance and ensure maximum data privacy by using an on-premise solution to have complete control over their data
- Deliver a secure, reliable, and accessible means of communication for citizens to accelerate their digital transformation

After gathering the requirements, it was clear that Rene was looking for a secure, on-premise, and open-source collaboration platform built for their security and compliance needs. Besides, the IT department of the City of Cologne had specific collaboration requirements such as secure file sharing, implementation of a virus scanner before uploading the files, automatic deletion of chats and files after a stipulated time period, and the extension of live chat support.

It was clear as day that Rocket.Chat was the best solution to meet the collaboration needs of 20,000 employees distributed across 9 departments and 50 offices. The implementation of Rocket.Chat is phased out to support the unique needs of the city council.
The implementation process

**Phase 1**
Internal team collaboration for up to 20,000 employees

**Phase 2**
Intercompany team collaboration: integration of the city-owned business.

**Phase 3**
The implementation of the “Smart City” approach: integration of all citizens of the city into the Rocket.Chat System.

- The first phase involves leveraging Rocket.Chat for internal collaboration. The City of Cologne has 20,000 employees distributed across 9 departments in 50 cities. Rocket.Chat empowered the employees to communicate with complete data privacy with controlled access to sensitive data.
- The second phase involves using Rocket.Chat for intercompany team collaboration in case of emergencies. This will establish integrated, decentralized communication across the city-owned companies and the internal teams for all-around, unified management.
- The final phase is relying on Rocket.Chat for the implementation of a smart city. In this phase, the sole objective of communication is to improve citizen engagement and gather the needs faster, so the city administration can help the citizens at the earliest. Therefore, Rocket.Chat is the comprehensive collaboration platform used by the City of Cologne for secure and interoperable internal, external, and citizen communication.
Results

Say hello to unified communication and bid goodbye to communication silos

Government agencies are under increasing pressure to modernize their IT systems, provide better employee hybrid experiences and deliver affordable digital services to their citizens. The City of Cologne leveraged Rocket.Chat to protect the privacy of various work environments and provide complete integrity so employees can collaborate with confidence while following data protection policies to prevent data leaks and reduce the surface area vulnerable to cyberattacks.

European governments are moving away from cloud services, and the importance of data control is specifically important in Europe. This is evidenced by GDPR, the Digital Markets Act (EU rules to limit the market power of large online chat and messaging platforms), but also with cases such as Microsoft Office 365 being banned from French ministries over privacy concerns, cloud services not allowed in the Swedish government and the refusal of the German government to work with large cloud providers.

Using Rocket.Chat has helped city administrators replace email as the primary communication channel to keep up with an on-the-go collaboration since a mix of employees is working cross-country or often from home as a result of naturally evolving workplaces and aided by the pandemic. This has increased team productivity by efficiently getting critical messages and information delivered securely to the correct parties in as little time as possible.

Rocket.Chat has built-in federation support meaning organizations can connect across agencies and departments, regardless of the communication tool they use, thereby eliminating communication silos.

Rocket.Chat has empowered the City of Cologne to securely collaborate with vendors, partners, and contractors who have an email domain outside of the organization, and connect across agencies while maintaining separate servers and data ownership.

“Originally we planned to start with 5,000 licenses. In the end, the offer was so good, and internal demand was so high that we immediately added more licenses and reached 20,000 seats.”

Rene Jahnke
Solution Architect, the City of Cologne
In the last few years when citizens' interactions increased, there's even more need to interact more transparently but securely with citizens over the channels they prefer. We, at Rocket.Chat help government institutions around the globe to manage incoming citizens' inquiries and requests efficiently and streamline customer communication by equipping them to communicate with citizens on their preferred channels.

Overall, Rocket.Chat helped Rene's team integrate disconnected systems, information, teams, and tools into a unified communications environment, thereby empowering employees to collaborate securely and seamlessly.

"We wanted to give everyone the freedom to connect with each other securely. We needed a tool that could bring us together again. Luckily we found one with Rocket.Chat."

Rene Jahnke
Solution Architect, the City of Cologne
Ready to accelerate your digital transformation?

Talk to an expert