# weConnect: CGI and ARD Multimedia Project

**CGI**

The weConnect system was developed by the ARD working group "weConnect" with the participation of IRT (Institut für Rundfunktechnik), CGI, and other manufacturers. Its goal is to replace ARD's ageing line scheduling and file transfer network and enable it to exchange audio contributions and switch audio lines between the ARD broadcasting stations.

Using its own protocol language SML (Story Markup Language), weConnect acts as an interface to production and line scheduling systems, as well as a complete, fail-safe transmission network.

weConnect allows the participating broadcasters to exchange multimedia contributions such as audio files, videos, images or texts, as well as to organize live broadcasts via line. All ARD broadcasting stations, Deutschlandradio, Deutsche Welle, ARD Hauptstadtstudio and ARD Sternpunkt are involved, as well as external broadcasters including ORF, SRF and EBU.
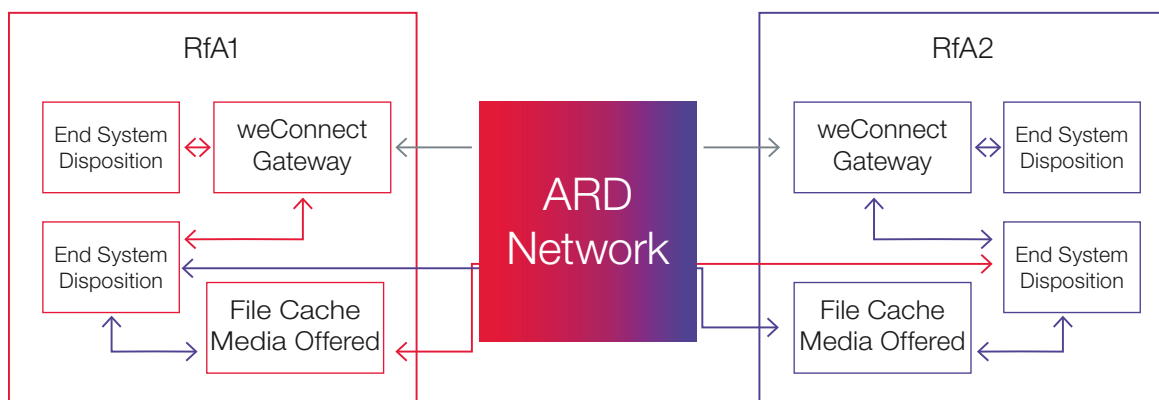
"At the beginning of the project there was the desire to simplify work processes - you have to bear in mind

that the management-based exchange of contributions was based on ideas from the 1970s and the file-related exchange was already over 20 years old - you wanted something modern", explains an ARD spokesperson.

The technical basis is formed by so-called weConnect gateways from the manufacturers CGI (11 gateway locations) and D'Accord (2 gateway locations), which are available redundantly for each broadcasting station and act as central sending and receiving points in the ARD network. Based on the weConnect gateways, special adapters have been developed to provide the connected scheduling, editorial, and production systems with the processed information.

Objects exchanged between the participating

## End-to-End Communication in the weConnect Network

broadcasters via weConnect are SML-based stories, containers for metadata, references to and descriptions of media essences, and booking information.

The weConnect network consists of interconnected weConnect gateways. Behind each gateway, local end systems are connected, which prepare the information contained in the stories for the respective applications. An end system here can be a scheduling system, but also an editorial or production system.
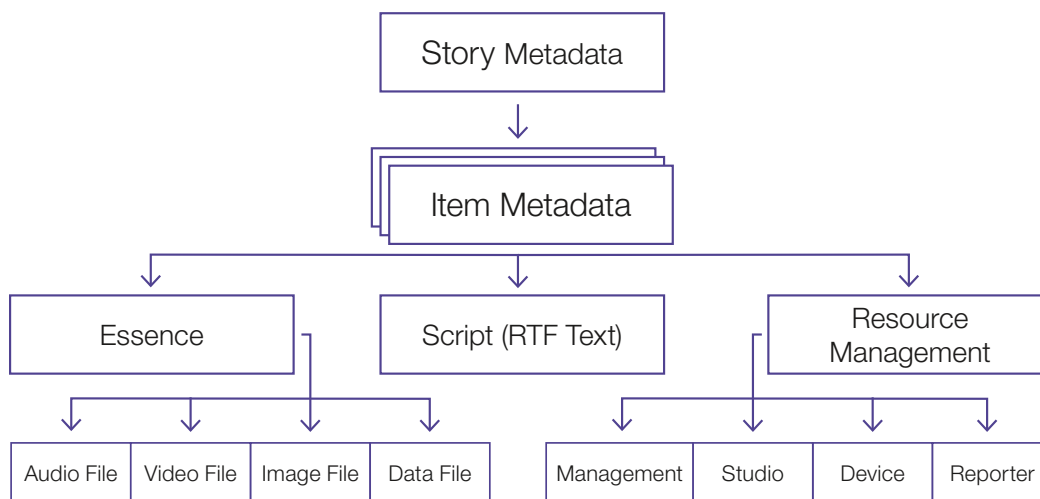
"The updated function for contributions by a story owner is classified as still unusual, but very exciting. If they change the story, this is communicated to all systems in the same second," says the ARD spokesperson. "Other options such as sending multimedia attachments should be mentioned at this point too. You can send posts with three questions as text, three answers in an audio format and also attach photos and videos to the story afterwards." These new possibilities are currently still being discovered and tested.

For the CGI dira customers among the broadcasting companies, an additional interface to their dira production system was created. Editorial systems are currently not connected to weConnect according to specifications. However, the CGI OpenMedia editorial system can receive story information via dira and send it via dira.

After a project phase lasting nearly two-years, weConnect was successfully launched in December 2020 despite numerous challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. This was thanks in part to the extensive, virtual training provided by the ARD. ZDF media academy specifically for this purpose.

"A new system naturally has more options and, as expected, is based on modern standard IT," says ARD. Multimedia articles can be distributed updated and distributed faster with WeConnect. "The technical implementation has succeeded more economically than ever before."

**Building the weConnect story**



## About CGI

Founded in 1976, CGI is among the largest IT and business consulting services firms in the world. Operating in hundreds of locations across the globe, CGI delivers end-to-end services and solutions, including strategic IT and business consulting, systems integration, managed IT and business process services and intellectual property solutions. CGI's merger with SCISYS Group PLC in December 2019 with deep expertise in the media and broadcast sectors, as well as the space and defense sectors. CGI's Media Solutions, formerly SCISYS Media Solutions, offer a wide range of professional news and content delivery solutions for innovative media companies across local, national and international markets. This includes the market-leading flagship newsroom system OpenMedia and the radio production solution dira, serving many key players in broadcast and delivery.

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