



## Election connections

1.14 million customers, 1,811 delivery sites, 2,000 submission facilities, 18,000 employees and all in one single day?! These are the key logistical figures relating to the elections held in the Austrian capital, Vienna, in October 2010. Translated, the figures actually refer to the number of eligible voters, polling stations, ballot boxes and poll workers involved in the process.

Above all, elections represent a logistical challenge in terms of ensuring that the authorities and service providers work together in perfect harmony; as such, they require precise planning and preparation. On the one hand, the households of eligible voters need to be provided with electoral information and, in some instances, postal ballots (around 162,000 of them in Vienna) in good time prior to the election, and on the other hand, polling stations need to be equipped with ballot boxes, polling booths, electoral rolls and voting papers; usually this can only be done the day before the election, so it is clearly a matter demanding exact timing and a good sense for logistics.

The large number of polling stations and frequent changes to the network of delivery sites (due to the relocation or closing of polling stations) call for additional flexibility when it comes to planning routes and scheduling resources. Time management is even the central factor as far as packing up the polling stations is concerned, since it must of course be possible to use schools, public buildings, etc. for their intended function the very next day. The prompt provision and collection of polling booths, ballot boxes, tables and chairs for Viennese and national elections are managed from a central warehouse, as is the case within many companies. As a rule, all items related to the election will have been collected in just two days after the vote and they will then be stored until the next election is held.

It's not only full speed ahead for the public authorities during an election campaign, but also for the logistical preparations made by the individual parties. Whilst procurement logistics teams ensure that posters and information brochures are printed in good time prior to the campaign starting and that various newspaper and television ads are taken out, during the final stages the logistics of distribution are primarily down to party activists pounding the streets. As in every company, what it really boils down to is getting the information logistics right. Not only the politicians themselves, but also an army of spin doctors, marketing companies, pollsters and consultants are constantly grappling with one question: "How do I get my message across to the largest possible number of voters and mobilise them at the same time?"

Whether the efficient use of (tax) money and resources – which is, after all, the top priority in the field of logistics – is really taken into account here is a matter for debate. The day after the election the media, political scientists and polling organisations are only just getting started on analysing voters' motives, voter transitions and possible coalitions and types of government in detail – at the same time, lessons have already been learned in terms of party policy and logistical preparations are already underway for the next election campaign. The German expression "Nach der Wahl ist vor der Wahl" (which translates as "post-election is pre-election") is absolutely spot on. It also applies to companies, for which it is never too early to start planning and constantly rethinking their logistical activities if they want to avoid coming to the market late and make the most of their competitive advantage.

In any case, an election is essentially ambivalent in nature, whether it's for the voters who often feel inundated with enticements and pamphlets for the duration of the campaign or for the party members on the constant merry-go-round of licking their wounds or celebrating on the day after the count. Depending on your perspective, an election could be an ordeal – or the ideal expression of democracy in action.