IBA looks back on German breakthrough, plans for future

■ **BELARUS**   ■ **GERMANY**

BELARUS-based IBA Group has just celebrated its first ten years in Germany. Ulrich Lasarzik, CEO of IBA IT tells *IT Europa* how it set up and grew the business, and what it plans for the next ten years: "IBA was formed in 1993 in Belarus as a software development company. With the rapidly growing demand for IT technologies in the countries of the former USSR and with IT customers in Western countries, IBA evolved into an alliance of companies with development centers in Belarus and the Czech Republic, and sales/support offices in Germany, Cyprus, the United States, Russia, and Bulgaria. In 2005, following the admittance of the Czech Republic to the European Union, IBA Group relocated its headquarters to Prague. The German affiliate of IBA Group was set up in May 2000.

And the customers? "In response to numerous requests from customers working in the automotive industry, a number of meetings with prospective clients were held in Stuttgart and Northern Rhine-Westphalia."

The task became clear very quickly. For effective cooperation, good command of German was needed. Also, it would be difficult to implement the complex solutions without the presence of IBA people on site with the customer. The German customers like to speak only their mother tongue and the application software was very tightly connected with the business processes of the clients, he says.

Eventually, a project involving IBA system programmers from Minsk who spoke good German or had translator diplomas was launched in late 1999. That was the birth point of IBA IT GmbH, the German affiliate of IBA Group. After extensive discussions with the local government bodies, the first official work and residence permit was issued. Three programmers from Belarus were working in Germany by the end of 2000.

A breakthrough that transformed the German IT industry and had positive effect on the IBA IT GmbH development was the introduction of a Green Card for foreign IT specialists. Aiming to overcome the shortage of skilled IT staff in the country, the Green Card programme brought thousands of foreign IT specialists to the German IT industry. The procedure for obtaining a job permit was simplified and standardised. Within a few months, the number of IBA employees in Germany grew to more than 20.

Where does IBA stand now in Germany? "More than one third of IBA Group revenue comes from German clients. And it has new initiatives – he wants to:

"Offer to our German-based clients our competencies in new technologies in mobile and internet service areas, including cloud computing; promote our competencies as an Eastern European leader in BI solutions for finance and manufacturing clients, and enter the market of Tivoli-based solutions."

Which of these is growing fastest in Germany? "Web 2.0, SAP and other ERPs, business intelligence, data warehousing, and cloud computing."

We have heard from some big companies that they have real problems finding skilled staff in Germany – does this affect you?

"It is true and has positive impact on our outsourcing business, because we can offer a near-shore or combined on-site plus near-shore delivery, which consolidates the advantages of easier project steering with an attractive resource and project realisation cost."

What do you think IBA will be doing in Germany in another ten years' time?

"Proceeding with our proven services; following up requests of the existing clients and grow with them. IBA aims to always be open to new IT industry trends in Germany and always offer the solutions and competencies that are on demand."
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▶ **OUR ANALYSIS**

It was the willingness of the German government to allow the guest-workers in, mainly from Turkey that helped its manufacturing years ago, and it has also now helped to boost the local IT industry with thousands of foreign experts. But across Europe, the prospect of rising unemployment is bringing down the chances of skills coming in from outside. Yet one of the effects of recession was to cut training, so it is unlikely that Europe will be able to meet its own needs, so Belarus-based IBA should be OK to benefit.

IBM to offer email triage

■ ■ **FRANCE**

IBM IS to launch a mobile device application for managing mobile e-mail. Currently, the IBM Mail Triage project is a prototype application, for use by IBM employees, and as part of ongoing research, it is planned to make the prototype available in beta form externally in the future.

Current mobile email clients are often just smaller versions of desktop clients and assume a user will open, read and respond to a message in the same manner they would on a desktop or laptop. Though in studying the behaviors of mobile users, IBM scientists are finding that mobile email usage differs greatly because of the environment and context in which it typically takes place.

With mobile mail, researchers have found that users are focused on "triaging" what's in the inbox at that moment – scanning and quickly deciding what's new; what needs to be handled immediately; what can be deleted now and what can wait until back in the office. Since there is no easy way to distinguish the difference between "new," "unread," and marked for "follow up," users often have to make up ad hoc solutions and decide when to make the trade-off to a different device.

To help solve this common problem, IBM Research is engaged in an ongoing research effort to redefine the mobile email user experience to more closely reflect how people work today. A prototype technology that researchers have developed, called IBM Mail Triage project, rethinks the mobile email experience by allowing users to quickly "triage" their email and identify what needs immediate action and what can be handled later.

"This project has grown out of ongoing research that attempts to understand how people use the technology devices in their lives – mobile phones, laptops, desktops, tablet computers, etc. – and spread their computing time across them," said Jeff Pierce, manager, mobile computing research, IBM Research at Almaden. "Today, people use devices interchangeably and in context with other devices, so we have developed a prototype application for mail triage to reflect today's smartphone email experience."

The IBM Mail Triage project accounts for the behavioural differences in the way users address emails on a desktop computer versus email a mobile device. For messages that do not require immediate action, a user can indicate an intended action – such as handle next, defer for later or reference.
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