LOGRUS CELEBRATES
TEN YEARS IN LOCALIZATION

*A growing technology company traces
its roots to the free economy movement in Russia*

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Later this summer, Logrus International, Inc., will be celebrating its tenth anniversary as an experienced translation and localization company. Recently, the company was chosen by IBM Ireland Dublin Software Lab for recognition as the Lotus/IBM Software Engineering Supplier of the Year 2002 for building, testing and bug-fixing seven language releases of Lotus Notes 6. Two company owners and co-founders, Serge Gladkoff, President, and Leonid Glazytchev, General Manager, share their thoughts on the company, its recognition, the translation/localization industry, working with clients, and the company's next ten years.

When was Logrus founded?

Glazytchev: The Russian company was founded as an independent entity in the spring of 1993 and the US one in July 1994. Trying to select the best date for the company birthday, we kept in mind that celebrating in summer is more fun, and, understandably, the birthday should fall on a Friday. So, we decided to celebrate the day when Logrus got the first large localization project from a client: it was a full Lotus 1-2-3 R4 localization into Russian in the beginning of August 1993. Since then, we have

Team Logrus and Microsoft's Steve Sinofsky (fourth from left) during an 010 Kickoff in Dublin. Owners Serge Gladkoff and Leonid Glazytchev are fourth and second from right, respectively

celebrated the company's anniversary on the second Friday in August.

What is the story behind Logrus' founding?

Glazytchev: Localization was just starting to emerge as a separate industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s, simultaneously with the first signs of a free economy becoming visible in Russia. Some software publishers

were bold enough to enter the nascent Russian market at that time, and localization projects were initiated. While we were thrilled by being involved in something absolutely new and dealing with cutting-edge technology, we soon realized that the companies we were working for did not show too much interest in localization as such.

As a result we decided to create the first ever independent company in Russia fully dedicated to software localization. Given that there was actually no market in Russia for this type of services and that we didn't even have the starting capital, it was a very brave — or naïve — decision, which can only be explained by our young age and extreme self-confidence. Also, we had nothing valuable to lose anyway. Even our chains had been stolen during the privatization in Russia!

Gladkoff: Logrus as a team is more than 14 years old. Before becoming Logrus, the team while working for another company had completed a number of localization projects for Symantec. What gave rise to Logrus as a separate company was a combination of opportunity, capability and determination.

When Microsoft entered the Russian market, we realized that there was enough business to be involved in just the area of software localization. So, we decided to spin off and do it on our own. In 1993 with the Logrus team subcontracted by a software distributor to localize Microsoft Works 3, Leonid visited the Microsoft campus in Ireland for the kickoff. He declared that he was representing another company — Logrus — rather than the distributor. To Microsoft's credit, they decided to give us a try which they never did regret. Since then, the company founders — the original team — are still together.

What are some key dates in Logrus' history?

Gladkoff: Our key dates are the dates when our customers tell us that they are happy with what we do. Quite recently, Logrus was chosen for recognition as IBM/Lotus Software Engineering Supplier of the Year 2002 in the category of Outsourced Localization Engineering. This is a very important milestone for the entire team. It is very rewarding to see that you are doing something really worthy and that you are standing up to the challenge.

Glazytchev: The ones that I remember are getting the first large contract for the company (Lotus 1-2-3 R4, August 1993); getting the first project (Works 3, September 1993); receiving the first recognition award from Microsoft (1995); getting the first project from Oracle (1997); and expanding into multilingual software engineering and getting our first such project from Lotus/IBM (1999). And, of course, the recognition which Serge just mentioned.

How has Logrus changed in the past ten years?

Gladkoff: We are a lot more organized, a lot more formal and very, very experienced, but the fundamental principle remains the same: acquire the best people and keep them. Then whatever you do to improve your corporate processes is basically aimed to allow the best and most capable people to work more and more productively and to allow them to grow according to their own potential and development. I am proud that our staff turnover is very low.

What's the key to Logrus' low staff turnover?

Gladkoff: It's a combination of policy and spirit. First and foremost, it's a result of stringent admission criteria. Our team members have a voice in admission decisions, and people tend to be with their likes. I don't think that a successful company can work as a machine or a faceless system. It's good team spirit that works and the atmosphere. Of course, "atmosphere" is something that is very difficult to define, but it works with us. All of our people are very good, and we don't like to part with good people. Naturally, we do everything we can to keep them, including offering loans and incentives.

What has Logrus learned about language and translation technology over the past ten years?

Gladkoff: I am a great believer in technology, and what I have learned about language and translation technology in the past ten years is that it is not going to replace translators any time soon. Automatic translation is a very far call. Therefore, the best translation technology can do is to improve the productivity of the human translator. Unfortunately, no existing technology to date allows a translator or company to get rid of the mandatory TEP — translation-edit-proof — cycle, so all radical changes in translation services induced by technology are still in the future. On the other hand, technology indeed does awesome things by allowing remote people to be fully integrated into the project system, and this is a cornerstone of our scalability. Technology is all about people.

Glazytchev: First of all, we've learned how different languages really are! A thousand minor translation tricks mastered during various software translation projects have also demonstrated how innocent — or ignorant — developers are when it comes to preparing their products for future localization. We've also learned that stupidity and laziness are the worst sins in the translation/localization world. Sometimes one can save hundreds of work hours by writing simple conversion utilities or other small tools — or by contracting vendors who are able to provide such out-of-the-box solutions.

What makes Logrus different from other translation/localization companies?

Glazytchev: Ever since Logrus was established, we have maintained that our key strength and difference are in our people. Our major asset is the unsurpassed level of technical competence and knowledge which make it possible for our employees to address most projects and processes in a creative manner. In this way we've solved many problems for our clients — for example, speeding up translation time, repairing damage done by faulty tools and ensuring better consistency and quality — and have received recognition for our services. And it's no wonder. We

The Logrus Lotus Notes 6 team

are one of few companies with so many former scientists on board, and we probably employ more Ph.D.s than the average high-tech company does per headcount.

One more thing is that we have always wanted to stand out from the crowd and considered it important enough to do all things — from advertising to sizing dialogs — in a different or at least modified way. Last but not least, we are still enjoying all of this, and we do not take ourselves too seriously!

Gladkoff: Also, in the past ten years Logrus has completed many complex projects that the acquired management knowledge base is an invaluable asset by itself. Our offer is a high-end technical management team. Large companies these days are buying a great deal of overpriced complex project management services. Hopefully, we will be able to make our offer — as outsourced large and complex IT project implementation — stand out above the noise.

If a client comes to Logrus with a project, what should he or she expect in terms of service and project satisfaction?

Glazytchev: Our clients can expect an unusually warm welcome for sophisticated and technically challenging projects. We have long-term relationships with the majority of our clients which, along with client awards earned over the past decade, point to an extremely high level of customer satisfaction. Also, low support requirements come as a pleasant surprise.

From a client's point of view, what is the best thing that he or she could say about Logrus?

Gladkoff: The best thing a client can say is that Logrus delivers at a very competitive cost. The second best thing is when a satisfied client admits that the result is beyond his or her expectations. The third best thing that a client can say is that Logrus requires no support. This means that we offer intelligent service going

beyond the predefined task definition. We are an overqualified team of organized professionals able to tackle large and complex projects at a very modest price.

How has Logrus grown in the past ten years?

Glazytchev: In terms of headcount, Logrus has grown from four people in 1993 (two working at the office, another two at home, no local network and a second-hand laser printer) to more than 90 people working on various projects simultaneously and using the latest hardware. But what is much more important for us is that we have gone from a typical garage team offering Russian localization to an established company with a certain level of recognition. We have developed the reputation as a company that can handle large and sophisticated engineering, testing and multilingual localization projects while specializing in problem-solving and high-tech turnkey solutions.

Gladkoff: Logrus is growing a modest 15% to 20% in terms of volume and size each year. In terms of maturity, we have departed radically from the initial concept of single language software localization. We still render localization services, but these services are much more complex and advanced than those offered in 1993. We continue to serve our major clients in new ways, and we also have developed some vertical solutions such as ERP and multimedia.

All in all, it is much more advanced and long-sighted management, engineering and multilingual work, as well as specific and unique services that come with every new project. What remains the same is that these services are centered on very large projects that few companies can complete. Another characteristic feature is that we are doing a lot of things that are beyond simple 1-2-3 sequences. Since our inception, we've been trying to make a point that Logrus has a very strong engineering dimension. Our growth shows that our customers are beginning to appreciate that.

How does it feel to be celebrating Logrus' tenth anniversary?

Gladkoff: One of my friends — also a company owner — said on his company's tenth anniversary that "after ten years, we fear

nothing." I can subscribe to this in the sense that we are past many dangers. In our first ten years the company has survived a coup, default, currency devaluation, and a shooting of the Parliament. Hopefully, these threats are behind us now.

On the other hand, as we are growing, we constantly face new problems — similar to the video game player running through a labyrinth and seeing a new monster jumping out from around every corner. Well, after our tenth anniversary, I am focusing on the positive side of the process with much less anxiety and much more excitement. It is fun to be in the translation/localization business.

Glazytchev: It feels terrible! It is so hard to accept that you are not that reckless and adventurous any more. I have to get used to the fact that the company employs dozens of people who are so much younger than me because I do not feel that experienced. The good thing is you can tell them embellished stories of the "good old days." The thought that we have really done something against all odds is really invigorating.

Where do you imagine Logrus being when it celebrates its twentieth anniversary?

Gladkoff: Logrus isn't exactly an oversized company yet, so there's plenty of room to grow. Now that there is more stability in Russia, we hope that Logrus will be growing faster. Besides, no company is quite credible and respected before it is at least ten years old. There are projects and endeavors that simply cannot be trusted to a start-up, no matter what. On the other hand, as the company matures, new possibilities open. This factor has tremendous significance in every sector of the service industry.

As Logrus gains credibility by staying in business longer, the company will be more visible for larger and more complex projects. In the future, different service industries will be converging because, first of all, all service organizations share many common skills such as people management and project management and, secondly, advances in technology lower entry barriers, thus making it easier to jump over industrial sectors and cover other areas. As Logrus grows, there will be many new and exciting opportunities opening up. 🌐

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