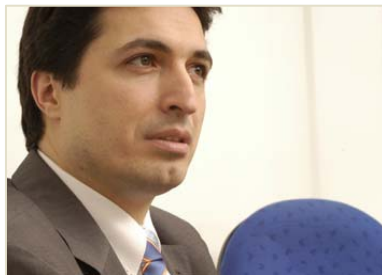


The Project Group, Munich, Germany

E-Interview with Stavros Georgantzis, Managing Director and Co-Owner

for “Competence Site”, a Web-Based Center of Excellence

This interview was conducted in January 2005 by Dr. Bettina Türk for Competence Site (www.competencesite.de), one of the leading German centers of excellence for executives, specialists, management, and service providers on the internet. Stavros Georgantzis, founder and Managing Director of The Project Group, a supplier of IT solutions for enterprise-wide project management centered on Microsoft Project and SAP, talks about the background, challenges, current activities, projects, and plans of The Project Group.



Question: Stavros, what have been the most important development milestones of The Project Group, including organizational changes, innovations and market successes? Which competences has The Project Group built up and expanded since its beginnings? And which networks have proved to be the most important up to now?

Stavros Georgantzis: I founded The Project Group (TPG) in 1998 as a result of having recognized that professional, enterprise-wide project management would continue to grow, and at the same time I saw there was a market need for a solution to integrate Microsoft Project with ERP systems like SAP. That idea gave birth to the first version of PSLink®, which has become the world's most powerful integration of the two market-leading applications. Then, in 2001, my business partner Hans Strasser joined the company and strengthened the existing team with his deep knowledge of professional software development. Another turning point came in mid-2004 with the arrival of Dr. Thomas Henkelmann and his team. Thomas is now our Director of Consulting Services and manages our team of technical experts in the consulting area.

Our competence lies clearly in enterprise-wide project management solutions based on Microsoft Project (EPM) as well as the integration with SAP. Microsoft Project is quick to implement and gives measurable results in the short term, as well as increased productivity in the way projects are handled, which is why Project is the global market leader with over 6 million users. TPG's management alone has over 50 years collective experience with this application, ever since the first beta version in 1989!

TPG is tightly integrated into Microsoft's network. As one of the very few Microsoft Premier Project Partners in the German-speaking countries, TPG has an excellent reputation and we constantly receive new customer enquiries. Our expertise in Microsoft Project is also underlined by the fact that I'm in the US 3 or 4 times a year to participate in the Project Advisory Council (PAC). This group is comprised of 20 international experts who advise the Microsoft Project development team on future

enhancements. We're also a member of the Project Management Institute (PMI) network and cooperate with the German publication Projektmagazin.

The success of this strategy, focused on Microsoft Project, seems to indicate that it's the right one. In each of the last three years our revenues have grown by over 50% and in 2005 we're aiming for 70% growth. We're also boosting the number of our internal experts.

Question: What do you see as being the most important developments and challenges in the future of The Project Group? What are the principal success factors and competences needed to meet these challenges?

Stavros Georgantzis: The integration of enterprise-wide project management in other business processes, like quality management, controlling, and sales, is gaining in importance and will lead to an increased demand for powerful project management solutions. TPG is prepared for this because its team of top-flight experts undergoes regular training to keep them on the highest level of expertise.

“Professional, enterprise-wide project management will keep growing and its integration into other business processes is gaining in importance.”

Of course, it's always a challenge to recognize emerging market trends as

early as possible. We've been successful in this due to the close cooperation with Microsoft and SAP as well as organizing our own seminars, which enable our customers to tell us about their requirements and their pain points so that we can develop solutions or a product to meet their needs.

Question: Which products and services are at the forefront of your business today? What are you planning for the future? Who are your main competitors? And what differentiates TPG from the competition?

Stavros Georgantzis: Our business model is based on three areas: our high-performance products; the consulting services and implementation of enterprise-wide project management solutions based on Microsoft Project; and our seminars. Among the products, PSLink® is currently our flagship, but the others are selling pretty well too.

As for the future, we're planning new products based on a number of ideas we've been having. We'll need to recruit additional staff for those. And of course we'll continue to update our existing products and customized solutions to keep them in line with the newest technology from Microsoft and SAP.

To answer your question about the competition, our principal competitors worldwide are other Microsoft Project Partners, some of whom are a lot bigger than TPG. We're different from some of these though because of our international partner network, which we use to sell our products. We're continually working to expand our partner model. Another differentiator is that you won't often find the level of expertise we have in-house in the product and service area, and we develop it by investing in research and development as well as in the salaries of our best people, who are

recognized experts in their field.

Question: What is the typical TPG employee like? What are the qualifications you look for? And what marks TPG out as an employer? How would you describe your corporate culture?

Stavros Georgantzis: TPG's staff, as I mentioned just now, are experts in their area. As it's not always possible to buy in the level of expertise we're looking for, and because the market always brings new challenges, we invest a lot in additional training. All of our staff are free to develop further in the areas that interest them. Our corporate culture is based around sharing knowledge with each other so that we remain a really strong team. And our team spirit is also encouraged by the activities we do together, like the cable water ski course we rented last summer, and karting. Another important contributor to our staff morale and good team spirit is the transparent management style we have.

Question: Can you outline a few of your current customer projects? What do they involve? Who are you working with on them? And how do you approach these projects?

Stavros Georgantzis: We implement enterprise-wide, Microsoft Project-based solutions using our proven 5 Phase method. This places a lot of importance on detailed specifications that are developed, using a prototype, in an intensive workshop with our experts and the people who'll be using the system later on. It might sound odd, but we're often amazed how often we meet customers who, in earlier projects, started by saying, "let's just get started and we'll see how things turn out." Then they wonder why the result wasn't what the users were expecting and that the project timeframe and costs have spun out of control. At the end of our workshop, the customer knows exactly what will be realized and how, because he has the prototype to prove it.

"Then they wonder why the result wasn't what the users were expecting and why the project timeframe and costs spun out of control."

Our offer for the realization of the project is based exactly on the optimal design that has been developed in the workshop. It's hard to imagine a better way to guarantee accurate planning and transparency for both sides.

TPG's experts then develop a pilot which is tested by the customer's pilot testing team using clearly defined scenarios and test processes. If the pilot fulfils all requirements, the solution is implemented by TPG in an enterprise-wide roll-out. The users, who have been trained by experienced trainers, can now start to work with the system. If there are any questions or if the customer needs additional development work, we're always there with our support, to underpin the long-term reliability and performance of the system.

For winning new business we work very closely with Microsoft, and when it comes to handling international projects, for example a SAP integration, we work with our global partners on site.

Question: What are your expectations of the knowledge network on the Competence Site? In areas like research and best practices, what aspects of a knowledge exchange with specialists and experts from other organizations are you looking for? Do you see any potential for joint projects or activities with other organizations?

Stavros Georgantzis: One expectation is that the dialog with our target group will help us to quickly identify emerging market trends; and we're also hoping to increase our visibility in the market. Our target groups are large and medium-sized enterprises in any industry who are looking to implement professional, enterprise-wide project management. We're in regular contact with consulting firms and support them when their customers ask them about project management and its technical realization. We sometimes hold joint events with them, and in our experience these are a win-win situation for everyone involved.

We'd like more contact with universities and advanced technical colleges to encourage an interest in our area and to identify and recruit talented individuals, who we would then train to become experts – we're always looking for these people!

Question: What are your plans for the next 12 months? Do you have a corporate motto? And what do you like to do in your spare time?

Stavros Georgantzis: This year our product range will be significantly extended and we'll start selling useful little tools directly from our website. We're hoping this will boost our name recognition and generate new business for consulting and project work.

Our corporate motto is "To be on top of the best". We're happy to be among the top suppliers of Enterprise Project Management solutions, especially as far as our expertise and performance are concerned. But we work hard to keep that top slot, which is why we invest a lot in expert knowledge, resources, and customer service.

From time to time I spend a few days off with my wife and daughters in Greece, and that replenishes my batteries for work. Building up the company and seeing its success is really satisfying and gives me the feeling that I'm creating something of value.

Contact:

Stavros Georgantzis

The Project Group

StavrosG@TheProjectGroup.de

Tel: +49 (0)89 / 61 55 93 – 30

www.TheProjectGroup.de

Stavros Georgantzis is an expert on Microsoft Project and its integration with ERP applications, particularly SAP.