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Without tests, no go for mobile phone networks

Sigos, the Nuremberg-based company, helps with the launch of new mobile phone services. Focus expanded to the world market

NUREMBERG _ Increases in the cost of transmitting SMS messages are always met by outcries the length and breadth of the country. Kids, and many adults, too, have fallen in love with „SMSing“. It must be cheap and work efficiently. The latter requirement is taken care of by specialist mobile phone companies such as the Nuremberg-based Sigos Systemintegration GmbH.

„We have grown along with the mobile phone industry“, explained Helmut Friedel, the company founder and one of its three directors. As the star of the Philips Communications Industry (PKI) in Nuremberg began to fade, the SIGOS story was poised to unfold. A team of 17 former PKI engineers offered the industry tailored IT and telecommunications solutions. Now, twelve years on, 45 employees are on board – and on the increase. This year Sigos, as a specialist in the automated testing of telecom services, anticipates a still moderate growth of twelve to fifteen per cent to over 6.5 million Euro. „We are making a sensible start so that we can grow twice as fast in 2003“, announced Friedel.

Whereas in the initial years the emphasis was on customised telecom services for a regional market, Sigos has long since expanded its focus to standardised test systems for the world market. „We are ripe for it now“, stated the new chairman of the board, Johannes Reis. Manufacturers such as Compaq, Lucent and Ericsson as well as all major German and some European mobile phone network operators are customers. According to Reis: „We are benefiting from the internationalisation of their business to expand ourselves.“ An order from China is taking concrete shape. Further custom is anticipated from the USA since the original European GSM standard has established itself on the American “patchwork”-style market . An alliance with a partner of international standing in the sales and technology sectors is currently being developed.

With its know-how, Sigos benefits from the new challenges posed by suppliers: given the saturation of the mobile phone market it follows that the acquisition of new customers is no longer crucial to success. More so now than at the beginning of the mobile phone era, suppliers are under pressure to differentiate themselves from competitors. This is less and less on the price front as sales margins have become so slim. The criterion therefore remains innovation. Whoever offers the best service, wins. Mail box calling, telephoning in other networks (roaming), global availability, requesting mobile phone statements and of course sending SMS: All must function conveniently and without error.

As such major network operators cannot risk launching new mobile phone services without test runs. Sigos simulates the customer's telephone behaviour with automatic test systems. For Vodafone, for instance, every imaginable scenario was played out at 67 locations in order to test the stability and availability of the network. Extremely embarrassing errors with serious consequences may be avoided, for example in mobile phone billing. Nothing angers customers more than being billed for calls which however could not be connected.

With its product portfolio Sigos GmbH has achieved a competitive edge over rivals on the German market. The major difference: „Competitors mostly offer island solutions. We, on the other hand, are part of the network operating system and offer test solutions that encompass the entire network“, explained Reis. We have products on the market for SMS, WAP services, billing systems as well as for the GPRS standard and in the future, they will be in even more demand for the new UMTS generation. Friedel concluded: „We help launch new services quickly and round off their stamp of quality.“

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