

Proekspert – founded by software engineers for software engineers

trade
estonia

Proekspert has a rich and dignified history dating all the way back to 1981, when its founders met for the first time at the Institute of Cybernetics and Physics in Tallinn. Proudly carrying the flag “founded by software engineers for software engineers”, Proekspert was officially established in 1993, making it one of the earliest technology startups to emerge from Estonia.

The company has certainly come a long way, agrees CEO Triin Sepp. “What started out as a pack of engineers developing bits of software for controlling the growth of bacteria for scientific research, has now evolved into one of the leading engineering technology companies in the region,” states Triin proudly. Today, Proekspert’s focus is on programming hardware to make almost any device a smart device instead of being just a piece of equipment, but the company’s founda-

tions are rooted in the early days of fintech. “We developed one of the first microchip banking cards in Europe already in the 1990s and this is a sector still very close to our hearts,” adds Triin.

Rather than being a run-of-the-mill software house, Proekspert take pride in being able to expand device functionality with modern software technologies. “We see ourselves as product development partners for the electrical equipment industry, which sets us apart from many competitors. Embedded programming allows us to solve very complex problems and to provide testing on an unforeseen level. We know what needs to be done in hardware development, what data to collect and how to store it in the cloud.” Working with Denmark’s largest electrical equipment manufacturer Danfoss in fact led to a strategic partnership with the multinational giant – at one





point Danfoss held 51% of the shares of Proekspert. A management buy-out in 2013 returned the company 100% to its Estonian shareholders.

A liberal approach to managing talent

Triin remembers the Danfoss partnership days vividly. "They needed a development centre in Estonia and approached us with the most complex problems imaginable - "we know that this is an impossible task, but you come up with something", was the standard ask from the Danes." But besides the many technological victories, the Danfoss partnership taught the Estonians at Proekspert a priceless lesson - in order to understand the client's needs and to solve them accordingly, there has to be a degree of freedom and flexibility in the organisation's workflow and structure.

Proekspert are proud to call themselves a boss-less company, driven by an innovative and liberal culture. "This isn't a collective farm where our engineers simply obey orders given by their superiors, we need some freedom to come up with great ideas and achieve real efficiency." Thus, there are no yes-men at Proekspert. "If something can't be done, we simply state that and move on. We don't give out empty promises," stresses Triin. Each project is assigned a dedicated customer success manager, who is sincerely vested in the business processes of the client, acting as an interlocutor between the engineers and the client's needs to ensure a pleasant customer experience and a degree of familiarity.

Another example of Proekspert's more liberal values is the unique recruitment process, which

is in constant development to improve the process for both the recruits and the recruiter and to determine whether the candidate has the right stuff for the job. "We hold regular bootcamps for talented juniors and one exciting element we developed there will be added to our junior recruitment process - they have to win an online puzzle game developed by our own engineers in order to proceed to the next round of recruitment," explains Triin.

One can not achieve quality and provide credible solutions to customers without learning the ins and outs of the trade first. "Our focus has always been on completing the task as expected and avoiding nonsense at all costs. The master's honour is a centuries-old principle that we still hold in high regard. This is why our less-experienced junior recruits start as apprentices before they graduate to become masters."

Making electrical equipment smarter

Given the compact size of the domestic market, it's only natural for Proekspert (and many other Estonian businesses) to scout for more revenue from export markets. Besides Scandinavia, the company keeps tabs on the highly lucrative German market, where they've even managed to secure a holding in a startup manufacturing smart bolts - [Sensorise](#). "This was the result of a chance encounter with a German inventor and we decided to invest in his venture. These smart bolts contain tiny sensors which give an advance warning of metal fatigue or any other possible failure. The use cases for this could be endless, but currently they're being actively used in infra-

structure facilities carrying expensive equipment, such as wind generators, TV towers or network cell equipment. Our core competence is to prepare collected data and develop analytics models that help technicians to predict such events."

Potential clients for Proekspert include manufacturers of electrical equipment and devices that can be made smarter digitally. Proekspert has worked with Stiebel Eltron, Telia, Alliance Laundry Systems and the European Space Agency, among others. "We do not have our own products on the market, rather we choose to dedicate ourselves to work with our clients to help them instead. Developing our own products requires the kind of market expertise that we simply do not have the time for. It makes more sense for us to commit ourselves to building long-term partnerships with our key customers, for example our partnership with Telia has lasted well over 20 years now."

As Proekspert's story dates back to the 80s and 90s of the previous century, the company has been a crucial part of the Estonian ICT success story. "I think that one of the reasons why Estonia stands out in this field is due to our history and our background. Proekspert is a living example of the standard Estonian mindset - we had absolutely nothing and had to be inventive and creative. Interacting with Estonians may seem intimidating at times due to our blunt and straight-forward approach. But we are sincere, self-critical and always ready to admit mistakes. We like to see the bigger picture in everything and can explain our work processes in a customer-friendly manner. These are the qualities that make Estonian ICT companies and Proekspert in particular worthy partners for cooperation," believes Triin.