

From ABEL-Computer, Czech Republic

Eastern Europe does not Underdevelop

Time to Change Views on Eastern Europe



It might seem that the longer you travel from West to East, the more differences between these two European areas you can feel. It is absolutely natural. Some decades ago, people were used to such differences and the eastern countries were considered to be underdeveloped in general.

However, if you visited some of the highly specialized shows organized in either the Czech Republic or the Slovak Republic these days, it would be very difficult to notice any significant differences. Perhaps, the only difference might be in the bigness of the show.

The Slovak COFAX show and the Czech INVEX show enjoy a very good reputation. Of course, it is not possible to compare these two shows

with CeBIT, for example, but INVEX and COFAX respectively might be considered second and third biggest shows in Eastern Europe. ABEL company takes regular part in both COFAX show in the Slovak Republic and INVEX show in the Czech Republic yearly.

Mr. Milan Macuga, managing director of ABEL company, was asked to share his experience and impressions of the two shows.

Your company takes part in various shows throughout Eastern Europe, but you yourself visit many shows in other countries regularly, too. What do you consider the most significant differences among the shows?

You are right, I visit many shows all over the world not only to gain new technical information, but also to inspire myself for realizing my own exhibitions.

I watch the individual exhibitors very carefully and I try to learn from their mistakes. I notice their image, their behavior towards passing-by customers, I notice who they pay most attention to and who they almost ignore.

Should I answer the question whether there are any differences between, for example, CeBIT and COFAX or INVEX shows, which specialize in the same subject matter, I would say that the most significant difference is in the number of exhibitors and visitors. At any show, I can see both exhibitors who came to

relax at the show, and exhibitors who came to gain new customers there. The former ones usually complain of everything and try to blame the organizers of the show for their failure, the latter ones are usually satisfied with the results of their presentation and the quality of the show in general.

ABEL company ranks among those exhibitors who return home from the show having gained hundreds and sometimes even thousands of new customers.



It really is a great success. To gain hundreds or even thousands of new customers, it is what each exhibitor dreams of. How do you prepare your exhibition to be so successful?

ABEL company has taken part in various shows for almost 10 years. The beginnings were the same as at any other company. We started with the 2x3 m² booth with no kitchen or any other hinterland. For the last two years, ABEL company has had a two-storey booth of up to 2x60 m² or 2x90 m². And still more and more new customers are concerned in our service.

For example, COFAX show started on May 2nd, 2000 but ABEL company prepared for it from December 1999. There were thousands of personal invitations sent to our most important customers, new catalogues and other promotive materials were printed and a detailed plan of the exhibition had to be reconsidered again and again.

To make it clearer, the ABEL booth was to make an impression of a company moved from its base to the show.

There was a computer with a flat screen to save place on each table, there was intranet installed on all computers so that people working at the booth could exchange

information quickly and easily, it was possible to present our visitors with pictures from company R&D department, receptionists could inform anybody about visitors coming very easily and, within a minute, the person to be visited could let the receptionist know whether the visitor can be let in or should wait. Each sales representative had a computerized table of his or her own, but any of them could use any table. Due to the network system, the receptionists could identify any sales rep at any computer.

There were also microscope, disassembled laser printer and many other devices the company representatives needed for discussions with customers.

Such a show must be very expensive...

Yes, it is. The costing of INVEX show which took place last October was about USD 40,000. Of course, this estimate included advertisements, billboards, accommodation, board...



Isn't spending so much money on 5 days of the show a bit inefficient?

I do not agree. ABEL company philosophy is based on respecting its customers. It is our customers who we built the company booth for. Once some company reaches a certain position on the market, it is expected to present it, among other ways, by not saving money on servicing its customers and taking care of them. ABEL company considers any show to be the way of thanking its customers for winning their affections. There are only 5 days of the show during which the company representatives can take personal care of customers coming to see the company booth and it is necessary to have enough space for

servicing all of them comfortably. These are very special and very pleasant meetings. Sometimes, it is the first time for some customers to meet people who they know only from phone receiver personally. Of course, it may be very funny sometimes, but usually, such meetings end with long-lasting friendships.

The company motto is: „Never be afraid to meet your customer.“ This motto is valid especially for shows and I know many companies which prefer not taking part in the show to meeting their clients.



Are there any competitors of yours in the field of cartridges remanufacturing?

Of course there are. As everywhere in the world. The competition is necessary for customers so that they had something to compare. On the other hand, ABEL company was lucky to start cartridges remanufacturing as one of the first companies. These days, ABEL has been in the business for 10 years. The company specialize in remanufacturing which means that there are no other activities which would split the company interests. Majority of our competitors usually not only remanufacture cartridges, but also sell electronics or some other products. That is why many of our competitors cannot pay enough attention to their own development.



Another of our company rules is to specialize in one field of interest only, but be excellent at it. Due to following

this rule, ABEL company gained a credit of highly professional company which works without any compromises as for quality of its products.

According to all possible criteria, ABEL company is the biggest toner, ink and dot-matrix cartridges remanufacturer in both the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic these days. ABEL company covers majority of the market, even despite the fact that the prices of its products are usually as much as 50 % higher than those of the competitors'. But it does not mean that there would be a monopoly of ABEL.

Although ABEL company has over 13,000 customers these days, its representatives are aware of the fact that there are still another thousands of customers disserved and that the world is big enough for everybody.



Would you also like to enter other than Czech and Slovak markets?

Of course, all businessmen dream of being successful worldwide. Still, the future philosophy of ABEL company is a bit different. It is reasonable to consider ABEL company a specialist in ink cartridges remanufacturing. Such a statement is based on numbers of remanufactured cartridges, successful results and number of reclaims. There were several filling machines developed in ABEL company and new machines are still being developed, which means that the company would rather like to offer its service to other companies than to split its activities by founding new factories. Due to such splitting of activities, many otherwise successful supranational companies went bankrupted in the several past years. It is also much easier to control the quality of products in one factory than in, for example, seven plants throughout

the world. This seems to be the most important reason.

How do you plan to develop then?

There are almost 100 employees in ABEL company. Almost half of them are production workers. It is a great potential for the future development. The productive part of the company is to be reinforced and new machines should be built. There should be a new plant built next year. The company home town supports these activities. Then, the company future is in offering its service worldwide after building the new plant. But not sooner. I myself pay attention to research and development and I can say that the field of ink cartridges remanufacturing is very difficult one and it is not an easy task to start and stabilize in the business.

There are several foreign companies using our service because they did not succeed in their own starting the business, which ruined them mentally and sometimes even financially. Many of them lost very important customers due to destroying their cartridges by impropriety remanufacturing. That is why I know there is no danger of losing our customers once we do our job on a professional basis.

Let's return to shows. Is there any visible difference between, for example, show organized in Las Vegas and in Bratislava or Brno?

Yes, there is a difference. But the difference is given by how large the organizing country is. The quality of the exhibitors has already been the same everywhere, so you can find the same in Hannover and in Brno or Bratislava. The only difference is the bigness of the show. So far.

On the contrary, the smaller shows are more advantageous for exhibitors. The truth is that there are fewer visitors coming to the show with fewer exhibitors, but then you have more time to spend with your customers. ABEL company is the example proving the fact that the geographical position of the show does not matter.



How do you like specialized shows like REMAX in Paris?

In past, my feelings were mixed due to the number of the exhibitors and the price of entrance fee. Several years later, I can say that such shows are the maximum to be offered to specialists. Considering the number of exhibitors is not the best way of considering the show in general. A consequential cooperation with the exhibitors present is the best criteria for considering such a show. That is what I appreciate most. I also appreciate that there are no laymen coming to the show. I like competitors but only those who do not destroy prestige of our business.

What would be your message to companies from western countries?

As an example, I could mention one big western company which let us know its superciliousness and disinterest in the past. Today, once our orders are not in kilos but in tons, the same company tries its best to gain us as its business partner. Although there may be another people representing the company today, it will be very difficult for me to change my mind. It's a pity not for me, but mainly for that company.

I would like to let all similar companies know that it is the time to change views of eastern Europe now. I would highly recommend them not to be too proud when dealing with partners from eastern countries. Of course, it is necessary to be careful. Still, what they will create today, they will have tomorrow. The new eastern Europe does not mean just a new competition. First of all, it is a new field of interest. Those not understanding it got on the wrong train...

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