actesy in Swiss IT-Magazine: actesy connects digital worlds 1/2

Digitization is one of the greatest challenges facing companies in the 21st century to succeed. But what exactly does that mean? Peter Imthurn, Chairman of the Board of Directors and co-founder of the St. Gallen start-up actesy, has a simple but concise answer to this question: "Today, digitization is understood as letting systems that were not developed together work together. That's exactly what actesy is committed to. Founded almost a year ago, the company stands for process optimization, system openness, security and agility, according to Imthurn, who can look back on 30 years of experience in the IT industry, 18 of which he spent as Chairman of the Board of Directors and CEO at GUS Schweiz, and is particularly familiar with ERP systems.

SYSTEMS AS MONOLITHIC BLOCKS

There are plenty of them, from Oracle to Microsoft to SAP. "But companies are often faced with the challenge that no one really cares about having the systems communicate with each other," says Imthurn. "Each system is designed as a monolithic block. This has induced the four founders of actesy (by the way, the name is a Portmanteau from the English term Act for action, E for electronics and Sy for systems, but also a reference to Act Easy, but not to Ecstasy, the drug, as Imthurn emphasizes) to create a framework that allows companies to network their systems already in use with each other. The founders are Peter Imthurn, his son and CEO Andreas Imthurn, Sandro Secci CIO, as well as Tim Kühnl CTO, also owner of the German company Tiksys, on whose technology actesy could partly build. actesy thus wants to enable companies to break out of their dependence on complex (ERP) systems, so that they can select the best application for individual processes or application scenarios, but always link them together and integrate them into a single workflow. "Old interface technology is like shooting old cannons at old castles," postulates Imthurn, recalling the difficult work that this can entail: "In my career I have certainly built an interface to SAP 300 times. And every time it was said that you had to design it in such a way that it could be reused later. But that never really worked." There are three reasons for that: First, they always developed for a specific application; second, they were always under time pressure; and third, limited budgets ensured that the interfaces did not become what was actually hoped for. One could also compare the whole thing with road construction: "Everyone tears up the road again when a new pipeline is to be laid. What we do differently is we tear it open once, lay a large channel into which we can then install different lines in day-to-day operation." In this way, the adaptors could be adapted to the customer's specific requirements afterwards. The start-up ecosystem now consists of an abundance of adaptors for every conceivable business application. "Customers can link their systems individually with our more than 250 available adapters," explains CIO Sandro Secci

BEGINNINGS

The first major project that actesy was able to implement in its short lifetime resulted from the demand of various customers "who wanted to connect an online shop but wanted to integrate it even more deeply, i.e. wanted to integrate processes from the shop as well," recalls Imthurn and adds: "This includes the integration of logistics and consulting services, which cannot be easily integrated with a simple, classic shop system. Another major project came from "one of the best sports car manufacturers in Europe," reveals Imthurn. "This was about the exhaust scandal and the associated type certificate." Here, the exact traceability of individual components and data had to be ensured.

"The company had half a year to complete the audit and we were able to complete the project in 3 to 4 months," says Secci. Also of great importance is a product that targets the secret shadow ERP system in every company: Microsoft Excel. Today, an enormous number of reports are still created with the spreadsheet program. However, changes in the individual tables or formulas in Excel files are often difficult to track and trace. Here the Excel Easy Adaptor developed by actesy is to provide remedy. "This is how we audited Excel," explains Secci. With the Excel Easy Adaptor, existing Excel applications can be integrated or replaced, explains Imthurn. Both the business logic and the data are transferred. And with the integration of the Excel application, the underlying logic is also documented and traceable. The result is a holistic audit trail. Originally conceived as a project developed for a specific customer, actesy now offers the Excel Easy Adaptor to customers as a finished product. With Valeasy, another product in the actesy portfolio has landed in the same style, according to CIO Secci: "This is about firstly graphically recording processes, secondly testing processes and workflows, and thirdly automatically documenting and validating the entire process.

TARGET GROUPS

Basically actesy does not focus on a specific target group. "We simply provide the technology with which the customer's existing systems can be connected to each other," says Imthurn. The sales mechanism functions somewhat differently than normal.

On the one hand, actesy directly addresses SMEs that need solutions to a specific problem. As a second sales channel, consulting firms are being used, where the digitization of their customers is at the top of the agenda. "They receive a tool from us, similar to the well-known Swiss pocket knife, with which they can not only advise, but also help their customers

during the implementation of the project," explains Imthurn. That's why training courses around the actesy metadata framework are so important. This is how actesy helps its customers to help themselves.

GROWTH PLANS

In addition to St. Gallen, actesy already has locations in Berlin, Tübingen and Holland – further locations in the USA and Canada are currently being discussed. Globally, the start-up employs between 20-25 people, seven of whom work in Switzerland. actesy is facing a certain challenge in terms of growth plans. "The market is almost tearing the products out of our hands," said Imthurn. Some of the products or projects are relatively self-explanatory, which means that they do not require much effort from actesy after implementation. With other products, for example when it comes to the connection of two large business systems with each other, the business understanding on the part of the customers is strongly demanded. Therefore, there will nearly always be an external consulting company on board, which will take care of the training of the employees or the support. On the one hand, they can grow under their own steam and with their own employees, whereas Imthurn expects an annual growth rate of around 15 to 20 percent. "If the consulting firms, where we currently have a very strong demand, actually achieve the desired quality and implement projects well, we can also grow through the multiplication of our partners. This would also allow a much stronger and faster growth. actesy is completely self-financed by the founders, so that the vision of the founding team can continue to be pursued independently and sustainably, explains Imthurn and adds: "The company is owned by the management".