

IskrateL: The Secret Is in the Co-operation

A communications company's strategy is determined by the market, technological development and science.

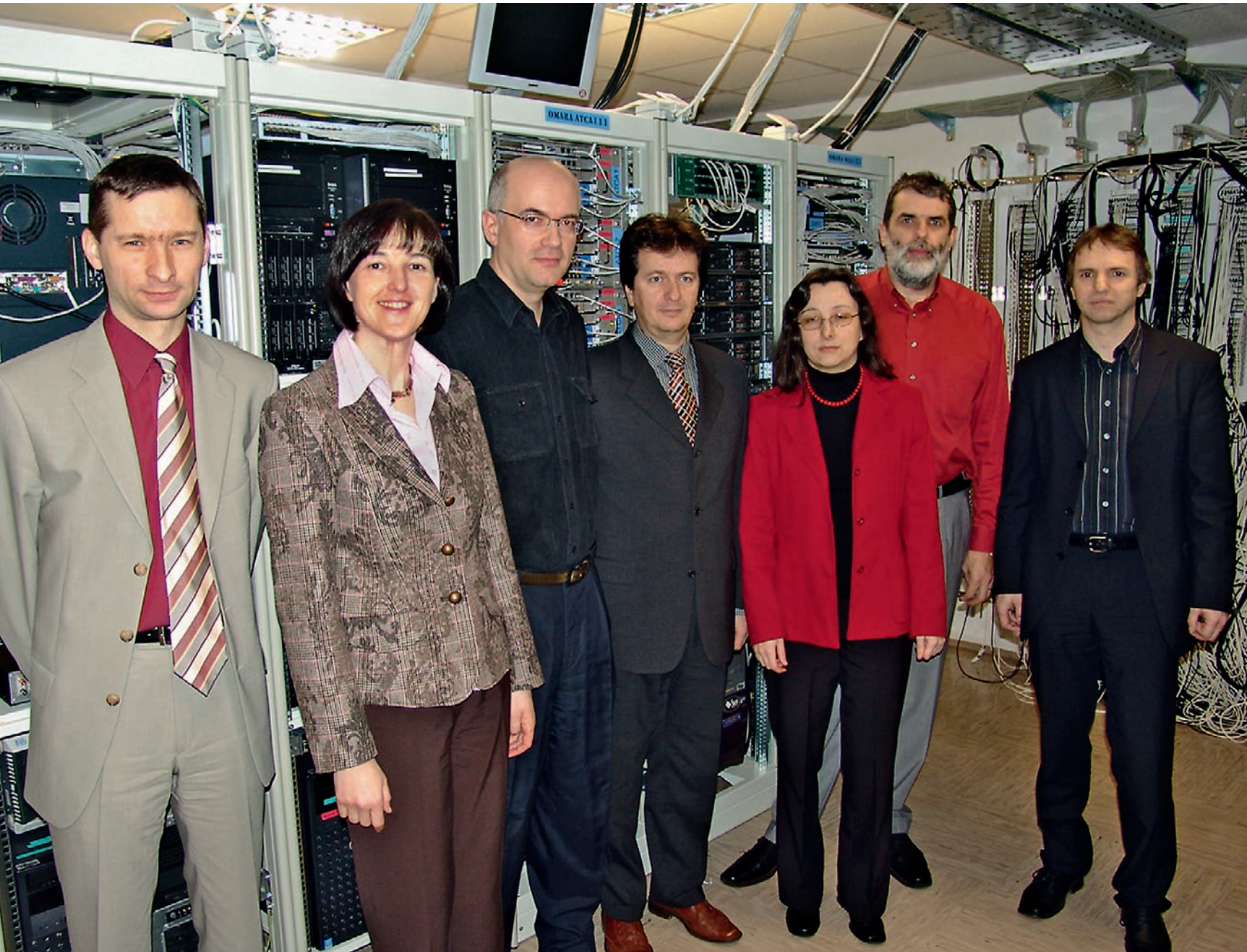
Uroš Jenko and Marjeta Pučko, IskrateL

Telecommunications have been undergoing a period of intensive transformation for more than five years. The attentive observer will have noticed a renaissance. The world of telephone exchanges, voice calls and dial rotation is changing into an all-embracing communications space that collects distant interaction among humans on a common technological and functional foundation.



Uroš Jenko and Marjeta Pučko, IskrateL

This article is based on a string of interviews with IskrateL R&D heads during December 2007 and January 2008.



This communication revolution is a child of the Web, its applications and newly formed roles and relations between individuals and organisations. Iskratel has been aware of and following trends in global telecommunications development since the beginning. The change of the basis of branches – the transition to communication systems based exclusively on Internet Protocol (IP) – had been expected. It demanded a complete renewal of the product range, a readiness for changed market conditions and a renewed mode of dealing with current and potential future customers.

The value offered to service providers and, in the end, to all of us as end users, has become the criterion of success for telecommunications companies. Telecommunications have lost their exclusivity. Larger and more-prominent communication equipment providers are facing the phenomenon of specialised, small application providers that stimulate continuous testing and never-ending development. The Web is the environment that can give a prototype the status of a finished product.

Why co-operation?

Business-operation modes are being reformed by network equipment providers as well as by network operators and providers of communication services. Iskratel, together with its competitors, is forced to balance the influence of three groups of factors: the market, technological development and the progress of science.

Because of the necessity of adjusting to changing conditions, the company must build an extremely flexible internal organisational structure. In establishing processes, the principles of dynamics must be followed. A modern communications company is a flexible system that is able to adjust its own creative capacities to the order of processes and conditions in the external technological and marketing environment.

A competitive environment requires the formation of a clear and exactly defined strategy built on a well-organised monitoring of similar companies and market requirements. Making sure the company's advantages are evident to customers is of key importance. The messages of the company must be clear and unified to prevent any overlapping with the offers of competitors. Iskratel believes in customised network solutions during the transition from



Franc Dolenc, Director of Iskratel Products and Solutions:

legacy telephone systems to network architectures based on IP technology.

The Iskratel way

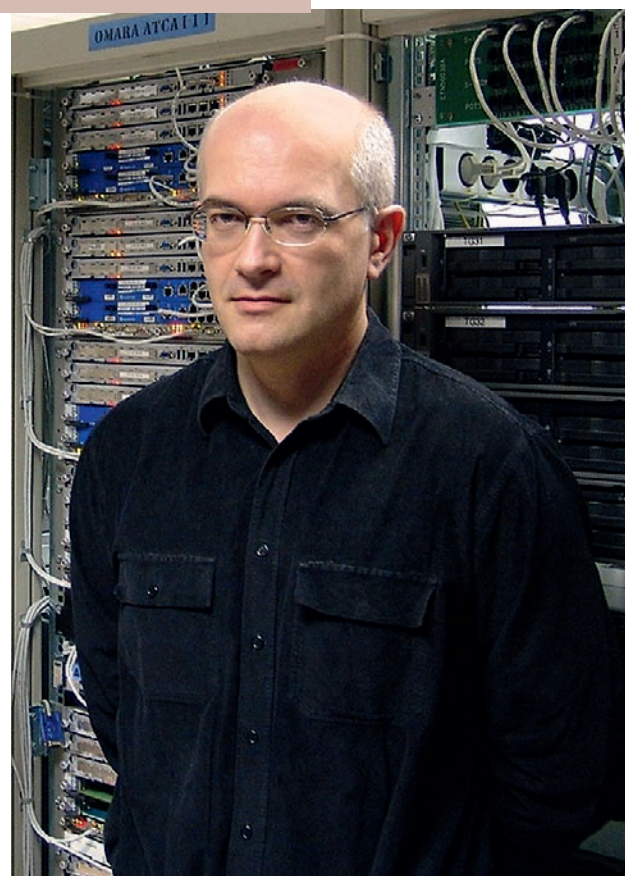
Manufacturers and network-equipment providers are innovative and progress-oriented companies. Despite being competitors, similar companies are interdependent, and technological co-operation between them is inevitable. It is increasingly common for customers to build their networks with heterogeneous building blocks, and therefore standardised products are required.

How then to ensure growth and survival in a tough market environment? Iskratel's heads of development sectors believe in choosing the right people and trusting the experiences gained from completed projects – either pilot or already-established network infrastructures. Even during the development phase the company must simulate the on-site state as frequently as possible, and systematically spread knowledge among its organisational units and individuals.

Iskratel is a continuously learning organisation. Its operation is governed by group dynamics and individual incentives. The company's ideas are its driving force. Because of the relatively small number of people engaged in the development process, the com-

pany cannot organise typical teams based on the specialised knowledge of individuals. Each employee simultaneously participates in several projects, i.e. they are a part of a balanced project-development matrix. Work in the company offers an excellent opportunity to all who are striving for professional, research and personal development. Researchers regularly publish their research and development (R&D) achievements in scientific and professional publications and regularly receive awards for their R&D work and innovations.

Franc Dolenc, Director of Iskratel Products and Solutions:
 “Iskratel builds its strategy on exceptionally economical solutions for the transition from legacy telephone networks to IP-based broadband multimedia networks. A connection with the domestic and foreign development spheres, smaller creative companies and a network of technological partners represent for the company new sources of knowledge and a model for testing its technological and business decisions.”



Sani Rus, Head of System SW Development:

“It is a must for a high-tech company to intensively specialise its development activities and ensure well-regulated relations between individual work processes. A systematic exchange of information and close contact with developments in science and across the whole spectrum are inevitable requirements for competitive market operations.”



Head of Iskratel Products & Solutions business unit Franc Dolenc discussing with Janez Potočnik, European Commissioner for Science and Research.



Prof. Dr Zmago Brezočnik, FERi, University of Maribor:

“Joint projects between the faculty and various companies are useful for both sides. Science acquires feedback on the usability, advantages and deficiencies of its findings. Each company, together with the whole of Slovenian industry, strengthens its competitive edge. The development of their professional staff is an additional advantage.”



Andrej Ciglic and Drago Škarabot at the hardware testing center.

Co-operation as a hidden advantage?

The result of Iskratel’s teamwork with the Universities of Ljubljana and Maribor, as well as some other Slovenian and foreign universities, is a string of successful projects for combining network technologies and the new generation of communication services. These projects include the preparation of analyses of network elements required for the delivery of Television

Ana Robnik, Head of Network Management at Iskratel:

“A successful telecommunications company is well acquainted with market operating principles and the formation of technological and business partnerships. Its operation is supported by an information and communications infrastructure appropriately adjusted for co-operation in the ecosystem of marketing, development and research activities.”



Dr Andrej Duh, MG-SOFT

“Small companies, such as MG-SOFT, that have big partners are much faster at conquering new markets. In turn, big partners that are linked to small companies are quicker at achieving modern technological solutions. Co-operation brings about the exchange of knowledge, ideas and experience, which is the basis for excellence in new products.”



Nikolaj Vidic, Head of Telecommunications Applications at Iskratel:

“Our operating mode is based on specialising our development activities, order of processes and the methodical development of our developers' skills. Open communications, permanent contact with top-level technologies and the systematic expansion of knowledge are the prerequisites for a development-oriented company.”



Prof. Dr Janez Bešter, LTFE, University of Ljubljana:

“A good professor or a successful researcher should remain in a company for the same length of time as a good entrepreneur stays at a faculty or at a scientific institution. Market conditions and factors demand the exchange of experiences and knowledge pooling.”



IP, Voice over IP, convergent mobile services, the development of signalling, protocols and new services, as well as the organisation of training courses on emerging network architectures, services and solutions.

Outside partners introduce the possibility of a continuous examination of the company's strategic development decisions. Because faculties often do not have such expensive test equipment as companies, the latter are an excellent environment for testing innovations. Common laboratory use, pilot projects and ample checking of network-ele-

ment functionality decrease the risks when introducing a new product to the market.

Because research institutes – the Universities of Ljubljana and Maribor included – have to perform their tasks using the logic of business, co-operation with companies has become an important success factor. The conditions in which the academic institutes operate are becoming increasingly similar to the marketing environment of companies. The activities of young researchers in companies contribute to their knowledge of economic, market-

ing and legal aspects of communication services.

Despite its evident advantages, any co-operation with outside partners is intensive and demanding for the participants. Some company representatives consider the introduction of partner companies' elements into their own product portfolio as the most demanding of development endeavours.

(Footnotes)

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