



HISTORY

The official weblicon legend

THE SEED

In summer 1999, Peter Haas and Carsten Brinkschulte, both professional software developers and software consultants, began to intensify cooperation on common software development projects, mutually profiting from more than two decades of IT experience and expertise. Both had started development more than 20 years ago and had been independent software vendors for more than 10 years, running their own companies, Peter Haas * Interaktive Dienste and Century Software.

Carsten Brinkschulte had become one of the prominent architects at SAP AG, designing and implementing the SAP/R3 front-end, called SAPGUI for Java. Peter Haas was lead developer for Acer Netxus Inc., Taiwan, designing and developing the „Global Communications Office“ for the AcerISDN product line.

In addition, both had designed and developed their own products: „ClockWork“, a desktop-based calendar that had become a huge success among almost 35.000 Japanese, European and US-American Macintosh users, and the flagship of the Century Software Online Store.

For years, Peter Haas has been working on a dynamic HTML-generator, providing a highly flexible user interface on-demand, aiming on office automation. The approach was quite ambitious and even raised medium amounts of venture capital from a private business angel, but it lacked a performant and mature architecture and failed as a product since it was never really completed.

In October 1999, both initiators were intensively discussing the content of an article taken from „Wirtschaftswoche“, a leading german business journal, mentioning online calendars and citing a recent study from the IDC that predicted 78 million online calendar users in the near future. The message was clear: Take the calendar, spend it a dynamic HTML interface, remove it from the desktop and bring it on the Internet. Three months passed by, the seed of a complementary approach needed time for growing...

THE CORE TEAM...

On January, 2nd, 2000, the phone rang. Carsten Brinkschulte called as he had just found an article on Venture Capital in the „Financial Times“. That day, within the same phone call, both initiators started to write a common Business-Plan in less than 4 days of constant work, mostly at the phone. Unfortunately, Peter Haas had caught a chill, therefore numerous e-mails and attachments were flying from one to the other's office.

Having visited one of the early FirstTuesday events in Berlin, phone calls to and from Venture Capitalists began in January, indicating good prospects. A decision was made: After successful VC-funding, the new company definitely will subscribe „Wirtschaftswoche“ and „Financial Times“.

In February, two of the key developers joined the core development team. Wolfgang Fischlein, together with Carsten Brinkschulte, had developed „ClockWork“ and brought in experience and a track-record of almost 10 years professional, objectoriented software design and implementation. Michael Büning, best friend of Peter Haas and known from early school days, decided to move from Cologne to Berlin. Together with Peter Haas, Michael Büning had been developing 2 different flight-simulators, one in late 80s, one in 1998. He lived and worked as a professional Jazz musician in Cologne, playing the bass and working at the university as a teacher for bass and improvisation.

The core team actually combined a total IT experience of more than 76 years and started to organize development in teams. Development of both, the Java client and the HTML client, started in early March as a contest among Brinkschulte/Fischlein (JAVA) and Haas/Büning (HTML). One question was coming up: Will a jazz musician be able to catch up with professional software engineers?

It finally turned out, after a complete week of intensive work and competition, with the Java team working at Century Software, and the HTML team remaining at Interaktive Dienste, that both teams had won the contest: they joined after 8 days at Century Software, both presenting their very first month view prototypes, of both, the HTML calendar and the Java calendar. The equipment of Interaktive Dienste was brought to Century Software, occupying one of the big rooms of the apartment of Carsten Brinkschulte. The huge apartment, located near Hermannplatz in Neukölln, with its ceiling mouldings and large double doors appeared so generous to them. Once, it used to be the apartment of Rio Reiser, the singer and band leader, and all visitors agreed that this must have left a creative spirit. But this apartment should become subject of vital change very soon...

RATHER CUSTOMERS THAN VCS...

In the beginning of March, the core team decided that the search for Venture Capital unexpectedly took too long, therefore Brinkschulte and Haas targeted potential clients and scheduled their first meetings with various major European telcos.

The feedback was extremely good. Michael Büning and Thomas Ackermann, who joined the team, managed to develop a small technology study that outlined a rough pre-release of a WAP calendar, served online just-in-time. The first WAP-capable phones were bought in a hurry. The plane delayed for more than an hour, the telco delegation hopefully was waiting. The presentation of 3 different calendar clients and the roadmap presented was overwhelming, the strategy clear and distinct. Even before Brinkschulte and Haas came back to Berlin to join Fischlein, Büning and Ackermann at the office, a fax was sent with a first-class-letter-of-intent. The best above all, the LOI didn't come from a Venture Capitalist, it did come from the telco, right after the presentation. Big point taken.

Only a few days passed by, when Venture Capitalists sent LOIs by themselves. Two of them were commonly considered interesting. One LOI did come from a small local Venture Capitalist with little experience in the market, the other from a big internationally operating company with an impressive portfolio of ventures.

How Thomas Ackermann joined the core team is a story of its own, worth to be told here. Peter Haas was looking for Stefan H., a former colleague and UNIX expert. He must have relocated recently since Haas didn't reach him for weeks. The phone book of Berlin showed up 5 different Stefan Hs., one of them shared the flat with other students, Haas called and left a message. Somebody called back soon and apparently belonged to Information Science students, working on an online calendar, but actually had nothing to do with the particular Stefan H. they were looking for. Among these students, there was Thomas Ackermann, who decided to join the weblicon team immediately and to write his master thesis about WAP calendar services. Perfect match. The „real“ Stefan H. was found many months later but unfortunately never joined the team.

In the meantime, the company name „weblicon“ was found and all relevant domain names registered. Angelika Drees, who had designed data base models for several firms during the past 20 years, among them Deutsche Bahn AG, joined the team. She started to set up the first databases on dedicated servers and prepared the first LDAP servers as well as staging servers.

To convince Stefan Berreth, a WebObjects wizzard, to join the core team, was not easy. Stefan Berreth had just started writing a PhD on Advanced Interaction Design at the MediaLab in Helsinki, when Brinkschulte and Haas finally succeeded to convince him to join a „nerd company“ in Berlin and move to Berlin. The same time Stefan finally joined the weblicon team, Axel Emanuel decided to quit his old job. Axel was a leading project manager for more than 5 years at Callas Software and experienced with professional objectoriented development during the past decade.

In April 2000, weblicon consisted of a core development team with complementary and almost comprehensive development skills and counted 8 members that time, combining more than 115 years of IT experience and expertise. The apartment was still kind of comfortable since Brinkschulte spent another of his private rooms to the company. To run multiple application and database servers day and night, it seemed suitable to put some IKEA tables on the corridor and to install the legendary „weblicon corridor server park“. But space would become even more precious very soon...

HOW TO START A COMPANY WITH 13 FOUNDERS...

In May 2000, negotiations with peppermint. Financial Partners entered the final phase and week after week new members joined weblicon. With Dieter Schiewer, another senior objectoriented professional joined the weblicon team, with almost 10 years of experience in software development. Ole Raether did join the team later that month and quit all of his data base optimization projects, among them projects at Strato AG. Ole was famous for getting SQL/Oracle databases fast, at any means. When Daniel Denes entered weblicon, the team gained another UNIX guru and VI jockey that used to organize and maintain large Sun Solaris deployments at the BFA. Both, Ole and Daniel, began to build optimized installation scripts for deployment.

Frank Daubenberger managed the intranet-web pages of weblicon those days and joined the company introducing professional e-mail and phone support. Finally, Marion Falk-Pytel, a professional translator, who had gained experience with another joint-stock company, came to weblicon and organized office management of the young „weblicon technologies AG“ that had been founded by 13 founders and stock-holders in the meantime.

That's how 13 founders in June officially started a company named „weblicon technologies AG“ combining almost 150 years of IT experience. The first week, Marion Falk-Pytel had just begun office management at weblicon, a schoolboy applied for a Java internship and practise. (The boy was 16-years-old Tobias and did get the Java Swing internship)

That was the day, when Carsten Brinkschulte had to leave his 140 qm apartment to stay at the hotel for months and even the big ClockWork-Logo disappeared in a small chamber because all space was needed so desperately. Weblicon family had conquered the complete flat and even had occupied the cellar. All private stuff of Carsten Brinkschulte had to fit into a 5 qm chamber. People started to work in the morning, some would leave their computer late at night. The neighbours were wondering about a dozen computer nerds working day and night.

On June, 5th, 2000, weblicon technologies AG and peppermint. Financial Partners GmbH signed a contract and weblicon raised EURO 1.5 million first round financing, later in July the team gained another EURO 1.5 million additional financing from the tbg, subsidiary of Deutsche Ausgleichsbank. Weblicon had decided to close the deal with the smaller VC and had chosen a hands-on VC with smart money, located nearby, thereby experiencing a round-the-corner-VC.

Time is money, but is it also right that money is time?

MOVING TO BERLIN-MITTE...

With 13 employees and little space in Rio Reisers former apartment, the weblicon team was desperately looking for appropriate office space to grow or better, to feel comfortable again. Unfortunately, it took them until late September to move to Torstrasse in Berlin-Mitte entering the complete 6th floor of a modern office building. The new office provides weblicon and her visitors a breath-taking view upon the city of Berlin with Potsdamer Platz, the Reichstag, Gedächtniskirche and, above all, the Alexander-Platz Television Tower. The office reminds on a bridge of a huge steamship with a porch elegantly surrounding the whole floor. Weblicon meetings were held in the evening sunshine those days...

In November, Jan Füllemann joined weblicon, as a Marketing and Communications Manager. Running his own company for years, Jan Füllemann brought in experience from the GSM and PDA market. A propriatary weblicon corporate design and weblicon business cards were on their way.

As summer went by and autumn evenings became increasingly colder, weblicon development faced the hot and final phase of finishing its first release. In early November, after less than 5 months of operations, weblicon presented the first publically released version of its online organizer. The weblicon team succeeded in all of the three categories: HTML calendar, contact management and to-dos. The WAP team, led by Thomas Ackermann, finished WAP calendar and contacts just-in-time. The Java team, led by Wolfgang Fischlein, showed an astonishing Java calendar with drag&drop, double-clicks and immediate response. The vision of applications jumping out of the wall-socket had finally become reality. All applications relied on a single Oracle database with address information stored in an additional Netscape LDAP directory.

During those days, in late November, potential clients or licensees of weblicon products would almost meet at the side-walk at Torstrasse. For the first time, foreign customers showed up and sent technology experts. Something really big was on its way...

6. FIRST SUCCESS!

In January, weblicon signed license contracts with 2 major European telecommunication companies, among them the telco that Brinkschulte and Haas visited first of all in early March 2000.

After only 7 months of operations, a small Berlin-funded technology company did finally win two of the most prominent contests for online applications in Europe. That time, more than 25 software developers applied for becoming weblicon team members. In January, 6 new software developers entered the team and signed their employment contracts. For Jeff Nichols, one of the first german green card was confirmed. Jeff is native American and during his Computer Science studies in the US, he also worked on NASA software projects. He is a long term Java pro with deep objectoriented knowledge and understanding and gained a „cum laude“ Master from University with 22 years.

With Axel Mosch, student of Information Science at Humboldt University, a junior Q&A Manager joined weblicon, introducing industrial quality management.

Marc Günther joined next. A mathematician with an excellent track-record of more than 10 years of professional programming is commonly considered a NEXT and Java guru with deep objectoriented experience.

Patrick Berzbach did start programming with 11 years and in January, 11 years later joined weblicon with his astonishing experience in native Windows and Palm PDA programming. Patrick Berzbach looks like a junior developer but can definitely be considered senior.

Coming from IXOS AG in Munich, Volker Vöcking decided to leave IXOS after 5 successful years of objectoriented software development. He brings in a professional track record of more than a decade of IT experience with strong team leadership capabilities.

Therefore, the weblicon team today counts almost 20 fulltime employees, most of them professional software developers. Believe it or not, the development team combines an incredible 200 years of IT experience and expertise.

Stay tuned. To be continued soon.