

## **pcywicki.net**

### **The beginnings: self-employment**

'pcywicki.net' ([www.pcywicki.net](http://www.pcywicki.net)) has been operating since 15 February 2002. It delivers Internet services such as web designing and hosting.

Mr. Piotr Cywicki, the founder of the enterprise, had worked in the IT sector since 1996, always in large companies. During several years, he has acquired valuable experience and in-depth knowledge of the Polish IT market, which was dynamically developing in that period. He was mainly involved in introducing new products and services into the market, as well as in gaining new clients. When in year 2001 the company he worked for at the moment went into liquidation, this young, 25-year-old man had to take a difficult decision concerning his further professional career. He might have search for a job in another company, but eventually he decided to take a chance of starting an individual business, even if he did not have examples of self-employment among his friends. The decision to work independently was practically forced by circumstances.

Mr. Cywicki started his business activities by offering web page designing services. As a freelancer, he was forced to search for the clients on his own, and acquiring the first ones was what he found the most difficult in the beginning period. He gained several orders through his friends and only then, with a first portfolio of executed projects, he was able to attract new customers more successfully. Soon, he had more orders than he could carry out on his own.

### **Broadening of activities: employment of staff**

In April 2001, two months after establishing of his company, Mr. Piotr Cywicki hired three persons on fixed contracts. Two people worked in the office – the boss himself and a person responsible mainly for the marketing, while two others worked remotely as teleworkers. When the number of orders increased significantly, the enterprise employed additional staff. All new employees (no more than 5 at the same time) were teleworkers, and they were not employed on a regular basis but for the duration of a given task. Such a system was profitable for the employer, who was able to meet demand in more busy periods and did not have to pay the employees when there was no work for them.

It is important to mention that each newly-employed person is always given a pre-condition: they have to lead their own business, as it is financially advantageous for pcywicki.net.

Piotr Cywicki, consequently relying on new information and communications technologies in making business, searches for new employees using electronic networks – he puts his job offers on different web pages and discussion groups. All his employees have been found via Internet, and they come from all over the Polish territory, but also from abroad (e.g. Berlin).

### **The offer**

'pcywicki.net' offers to companies and public administration services of web page designing. A number of sites which have been so far created by the company is close to 50.

Mr. Piotr Cywicki had participated, before even his enterprise was established, in development of the first Polish Business-to-Business (B2B) e-commerce platform. The platform, enabling commercial exchange among companies, was awarded with the Grand Prix Computer Expo prize in 2001. Unfortunately, the company responsible for administration and marketing of the site went bankrupt. The platform, however, is now kept alive within the 'serio.pl' website. The founder of 'pcywicki.net' had also contributed to the creation of 'alu.pl', the third biggest and most popular Internet auction house in Poland, after 'allegro' and 'aukcje.on'. The site does not exist any more, neither.

Another service offered by 'pcywicki.net' is hosting of Internet sites. The enterprise leases two servers in one of the data centres in Cracow, one of the largest companies of this type in Poland. Currently, almost 65 clients' websites are being hosted on the servers. After having developed a portal, the company offers to a client administration of the site (e.g. updating) or, for extra fee, gives the company DIY tools for independent edition and update.

Moreover, 'pcywicki.net' delivers ftp, e-mail and discussion group services, the latter being the less popular among the clients. Another activity of 'pcywicki.net', more prestigious than lucrative, is article writing, most of all – related to a subject of web page designing (publications in '*Puls Biznesu*' and '*Prawo i Gospodarka*' magazines).

## **Technical solutions**

Information management in 'pcywicki.net' is mainly based on internet communications (e-mail, ftp). The teleworkers have to use their own computers and secure (and pay for) internet access. Employees jointly work on a project using servers of 'pcywicki.net' accessible through WWW. After the project has been executed, a client decides whether to leave the created website on the company's server, using the hosting service, or to put the site elsewhere.

Details related to technical solutions used in 'pcywicki.net' are presented in Table 1.

## **Marketing in 'pcywicki.net'**

New clients are gained mainly using personal contact of the company's staff, but also based on recommendations of satisfied clients. The company uses telemarketing, calling firms and institutions potentially interested in their services. The company's website is considered by 'pcywicki.net' to be a very important marketing tool. It is only available in English (and not in Polish!), as Mr. Piotr Cywicki believes it should be mainly addressed to foreign customers. Currently, the company works for clients from New Zealand and Germany.

Mr. Cywicki is of an opinion that Polish firms do not have sufficient resources nor determination to invest heavily in Internet marketing and services. Thus, they try to minimise such expenses, while the foreign organisations are more likely to order complex and expensive services, as they care above all for the quality. As for now, the efficacy of the website in acquisition of new customers is 20% (expressed as a ratio of executed and paid projects).

## **Advantages and disadvantages of new style of work**

Mr. Piotr Cywicki is satisfied with his new style of work and he is glad of having taken the decision to start the individual business. He admits that he spends much more time on working now in comparison with the period when he was employed in other companies. Being a manager requires from him constant improvement of management skills and responsibility for the whole company.

Among the main advantages of flexible working, he enumerates the freedom from the traditional fixed-hours scheme – it is much easier for him right now to balance his family and professional life. Teleworking is a good way to reduce costs of running a business (costs for office space, hardware, software etc.).

Mr. Cywicki also sees some disadvantages of new working methods, among which the most important seems to be: risks related to hiring people without a face-to-face meeting. He claims having sometimes problems with employees not respecting the deadlines. According to 'pcywicki.net', the primary barriers to wider implementation of teleworking in the Polish market are e.g.: underdeveloped Internet infrastructure, high costs of Internet access and reluctance of many employers to introduce new telecommunications solutions.

Despite the current recession on the IT market, 'pcywicki.net' keeps on gaining new clients and extending the range of activities.

## Technologies Used for Flexible Working

Table 1 contains ICT technologies used in 'pcywicki.net'.

Table 1. Technologies used by teleworkers employed by 'pcywicki.net'.

|                                                     | Applied | Planned to be applied | Heard of |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------------------|----------|
| <b>Access Technologies</b>                          |         |                       |          |
| Modem                                               | Yes     |                       |          |
| ISDN                                                | Yes     |                       |          |
| ADSL                                                |         | No                    |          |
| CATV                                                |         | No                    |          |
| LMDS                                                | Yes     |                       |          |
| WLAN                                                | Yes     |                       |          |
| <b>Way of Communication</b>                         |         |                       |          |
| Fixed Telephony (+ Fax)                             | Yes     |                       |          |
| Mobile Telephony                                    | Yes     |                       |          |
| Teleconference                                      |         | Yes                   |          |
| E-mail                                              | Yes     |                       |          |
| <b>Communication Services</b>                       |         |                       |          |
| LAN                                                 | Yes     |                       |          |
| Application Service Provider ASP (e.g. WWW Hosting) |         | No                    |          |
| Virtual Private Network VPN                         |         | No                    |          |
| Leased Line                                         |         | No                    |          |
| <b>Software</b>                                     |         |                       |          |
| Word Processor                                      | Yes     |                       |          |
| Spreadsheet                                         | Yes     |                       |          |
| Graphic Programs                                    | Yes     |                       |          |
| E-mail Clients                                      | Yes     |                       |          |
| Information Management Programs                     | Yes     |                       |          |
| Employee Management Programs                        |         | No                    |          |
| Financial and Cash Flow Programs                    |         | No                    |          |
| Network Security                                    | Yes     |                       |          |