



LUGERA

GERARD KOOLEN

GROUP MANAGING PARTNER
LUGERA & MAKLER



Dutch-born entrepreneur Gerard Koolen has spent over 30 years building businesses across Central and Eastern Europe. Before recruitment, he founded and exited a design company with clients like IKEA and later managed large-scale distribution operations across the region. In 1996, he co-founded Lugera in Slovakia with Rasťo and Luboš, starting in a 4x4 meter office with one computer and one phone line. Today, Lugera operates in more than 10 countries, with 15,000 people at work daily and group revenues of €243 million. Known for combining entrepreneurship with innovation, he has driven the development of next-generation recruitment platforms like New TalentBase and STAA. His belief remains simple: technology enables—but people make the difference.

WWW.LUGERA.SK

SLOVAKIA'S RECRUITMENT LEGACY

In May 2026 Lugera turned 30. The company started in 1996 in a 4x4 meter office with one computer and one landline. Once the computer was connected, Luboš (the "LU" from Lugera) started surfing the internet for candidates—truly revolutionary at the time. Our first assignment came from KPMG: finding Dutch nationals for roles in Bratislava. Within an hour, Luboš identified our very first candidate, who was later successfully placed. Not a bad start. The early days meant working with just four people, one computer and one phone line. Calls had to be queued, and if a candidate or client didn't answer, you simply went to the back of the line.

ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL SLOVAK MULTINATIONALS

Today Lugera operates in more than 10 countries across Eastern Europe and Morocco, employing around 500 internal staff and supporting approximately 15,000 temporary workers. Permanent staffing remains our core service, but over time we expanded into Temporary Staffing, Payroll Administration, Recruitment Outsourcing and recruitment technology.

FROM 45K IN 1996 TO 243 MILLION

Lugera is one of the genuine Slovak success stories. Founded in Slovakia, it is the recruitment company that started small and gradually expanded into international markets. What began as a local company in a small market has grown step by step over the years—from €45,000 in revenue in 1996 to €243 million in group revenue in 2024. This growth places Lugera among the top three independent recruitment agencies in Eastern Europe.

LUGERA SLOVAKIA #1

Within three years of starting, Lugera became the largest permanent staffing agency in Slovakia in number of placements. Over the years, we occasionally gave up that position—to some very good competitors. And that is exactly where you want to be: constantly challenged by strong competition, because it keeps you sharp, focused, and always pushing forward.

WHAT CHANGED IN THOSE 30 YEARS?

Nothing and everything. I remember the early days of the first job portal in Slovakia, around 1997. At the time, many believed job portals would be the end of recruitment agencies. The opposite happened: more agencies were created than ever before. When LinkedIn, Google and social media entered the market, predictions were the same. Again, the opposite happened. More platforms emerged, more agencies were

founded, and the market expanded rather than contracted. The lesson is simple: every technological wave reshapes the industry—but it does not replace it.

WILL AI EAT RECRUITMENT AGENCIES?

Today AI is the new "end of the industry" story. Many agency owners wonder if their business will survive. The reality is straightforward: those who embrace AI as an opportunity will prosper; those who rely on it blindly will not. AI is a powerful tool, but it is not a business model. Without a strong foundation of recruitment expertise, process discipline, and real understanding of people, AI alone will not deliver results.

LUGERA'S RECRUITMENT EXPERTISE

Our experience shows that deep recruitment expertise consistently outperforms standalone AI tools. Over 30 years, Lugera has built an extensive know-how base and refined every step of the recruitment process—from taking a job brief to guiding a successful hire, and everything in between. That foundation, combined with smart use of technology, continues to drive our results.

HOW IS LUGERA DEALING WITH AI?

Within the group, we have developed two recruitment applications. The first is New TalentBase—the younger brother of TalentBase, originally built in 1998 in Lugera Slovakia. It is the next-generation, the full-stack applicant tracking system with practical automations and AI features. The second application is STAA, a unique platform powered by multiple AI agents designed to support different parts of the recruitment process in ways traditional tools cannot easily match.

READY FOR THE NEXT 30 YEARS

Lugera looks ahead with excitement and confidence as we continue to serve clients and candidates in this new AI-driven era. We believe we can make an even greater positive impact in the years to come. Because what truly defines us is not just technology, but our loyalty to clients and candidates, our help-driven mindset, and our commitment to long-term relationships. Technology will continue to evolve—but people will always value genuine human connection. And that connection, when done right, will always make the difference.

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