

English language skills test invented by Slovaks goes global

by  **Peter Scherhauser**,
Public Relations
Manager, the Bridge
English Language
Centre



A Slovak online start-up, TrackTest, launched in 2012 in Svätý Jur – a small town near Bratislava, now has 35,000 registered users worldwide and is selling its products to customers in 70 countries around the world.

Can you tell how good your English, or the English of your employees, is? Have their language skills improved since they started to attend language school? These are some of the key questions which the Slovak-based provider of online English language assessments addressed with its innovative online solution.

The inspiration for the business came from its founders' experience. One of them, Dalibor Jakuš, is the founder of a leading jobs board in Slovakia – Profesia.sk. The other, Klaudia Bednárová, is the owner and Managing Director of the Bridge English Language Centre in Bratislava. "When both of us realized that there was often a problem in identifying the level of English of jobseekers, employees or language students, we decided to establish our own start-up company which would serve these needs of ours," said Klaudia Bednárová. "The traditional assessment centers offered pen-and-paper tests and charged a substantial fee. That was why – from the very first moment – we intended to go online and build an affordable and reliable application," said Dalibor Jakuš, owner of Profesia.sk.

"Raw material for the tests came from a reputable language learning publisher, which TrackTest built into an online system," said Braňo Pokrivčák, co-founder and chief executive of TrackTest.eu. To make the product more trustworthy, they use the widely recognized Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which was developed by the Council of Europe and endorsed by the EU in 2001.

“
TrackTest's
business journey
does not resemble
a typical Silicon
Valley story, i.e.
obtain hundreds
of thousand users
in a few weeks,
raise and burn
through a few
millions of venture
capital and then
shut down or get
bought out by a
bigger player.”

The founders launched their online system in September 2012. For the first half of the year the application only served individual clients and was free of charge. Since its launch, it has generated user data to fine-tune its algorithms and prove its reliability. Having thoroughly analyzed the system's reliability, they launched the commercial model for individual clients and companies and language schools from Slovakia and later also from abroad. In addition, this new version offers extra features for managing multiple users. Companies can assess hundreds of employees allowing HR managers to control the entire assessment process with ease using their online application.

"We approached our first corporate clients in Slovakia indirectly or through affiliate sales, i.e. through the dealers of our founding companies," said

Braňo Pokrivčák. However, the expansion to foreign countries, which was planned from the very beginning, has been crucial. The expansion was partially completed last year, but the main part has been completed this year. Since 2013, when there were 4,000 registered users, the number of TrackTest users has increased to an incredible 35,000 users to date. By the end of this year, 50,000 users are expected.

While still holding a strong position in Slovakia with clients such as Eset, Ecco, DHL, and civil servants from all Slovak governmental institutions preparing for the Slovak EU presidency, TrackTest now serves as an English assessment platform for companies and schools from around the world, including field personnel at London airports (Heathrow, Gatwick), software engineers in Vietnam, staff at aviation institutes in Bahrain and Rwanda, security forces in Estonia and students in Hawaii and East Timor. When it comes to client numbers, the UK is one of the most important countries. Compared to visitors from

Slovakia, foreign visitors currently generate more income and they come almost exclusively through online channels. The majority of users currently come from Europe (approximately 57%) and the rest from Asia and Oceania (nearly 30%), America (10%) and Africa (3%).

With paying customers in 70 countries and significant growth, TrackTest is still looking for ways to expand. The company continuously evaluates and introduces new features based on customer feedback. "These are, for example, speaking skills testing, online checking to prevent cheating, or sector-oriented testing," said Braňo Pokrivčák. Establishing a partner network is another step to enter countries where the Internet is less used.

TrackTest's business journey does not resemble a typical Silicon Valley story, i.e. obtain hundreds of thousand users in a few weeks, raise and burn through venture capital worth a few million and then shut down or get bought out by a bigger player. TrackTest's strategy is more typical for start-up companies in Europe – a bootstrapped operation funded by their owners focused on building a sustainable business which starts generating money as soon as possible and on continual growth.

