

INTERVIEW WITH ROLF HEEB: MOVING FORWARD AFTER THE GREAT RECESSION
4/14/2010

Rolf Heeb is founder and CEO of AIMS International - Germany, which has offices in Neuss/Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Stuttgart and Munich. In 2000, Mr. Heeb's firm, IFM, became the German partner of AIMS International and in 2002 he became a board member of the organization and, later, regional head of the EMEA Region. He was appointed president of AIMS International in 2007. Today AIMS can be found in over 50 countries on five continents and it has more than 90 offices exceeding 350 consultants. In the following interview, Mr. Heeb discusses the AIMS global network and how the search industry will climb out from under the Great Recession.

You've returned recently from your global partners' meeting in Prague -- we've been told that 'weathering the downturn' was going to be on top of your agenda there. Tell us what was discussed and what did you learn?

The most important topics discussed were the different economic situations in the world and the effects on our offices and how we might position ourselves in 2010/2011. We see different situations in different countries. In some countries the business is already back to where it had been in 2007/2008. Some other countries are in the process of recovering and some are still suffering a lot. From a global perspective we decided already in July 2009 not to cut our global infrastructure but to make changes in the local offices where it was necessary. We have seen in the last couple of months that global companies are much more open to discuss global preferred supplier agreements at this time than ever before. They see those framework agreements as a chance to streamline their processes and become more efficient in their recruitment efforts on all levels.

What's happening within your recruiting firm network as a result of this long and drawn out downturn? How, in fact, have your global partners weathered the storm around the world? And which markets are up and which are down at the moment?

Our cross border business is already improving and has been for some months. Therefore we are continuing our growth strategy. This means that we are adding new countries and new offices to our global network. The most difficult areas are still South America, some West European countries like the U.K., Spain and Portugal. Countries like India, China but also some Western European countries like Germany are on a positive track.

How has the recruiting landscape changed in Germany, the U.K., and other top world markets for your firm? What about among your overseas partners in other locales?

In a lot of markets several local or regional competitors disappeared and the international operating search firms have very heavily reduced their organizations. Local search firms which survived did have more and more competitive disadvantages because clients focused their remaining searches on less search firms. In some countries we were able to hire some of the best people who were on the market because of these developments. Since we also provide Talent Development Services in a lot of countries our partners had additional offerings to our clients. In some overseas regions like South America where business declined we also had to adjust our organization.

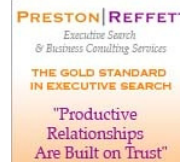
Are there ways to help find competitive advantage for clients as we come out of recession?

We have the impression that clients used the recession to focus their recruitment needs on less providers meaning that they negotiated worldwide or regional preferred supplier agreements. We have seen clients which did internal calculations showing major efficiency savings internally. The major focus was not fees paid to search firms but to make internal processes more efficient.

Speaking of coming out of recession, do you expect the downturn to last a bit longer -- are you thinking perhaps halfway through 2010? Or beyond?

In most countries we see light at the end of the tunnel. In some countries it is brighter than in others. Our cross border business in the first three month of 2010 is more than double compared to 2009. That is a good sign that the second half of 2010 will be even better. Unfortunately there are some countries which will not profit from these developments in 2010, but I think it is safe to say we will see all regions improving with time.

Next Wednesday, we conclude our interview with Rolf Heeb.
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