Small Spanish security software firm gets over crisis and goes global

A Spanish start-up teamed up with European partners to develop vital software to protect company computer systems. The project EUROSTARS HADES helped turn Artica into a thriving business.

The stealing of data can devastate individuals and companies. In May, Gregg Steinhafel, chief executive of US budget clothing brand Target, resigned after hackers breached the retailer's systems for three weeks, obtaining personal details of up to 70 million people. Sales fell as worried shoppers stayed away from the chain.

The company might have spotted the presence of spyware sooner had it used an innovative software solution developed by research project Eurostars Hades, says Sancho Lerena. Co-founder and chief executive of Spanish start-up Artica, Lerena was part of the team that developed software to monitor large networks of computers, detecting problems in their early stages.

Artica is now selling all three of the products refined and unified during the three-year research project. Their top software product Pandora FMS's open source version has sold 600,000 downloads since its launch in 2007, its tailor-made business version 5,000 and the company issues 30 to 40 company licences a year.

Making the leap

In their home country, they fitted their monitoring system into 8,000 servers at telecoms giant Telefonica; they have also won clients abroad like Japanese online retailer Rakuten. "The financing we got from Eurostars was vital," said Lerena. "Without it, it would have been impossible

to have developed software like this and to have made the leap to having clients like these."

Lerena was a 29-year-old computer engineer when he started his business along with mathematician David Villanueva. They had no experience of running businesses and could have gone to the wall like other start-ups in Spain when the credit crunch hit in 2007. If not for Eurostars. Their Eurostars partners, Spain's Abartia, Infraestructuras Tecnologicas Esenciales, research centre ESI Tecnalia and Portugal's Tekever brought invaluable complementary skills. They helped them identify the needs of companies and ensured their products met compliance rules on software.

Besides cybercrime, computer systems can be hit by countless problems. Rising temperatures at data centres can trigger fires. A fused power lead on one computer can affect a whole system. A company webpage crashing can disrupt customer orders.

Artica's clients get an alert by SMS, email or WhatsApp to allow them to nip problems in the bud. "Previously, the IT manager wouldn't know any of these things had happened until they got a call from their boss because he'd heard from an angry client," said Lerena.

Artica's software products like Babel for auditing systems and Integria to help

businesses manage their teams have helped the start-up to create an extra 3.8 million euros of extra turnover in the first three years after their launch. The best seller is Pandora FMS, named after the Greek goddess given a jar containing all the evils of the world. "The box had powers and could contain all the evils, like a barrier between hell and chaos!" said Lerena.

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Project participants:
Spain, Portugal

Budget: 4.8 MEuro
Duration: 36 months

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