A YTRIA CUSTOMER STORY

Showing up with the right tools...

“When you call an electrician, you hope that he shows up to your home with good tools,” explains Thomas Lang, Managing Director of Domino consultancy at once GmbH and avid Ytria tools user.

“And as someone who often visits a customer when they’re in trouble—when the customer really needs someone who knows what they’re talking about—it’s nice that I can open my Lotus Notes toolbox and say, ‘look here are some tools that will let me work faster and do things that even your administrators can’t do.”

Banking on Notes

Before getting to how Mr Lang discovered Ytria tools, we asked how he ended up as a Notes professional in the first place; it turns out he arrived at his métier by chance:

“It was with my first employer, a bank here in Germany, where I learned the shop as a Banker,” he recalls. “Eventually they asked me if I’d like to work with IT. After that, we built up a Notes environment so that’s how I got started with the platform; it was Notes R4.6 at the time.”

Squaring the circle

“After three years of working in IT, I realized I missed one of the things that led me to banking in the first place: the customer contact, talking to people, which is something I didn’t do so much of in the IT department,” he recalls. “So I started looking for something new.” Soon enough, he did find a job with IBM consulting company in Germany where he could have it both ways: “It was a really nice opportunity to combine IT knowledge with talking to people,” he explains. Then about a year later, he decided to start his own Lotus Notes consultancy which is still going strong today.

A chance encounter with scanEZ

About five years ago, he would learn about Ytria tools while on a tough job:

“I was in the midst of a project with a really large customer here in Germany where we had to do a migration for a merger between two companies,” he recalls. “We tried to switch one Domino environment from the smaller company to the Domino environment of the larger company and there were a lot of problems—horrible things to fix. We had to go through steps again and again and again for every mail database and every application database.” Another consultant on the job was already using the tools. “He told me ‘you need to use Ytria scanEZ,'” Mr Lang recalls. “And I thought ‘yeah it looks great, I can do all these things that normally take hours and hours in maybe 20 minutes.” After that, we built up a Notes environment so that’s how I got started with the platform; it was Notes R4.6 at the time.”
Competing with your tools?

But was scanEZ maybe a bit too good?

“I needed to ask myself if should really buy a tool to make things faster,” he says with a laugh. “I’d pay for the tool with my own money and the customer would save money because he doesn’t need to pay for as many hours of my time.” In the end, he concluded that this project was so tedious that he couldn’t bear it. “At first I was resistant but then I thought, it doesn’t make any sense to do this kind of work without the tools,” he remembers. “The work just wasn’t any fun and it was taking ages to do. So I bought scanEZ. That was back in July 2007.”

A new perspective

Eventually, Mr Lang would conclude that such productivity tools actually help the business side of his consultancy.

“Today I’m thinking a little bit differently about this,” he explains. “The consultant or the freelancer might save time for the client with the tools and not get money for it, so there might be some conflict there, but as I alluded to before, a good electrician should have good tools.”

It’s been five years since he got scanEZ (and he subsequently acquired the other Ytria tools), so we asked him if he felt he lost any money because of them due to fewer billable hours. “No,” he says. “The fact for me is, I’m working for a large customer here in Germany which is one of the largest Lotus workflow environments in the world. I’m really very sure we wouldn’t be able to do this job without the Ytria tools. The environment is really, really huge and we are only three people running the server and dealing with 20,000 users and 1.5 million workflows a year.”

Wowing peers

It’s little surprise that Mr Lang’s consultancy could take on bigger jobs when equipped with Ytria tools. He’s found the productivity gains from this software can sound almost unbelievable to the uninitiated.

“If you are talking to a normal administrator and he asks you to change agents from one server to another on, let’s say 500 databases, and you say it’ll take about five minutes,” he notes. “He’ll think you’re crazy and that you need two days to do this. But you can show him that this is five minutes—no more—with the Ytria tools.”

Even the naysayers

And what about stubborn folks who don’t think they need tools?

“There’s actually someone in our team of three who resists using tools, two of us are really using the tools a lot,” he says. “The third person is an engineer who comes from a background of developing things like routers—he’s really a genius for developing,” explains Mr Lang. “But when there’s something really big like issues with thousands of documents, even he’ll phone me up and ask, ‘could you tell again, how to do this and that with the tools, it would take me ages to write the proper agent!’”
Demystifying Domino environments with agentEZ

Some of the biggest challenges in Mr Lang’s work involve keeping track of Domino agents. And his tool of choice is naturally agentEZ.

“We’ve got some really long running agents in the night for preparing new workflows which need to be worked on in the morning. There are thousands upon thousands of documents created overnight,” he explains. “Maybe they are getting data from some partners and we need to work with them and we need to build plans to answer questions like, ‘when is this agent running?’ and ‘how long does it take?’” “And if there is a new workflow application, it’ll also have agents, and we have to think about when is the best time to run those agents,” he continues. “And we’ll need to answer, ‘when does the application need to be ready?’, ‘when is the window for backup?’ and so on.” “You can do all of this with agentEZ really well,” he says. “For each server, you can see when to start each agent and so on. And then easily change the settings of an agent—what server to run on, run on behalf of whom, the time and all these other things.”
Come together with aclEZ

While not quite as integral to Mr Lang’s work as agentEZ or scanEZ, aclEZ has been an enormous help when dealing with major institutional changes:

“Three years ago we had to deal with a merger between two companies,” he remembers, “And for sure there were different domains, different user names. When we switched mail databases from one domain to another, we used the NSF file and copied it.” “We had to sign the design elements for sure and then we had to adjust the ACL,” he continues. “We were only able to do this with aclEZ, otherwise it would have taken a really, really long time.”

Remembering the bad old days

When asked to elaborate on how scanEZ has been helping him in his biggest customer’s environment, he offered the following example of an issue he dealt with before owning the software:

“The company has maybe 10,000 branches all around Germany and all those workflow documents I mentioned,” he explains, “And like any Notes documents, you can set reader and author fields for these so we sometimes have situations where only one special group or user is allowed to read a special workflow document.” He describes why this situation is so problematic: “The organization is always changing and the company will inevitably need another user reading these documents,” he points out.

“You can change it in the configuration for all future created workflows no problem, but what about the workflows already created? You’ve got reader and author fields that are set, not dynamically updated so the new user will not be able to use them.” “When this happened the first time it was a huge effort to switch about 200,000 workflow documents and to recalculate which status the document should be in—who is the responsible person, who should be attached to the readers or authors fields,” he remembers. “I think it took us two or three full days to do this!”

The scanEZ difference

Of course, since acquiring scanEZ, things have been very different.

“When there is such a need for changes and reconfigurations the customer will ask about the ‘the special tool that Mr Lang uses [scanEZ]’” he explains with a laugh. “And if there’s a problem with one of our workflow documents and I need to look into the fields, I just use scanEZ--It’s like a viewer for Lotus Notes. In our environment everything runs in a web server and we don’t have the forms for the Notes client so you can’t see how fields are set, so I’m using scanEZ as a viewer whenever I need clues about the workflow.”

“And for sure I’m using scanEZ for the manipulation of data, for recalculating values with formulas,” he adds, offering this recent example of a huge mess where issues with the approval process in a content management tool led to 100,000 documents requiring repair.
“Some documents were hidden, some were never published, and some had other problems,” he explains. “When we recognized this, we asked ourselves ‘what is the easiest way to fix the problem’ and it was scanEZ—just mark all the 100,000 documents and do a calculation and add the field with the recent document unique ID. We tested it in a smaller environment and then did it on the 100,000 documents and it was done in 15 minutes. After that, the approval process worked again.”

**Results that get noticed**

Despite the fact that his clients don’t typically have a great deal of in-house Notes expertise, Mr Lang feels the quality of the work, and even the tools he uses, get noticed.

“They don’t know it is Ytria, they don’t know if they paid for it or not, but they recognize that we can do things like make changes on a huge lot of documents in a really, small amount of time,” he explains. “They don’t know how we’re using these tools but they know we can do things with them that we weren’t always able to do.”