In a recent interview for Bloomberg TV Bulgaria Atanas Kiryakov talked about Semantic Technology for publishers, Ontotext's partnership with Impelsys and the newly opened office of the company in New York.

Read the full interview below.

Bloomberg TV: What you develop at Ontotext is a semantic software, would you please share a bit more about it and about the target of this technology?

Atanas Kiryakov: What we do is on one hand based on connecting very large volumes of data, lately very popular to be referred to as Big Data. We connect literally billions of facts about all sorts of objects and concepts in the world. These are the sorts of things that we know something about from Wikipedia or from other sources. What we use something we call a graph. This is a huge structure made of data, very similar to what Google calls a Knowledge Graph. We use this graph as a brain, as background information, that is as a context to better analyze texts and connect them to that brain.

Semantic Technology for Smarter Content Management

Bloomberg TV: So, various enterprises use this brain to sell and make money?

Atanas Kiryakov: Our main clients are publishers and media. The BBC is perhaps the most famous of our projects. Many financial media and publishers also use our technologies, for instance, Financial Times and Delinian (formerly known as Euromoney Institutional Investor PLC). In the US the biggest publishers of technical literature, among which John Wiley & Sons, Oxford University press are our clients. They all are organizations that handle huge amounts of information and this information is dynamic, complex and costly.

Bloomberg TV: What is it that your clients are looking for? What is different about your product?

Atanas Kiryakov: The technology we develop allows our clients to better reuse information, more importantly, to better serve it to their users. Many of these leading media and publishers produce huge amounts of content every day, content that is very expensive and very nice. Yet they lose a market share against Facebook and against publishers with a much

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poorer content just because the way the latter serve their content is different.

For example, what the BBC do with our technology is that they generate thousands of topical pages on their website and every time you visit a topical page, say one about Wayne Rooney, you get to see the latest information about him. The information presented is directly or indirectly related to Rooney, be it articles, statistics – how many goals he scored, videos, photos etc. From this page, you can continue to the next related page, say for Manchester United, or to a completely different place.

Bloomberg TV: In a word, optimization. Your technology optimizes what has been created.

Atanas Kiryakov: It provides a better way of viewing, navigating and ultimately enjoying content, for doing something interesting with this content. You can't afford such content to be created by people. It has to do with managing thousands of pages continuously. It's hardly possible to do that manually.

The emblematic thing about Semantic Technology is that they open an opportunity for content to be served and consumed in a much more flexible way. And this makes the whole difference, giving publishers an edge over Facebook.

Ontotext's Collaboration with Impelsys

Bloomberg TV: It was just a few days ago that you announced Ontotext's collaboration with Impelsys, would you share more about this partnership?

Atanas Kiryakov: Impelsys is one of the largest suppliers of complete solutions for managing content for publishers. And while this does not sound sexy at all, these are the people who help publishers produce various types of information, to publish books, magazines and so on.

Impelsys are the type of company that offers manual content maintenance combining it with technology to create an integrated business solution. We are the ones more focused on the technology. Our partnership, in this case, will allow us to reach more publishers who are already customers of Impelsys and to help them make better products.

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Bloomberg TV: Is there an estimate of how much will your revenue rise from this partnership?

Atanas Kiryakov: Not yet. Anything said would be a speculation. Impelsys have over 100 big clients. We have been working on this partnership for more than half a year and now we're to the point where all the technical work is done. Next week we will be announcing the collaboration at the London Book Fair, one of two major events for the publishing industry, together with Frankfurt Book Fair. Ontotext is actively participating in both events, as we offer solutions for these businesses. Half of the people from our marketing and sales departments will be in London next week.

Ontotext's New Office in New York

Bloomberg TV: Ontotext is part of Sirma Group, we often mention you especially after the IPO – emblematic of the Bulgarian Stock Exchange. The latest news about the group is that the funds have already been invested. A good amount of investments have been directed towards the opening of an office in New York, actually, Sirma Group has already stepped on the US market with Ontotext. That said, what's next for Ontotext?

Atanas Kiryakov: I actually wear two hats, because I am a member of the board and of the holding. For Ontotext this means a lot because opening an independent office of a company is a much more difficult thing to do than opening an office when you have the scale of Sirma Group. This will lead to economies of scale and reduce the overhead costs. Also hiring a salesperson in the US and motivating them is not something you can easily do from Bulgaria. The advantages are many, we also have very good synergies with several of the companies in the holding.

What we will actively promote on the US market and where will try to increase the sales are the companies Sirma ITT, Sirma Solution, Sirma EngView and Ontotext, of course.

In fact, one of the reasons the office is in New York is that more than half of Ontotext's US clients are based in New York. This is extremely convenient. For example, a company from the holding – Sirma ITT that will have sales people there, uses the database of Ontotext as part of the business solution it offers. This means that every time they sell to the US National Gallery of Art, or to the Bulgarian government, this is a plus for Ontotext.

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We have very specific plans for how the sales team we gather in New York will work together. On the other hand, each salesperson will also be responsible for the sales of the different companies and for working separately with the respective marketing and sales teams.

Bloomberg TV: Was that a small portion of the investment?

Atanas Kiryakov: It wasn't very small, but it attracted much of the attention in the press. This wasn't the only thing we did with this round of investments. There were investments of around 1 million leva in Sirma Solutions, part of which was for its subsidiary company Loyax.

The Model of Sirma Group

Bloomberg TV: Speaking of Loyax, what does its spin-off from Sirma Solutions indicate? Does that mean that in the future there will be other companies spinning off?

Atanas Kiryakov: Yes, definitely. This is part of the model.

Bloomberg TV: Will this affect the image of the Sirma Group?

Atanas Kiryakov: Not at all. This is part of the model by which Sirma works from the very beginning. First, there was only Sirma, gradually various projects that it developed, upon reaching a certain level of maturity, separated as independent businesses. Thus we were able to motivate and focus their managers, as was the case with Ontotext.

Bloomberg TV: This is important as the company is public and any shift could trigger questions.

Atanas Kiryakov: Again, this is the model Sirma Group was built upon from its start. We have an infinite number of good examples. Sirma Solutions has perhaps incubated half of the companies that are currently in the holding. This is the way we work and the way we have been successful so far.

Bloomberg TV: In terms of additional investments, what part of them will be directed towards Ontotext?

Atanas Kiryakov: Currently we are discussing plans with Sirma Group and the investors and

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owners in Ontotext, but we're not ready to announce them.

The Shortage of IT Specialists in Bulgaria

Bloomberg TV: At the end of our interview, let's talk about workforce shortages. Your research and development activities are based here, in Sofia. Do you feel these shortages**?**

Atanas Kiryakov: Yes we do. And this inevitably leads to educating specialists, to partnering with a number of software academies in Bulgaria. The experienced people on the market are a limited number. According to statistics from BASSCOM, currently, there are about 20 000 people in the software industry and the companies in it continue to grow. That said, the only way is attracting students from universities and even from schools.

Bloomberg TV: Do you rely on retraining schemes?

Atanas Kiryakov: Sure, this is also very common. A neighbor of mine who was specializing in electronics has already spent a year of retraining and, currently, he will be starting a programmer career. These are very reasonable things. We expect an improvement by the so-called green cards because it's normal that we can import specialists. By and large, the problem with the workforce is severe but not so as to prevent the development of these businesses.

If you are interested in learning more about smart content management and gaining a broader perspective on how semantic technologies help publishers serve the right content at the right time – digested, easy to comprehend and navigate, and tailored to the readers' personal interests, we recommend listening to Atanas Kiryakov's webinar: Adding Semantic Edge to Your Content – From Authoring to Delivery.

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