



Consilia Solutions is an information technology firm based in Mariehamn, developing internet-based, content management systems and offering consultancy in programming.



"In this business, so much depends on the people you know and what sort of personal network you have" – Jan-Olof Engblom

WHO

Engineer Jan-Olof Engblom came from a family with an entrepreneurial flair. His father had owned a fishing boat for 30 years. Jan-Olof had been employed as a computer programmer with the Swedish multinational company Electrolux for a number of years. In 1991, he decided to set up his own consultancy firm in Stockholm. He identified his clients through the broad network of contacts he had developed while still at Electrolux. However, he became tired of the hectic tempo and long travelling times associated with city life, and so decided to move back to his native Åland Islands in order to improve his quality of life. This included taking up golf as a hobby. Åland has no traffic jams, a clean environment and a much more 'laid back' approach to life in general.

Jan-Olof's partner in setting up Consilia Solutions in 1997 is his old friend Stefan Lindén. Stefan is also a computer engineer and a graduate from Sweden. He joined an Åland-based firm which set up the first locally operated internet portal. He eventually became the co-owner of a sailboat rental firm and of a book wholesale dealer. The start-up capital for Consilia came from private savings and a bank loan since the founders wanted to exercise full control over their own firm.

WHAT

Consilia offers services in consultation and the development of programs for editing web pages or content managing systems (CMS) for business firms and not-for-profit organisations.

The idea originated in Consilia's own difficulties in identifying a handy, user-friendly, high quality program for creating its web pages. It was Jan-Olof's and Stefan's contention that it should be very easy to make the contents of the home page accessible and to be able to regularly update the contents without any specialist knowledge. Consilia has created its own solution to this challenge, a web-based publisher called *Informer*.

Currently, the *Informer* program is used by firms both on Åland and in Sweden for managing the contents of the internet and intranets. The program is also customised for small firms. Principally, *Informer* does not require technical skills, so those responsible for updating and organizing the information content can easily update the home pages themselves. Managing the contents is carried out in a web reader, which means the task can be undertaken anywhere, as long as the internet is accessible.

“We have got most of the customers that we can expect to have on Åland and now we are starting to look at the export market again” - Jan-Olof Engblom, managing director.



Informer also includes additional features such as registering all visits to a home page and keeping track of the language option used by the visitor. For intranet purposes, *Informer* can also handle users' rights and monitor the amount of time each person has been logged in.

The location on Åland rather than, for example, Stockholm, has its advantages. Lower fixed costs, such as lower rental charges, enable the company to cut product prices and compete in a growing market.

As the firm's products are virtual, freight costs are also completely avoided. A firm purchasing Consilia's products gets the product directly installed into its own system by the Consilia staff. It is also possible to send the finished programme via internet.

WHERE

Consilia was initially oriented towards satisfying Swedish clients. By 2003, however, it has a growing clientele of firms and organisations on Åland, and exports only covered some 5% of the firm's gross turnover. Local clients include the Alandia Group (the largest insurance group on Åland); the Chips Group (a leading business in the Scandinavian snack food industry); Eckerö Linjen (a leading passenger transportation firm operating between Åland and Sweden); and Posten på Åland (the sole local provider of postal services). Consilia has just one competitor firm on the local market. However, this local market is very easily saturated and links with overseas customers will have to be renewed. This may require the development of new products, such as a cheaper, simplified version of *Informer*.

Consilia has been exporting its products to clients in Sweden and Finland. It has two major overseas clients, both located in Sweden, and both of whom have been in regular contact with Jan-Olof, now Consilia's managing director and exports manager, since his business operations in Sweden prior to 1997.

INTERNAL SUPPORTS

Consilia Solutions is based on the professional cooperation of Jan-Olof Engblom and Stefan Lindén. The firm's internal organisation is non-hierarchical and informal. All five employees have professional degrees and salaries are above the average in this sector. Staff members enjoy special benefits, such as free gym visits, a broadband internet connection at home and mobile phones paid for by the firm. There is also a planning meeting every Monday



morning, which facilitates employee involvement in the firm's decision-making process. Such policies contribute to the development of an efficient and highly motivated team of workers. Such high levels of job satisfaction also mean low levels of turnover: only one employee has been 'lost' since 1997. The employees are, after all, the firm's most important resource. Consilia invests in the further training of its staff, and encourages their participation in specialised courses and conferences. The professional development of its employees is an investment to Consilia, and not a cost, in spite of the difficulties that this may create with such a small staff complement.

EXTERNAL SUPPORTS

Soon after its launch, Consilia received a Finnish Government grant of €50,000 for product development, making possible the hiring of the first employee. Some financial support is also available from state organizations for participation in different fairs overseas.

Otherwise, the Consilia partners have not sought financial support from other sources. The firm's success is traced mainly to Jan-Olof's numerous business contacts and the competence of the firm's employees. A network of connections has proved vital for Consilia. Jan-Olof has joined different local organisations and associations upon resettling on Åland so as to extend and cultivate his personal network.

When Jan-Olof and Stefan set up Consilia in 1997, they agreed on three targets, to be reached within 5 years of start-up: They would have five employees; they would be financially independent; and they would have an annual gross turnover of €500,000. The first two of these three goals have been realised.

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Activity: internet-based,
content management
systems and IT-consultancy.

Employees: 5

Established: 1997

Contact: Jan-Olof

Engblom (Managing Director)

After years in hectic Stockholm, programming consultant Jan-Olof Engblom decided to move back to Åland Islands. He soon found a business partner and, opting for a state product development grant, their firm could employ a third person and start developing its own flexible internet content management programme. Consilia Solutions gradually replaced its Swedish customers with local ones. However, thriving on the local market is not possible: the firm is eyeing overseas markets again, and is hoping that a mass-market version of their core product will serve this purpose.