

## IT Provider Focuses on Crisis Prevention

### On the path to success: Halle-based GISA GmbH provides help and support with digitalization

The full-service IT provider GISA broke the 100-million-euro mark for the first time in the 2019 financial year. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, the company in Halle (Saale) is once again on the path to success this year. It brought in significant orders to Saxony-Anhalt and won over its customers with digital solutions and practical support during lockdown.

Since the beginning of March, the coronavirus has changed many structures and presented businesses with unprecedented challenges. The start of lockdown and the introduction of measures to control the pandemic brought about a change of pace at GISA GmbH, too. The IT specialists heralded a new era for their customers that is seeing the acceleration of digitalization processes and the establishment of new ways of working. For more than ten years, the Halle-based company has been constantly updating its crisis prevention, which regulates internal processes and provides customers primarily in highly sensitive business areas with the guarantee that they will be able to continue their vital work in an emergency. "We train for these kinds of scenarios: every month we simulate what might happen and plan how we should react," says Hendrik Nitz, Vice President of Governance and IT Security. "Well before the pandemic arrived here and became a very serious issue, we knew how we needed to react."

### Digitalization projects are now being accelerated

The GISA formed a crisis committee and devised strategies. In mid-March, many companies told their employees to work from home. "But many didn't have the right infrastructure to make home working quick and secure," says Nitz. The IT provider from Halle swiftly offered his customers help and support. To this end, GISA increased capacity in its own data center without difficulty and used special access options to enable employees working for many different firms to securely connect to their company network from home via a browser. "This meant our customers could ensure that their employees could find everything they needed on one platform," explains Nitz. To achieve this, GISA drew on the IT expertise of some 830 employees at its headquarters in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt, and its five other sites and offices. The strategy has proved successful: many companies have found that home working is viable, that digital meetings do work and that virtual communication can be perfectly productive. GISA CEO Michael Krüger embraces this trend: "The pandemic is accelerating digitalization projects and has brought about many opportunities for us."

### GISA facilitated access to internal systems for 5,000 users at short notice

The staff at GISA were already demonstrating how this could be done back in spring. After the first step, which involved allowing access via a browser, they moved on to the next stage. "After the initial shock caused by the coronavirus, many companies gave hardware to their teams to use at home," Nitz explains. "We supported end users so they could use the hardware securely and easily." By providing an encrypted data connection, GISA guaranteed access for more than 5,000 users across Germany. At the same time, the IT provider uploaded documentation videos, organized training courses, advised its customers and tirelessly promoted digitalization and modified ways of working, both in virtual forums and traditional project work. "Our virtual collaboration is going well. Colleagues have discussions via Skype, decisions can be made without everyone being there in person and digital collaboration with customers works very well. Personal communication is nevertheless surprisingly successful too," says Franciska Quaiser, Press Spokeswoman and Unit Director for Corporate Communications and Development.

In terms of its internal activities, GISA is establishing a controlling department, developing processes and creating reporting chains. The crisis committee for companies held a weekly conference call where 80 managers got to grips with the current situation and fed the results back to their groups and departments. The company added a new section to its intranet where information could be shared and where employees exchanged advice on daily challenges such as child care. A nice knock-on effect of this is that "our company's team spirit has grown noticeably during this time," says Quaiser.

### Pilot project underway for the smart office of the future

Although GISA has not yet needed to reduce working hours, it did have to introduce new health and safety measures. Teams were split up, rooms divided into two and home working options were arranged. "It was easy – we had prepared for these kinds of situations countless times before during practice exercises," says Quaiser. The IT provider currently has a pilot project underway with one guiding principle: "Every employee's working environment should be set up in a way that allows them to work at their best – either at home, in the office or a mix of the two." Nitz says: "Our aim is to find out what our employees need, what technical infrastructure is important and how collaboration can work in the future with new strategies." Quaiser emphasizes that planning ahead for its customers and employees is part of GISA's philosophy. The IT provider has received lifelong certification by *audit berufundfamilie* as recognition that it is one of the most family-friendly companies in Germany. And its successful track record only continues. GISA finished the 2019 financial year with a turnover of more than 100 million euros and was able to employ even more people. According to a study by the economics magazine *brand eins*, GISA is one of the best IT providers in Germany.

### Building a new core sector

The company offers comprehensive IT solutions – from strategy and consulting to development, implementation and the outsourcing of complete business processes and IT infrastructures. Since it was founded in 1993, GISA has been growing continuously and now operates throughout Germany for the energy sector, the public sector and industry. It largely recruits its workforce from the local universities it works very closely with. It offers a winning formula of good prospects, continuing professional development and a location "that provides an ideal infrastructure and excellent links and connections," says Quaiser. Despite the pandemic, the forecasts for the current financial year are very promising. The company has recently succeeded in winning two major contracts. For the next four years, it will be in charge of managing, operating and developing the SAP systems for the Leipzig waterworks company and has also been contracted to introduce and maintain a finance management system based on SAP S/4HANA for five universities of applied sciences in Bavaria. "This is a very important step for us. We have been making preparations to offer universities and research facilities a model ERP solution specially tailored to their needs for several years," says Quaiser. "It could become a new core sector for us."

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