

# Offshore Update



## **ADB: Local project management is key to successful offshoring**

According to Antwerp Diamond Bank (ADB), pricing never was the primary driver for its offshoring relationship with Applied Development. It was all about finding the right IT profiles at the right time, and building a long-term partner relationship into the organization's extended IT team.

Antwerp Diamond Bank is a specialised bank focusing exclusively on the diamond and the diamond jewellery sector. ADB is the second largest diamond bank in the world.

The bank's network of offices covers both the major traditional and the emerging diamond centres, such as Antwerp, Dubai, Hong Kong, Mumbai, Singapore, and New York. ADB is a KBC subsidiary, providing its branches and representations with different types of financial products and know-how. "We are mainly offering financial credit and bank loans

*Dirk Nijs, VP IT at Antwerp Diamond Bank: "To us, direct contact through a local office was essential to establish a successful relationship with an offshoring partner."*

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## **Applied Development: The challenge of recruitment and retention**

Sharlet Murti is HR & Administration Manager for Applied Development's staff in India. "With 50 employees, we are a midsize company", she explains. "Obviously, in the IT market it's never easy to attract new employees. At the same time, we can't afford to have people on the bench. That makes recruitment and retention even more challenging."

Applied Development recruits employees with a hands-on mentality, who are technically competent, open to learning, interested in experimenting and have an appetite for challenging tasks. The company's focus is clearly on people with outstanding technical quality and strong foundations in software development. "There is a lot of competition in the IT sector, and yes, the market is very much alive", Sharlet continues. "Sometimes, we call in the help from recruitment consultants. We also have a successful reference programme."

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to diamond traders”, explains Dirk Nijs, VP IT at ADB. “The diamonds act as security for the loans, meaning that we need to be able to trace them: for example from the diamond mine in Africa, to the diamond cutter in India and to the trader’s office in Antwerp.” These business processes clearly set ADB apart from the typical banking business.

ADB’s headquarters are located in Antwerp, as is the bank’s IT department. Currently, ADB employs a staff of five IT professionals in Antwerp. They closely work together with five dedicated employees from Applied Development in India.

Dirk Nijs continues: “The Indian team is part of our extended IT staff, so to speak. We define the IT strategy and design the solutions we need – including the functional analysis – at our headquarters in Antwerp. The development of the solutions takes place in India.”

Currently, Applied Development’s Indian developers work on solutions within the Oracle Financial Services framework, next to a specific solution – tailor-made for ADB – supporting business critical processes, including credit management, reporting and traceability.

Local point of contact

ADB already had some experience with offshoring before the company teamed up with Applied Development. The shortage of highly skilled IT professionals in the Belgian market – especially Oracle experts – was the main driver for the bank to start working with offshoring. “Applied Development’s approach is different”, says Dirk Nijs. “The company offers more flexibility.” To ADB, it also was important to have a single point of

contact through Applied Development’s office in Belgium. “That is one of the factors that sets Applied Development apart. We never really considered setting up our own IT branch in India. We knew we would [more >](#)

**The offshore point of view**

Vinodh Kannan, Applied Development’s Team Leader for the ADB team in India explains:

“It’s always a pleasant experience working with ADB, as the bank treats us as a part of its own team. ADB provides a single platform on which we work together as extended team members, despite being in different time zones.

We collaborate through video conferences to update the status of the project and to get the business requirements. The levels of expectations are clearly set and this helps us to achieve the desired results.

We also spend time on informal contacts. We tend to discuss the happenings in India and Belgium, and it is always surprising to know that Dirk has more information about what is happening in India than we have! We do discuss the weather as well. Usually it is too hot in Chennai and it is raining in Belgium...

The ADB project has given a lot of exposure and challenges to the team. We are very motivated to work for ADB. Any queries we have are directly answered by the corresponding onsite colleagues at ADB, following a standard process. This reduces the turn-around time and ensures that the deliverables are made on time.”

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lack the know-how to be successful on the Indian recruitment market.” In that perspective, Applied Development offers ADB the best of both worlds. “The company knows its way around the Indian job market, while at the same time, we get in touch with the activities in India through a local, Belgian point of contact.”

But however smooth the contact between the customer and its offshore partner may be, the typical challenges of offshoring remain. ADB was well aware of these challenges, but found an efficient way to manage them. “The success of the collaboration with the offshore team largely depends on the talent of the team leader”, explains Dirk Nijs. “Obviously, we are in close contact with the team leader through email and videoconferencing. But he also travels to Antwerp on a regular basis.”

These face-to-face meetings are important, not only to discuss the technicalities of the projects Applied Development works on for ADB, but also to tackle the cultural differences that might have an impact on the efficiency of the collaboration.

“We all know and understand that Belgian and Indian cultures sometimes are quite different. Both parties take these differences into account, which results in a smooth working relationship.” In the end, a project’s success largely relies on mutual understanding.

“That’s why we believe Applied Development offers the right fit”, concludes Dirk Nijs. “We didn’t want to be a small client for a big offshoring company. We preferred a partner with a size that is comparable to ours. That way, we knew we would be able to keep contact at the right level.” ■

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For Applied Development, the challenge of recruiting new employees seems to grow smaller as time passes. “More and more people know our company”, explains Sharlet, “and the recruitment agencies have grown used to our high standards. We are all on the same page.” Applied Development’s reference programme benefits from the fact that the company is best represented by its own employees.

“They know the company through and through. They know what we are looking for in an employee, so the reference programme works really well.” As the employees share their personal experiences with potential candidates, they can’t but refer to Applied Development’s close-knit atmosphere. “Applied Development is different indeed. We’ve all heard stories about large companies that don’t know who their employees really are. That couldn’t be more far removed from our approach.”

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*Sharlet Murti, HR & Administration Manager at Applied Development: “Creating good relationships within an open, respectful working environment is essential to our company.”*



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Sharlet continues: “At Applied Development, we all work together. We know everybody personally and we have a mutual understanding about where every employee’s career path is leading. Creating good relationships within an open, respectful working environment is essential to our company.” But that’s not all. Retention remains a big challenge for Indian IT companies. “We pay slightly higher than the market”, Sharlet explains. “People compare a lot. Salary is probably the first thing an employee becomes unhappy about.”

Next to the financial aspect of their jobs, employees are sensitive to the way the company allows them to find the right work-life balance. “We invest a lot in establishing a friendly working environment”, concludes Sharlet Murti. “We organize several team events per year, to go out and spend time together, outside of the office. That really helps us to strengthen the team and keep our employees on board.” ■



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