Evernote Accelerates Company Growth by Enlisting ABBYY®

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- Alexander Pashintsev, Vice President, Research and Development, Evernote

ABBYY FineReader® Engine Shaves Months Off Evernote’s Development Time and Time-to-Market

Evernote: Your External Mind

Watch a video tutorial or listen to a podcast of Evernote CEO Phil Libin on the company’s site and you’ll inevitably hear him say that Evernote was created to be your “external brain,” to help take the burden off of you and your own brain to remember things. In fact Evernote is an online service that helps you capture, store and search information on your computer and across all your electronic devices, including your cell phone, your laptop, and online, so that you have anywhere/anytime access to your information.

Evernote users (now numbering over 1 million users) capture items like to-do’s, notes, napkin scribbles, snapshots, wine labels and business cards — all searchable within Evernote’s system. Evernote utilizes a simple three-step process for organizing your miscellaneous snippets: 1) Capture what you want to remember via your computer, the web, or your mobile phone; 2) Evernote recognizes the information and synchronizes it across your devices; and 3) Retrieve all your information, by simply searching through Evernote.

Evernote, established in 2004, spent three years developing its proprietary Advanced Image Recognition (AIR) system that extracts text out of traditionally hard-to-extract places, namely photos, such as those taken of product labels, signs and handwritten notes. The sophisticated engine goes into “deep analysis,” running several backend services and recognition protocols, undetectable to the user, according to Alexander Pashintsev, Evernote’s vice president of research and development. By all accounts, the system has been running well, helping the pre-IPO startup achieve media accolades and awards, and significant growth and fundraising milestones.
Rapid Market Expansion with ABBYY

To keep up its competitive pace, Evernote executives realized they needed to expand quickly into other markets, and in particular, foreign language markets. “Our system was working well, but we needed to expand quickly into multiple international markets,” said Mr. Pashintsev. “The initial international market was Russia, so we needed recognition for the Russian language. After analysis of what Optical Character Recognition (OCR) companies were offering, my first choice was ABBYY.”

Mr. Pashintsev said his company’s selection of FineReader as its engine of choice was due to many variables. “The engine is very comprehensive and includes coverage for all of the languages we envision using in the future,” he said. “Also the reputation of the ABBYY engine was very high in terms of people I spoke to and my own understanding, plus it is bundled with many scanners, and that confirmed to me that the engine is the best on the market.”

A “Common Vocabulary” Builds the Appropriate Business Model

Mr. Pashintsev said that flexibility with his company contacts was also a deciding factor in choosing to partner with ABBYY. He explained that his use of the FineReader Engine was different than that of traditional developers. “We didn’t need to process a lot of documents and don’t produce any recognized results; it all happens in the background, so we spent some time with the ABBYY people to find the right model for this kind of integration. We needed to find a way to measure the performance of the engine and price it to match what we were doing.

David Hazard, ABBYY Senior Business Development Manager, said that ABBYY and Evernote representatives began a constructive dialog to develop the right business and pricing model. “Alex told me they had a unique application and they needed to do business with a company that could develop a common vocabulary with them and thus develop a flexible business model that could fit their business application with the right licensing and pricing,” he said.

Mr. Hazard said that ABBYY’s management team works with a variety of companies in various industries and engages with each one to adapt appropriate business and pricing models so that the customer’s needs are always met. “Although Evernote’s application was outside the box of traditional ABBYY business, ABBYY’s flexibility enabled us to put our technology in the hands of Evernote so that they could be first to market with their unique offering in the consumer sector,” said Mr. Hazard.

Easy Integration into Evernote’s Existing System

Integrating the FineReader engine into Evernote’s existing system was a streamlined process, according to Mr. Pashintsev, who requested and received assistance from ABBYY as needed.

Mr. Pashintsev was surprisingly pleased with how smooth the integration went. “When integrating, it always takes time to understand the methodology of the design of the third party. But with ABBYY, integration was clean and worked as described. Overall, I didn’t have problems that things were not working. I had a good experience with the FineReader engine itself and with the company overall,” said Mr. Pashintsev.

Leveraging ABBYY FineReader Engine Alongside Evernote

Mr. Libin explained that Evernote’s technology excels at extracting text from poor quality images and it leverages FineReader for higher quality images. “The main thing our technology does is we start with a poor quality image and do a lot of filtering, a lot of analysis, determining which parts are important and which are not. We identify sections of an image as text and cut that out and hand that off to the OCR engine,” he said. “We get high quality scans, that’s something that ABBYY’s great at, and we never really optimized our technology for. This makes our overall system faster and saves us a lot of development time when writing different languages.”

“For faxes and cleaned, scanned documents FineReader can take our overall system faster and saves us a lot of development time when writing different languages.”

Mr. Libin said that implementing ABBYY FineReader Engine during development of Evernote’s Russian language version proved successful. “We were able to cut our projected development time significantly. We thought it would take six months; ABBYY definitely shaved a couple of months off of that,” he said. “The results have been good and we were able to launch on time.”