EXCEPTION TO THE RULE

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Marco Stefanini

Although services are least exposed to external competition, even with foreign competition advancing into their own backyard, several Brazilian information technology (IT) companies have managed to position themselves competitively in the international market. In June the Dom Cabral Foundation released its ranking of the largest Brazilian transnational companies: out of 46 companies, 12 were in the services sector, 6 of them in IT.

"Abroad, [our] strategy is to focus on building a serious brand ... and knowing the business culture and the country, [because] services have to be customized," says Marco Stefanini, president of Stefanini IT Solutions , which was second in the Dom Cabral rankings.

Stefanini has 67% of its assets, 37% of its employees, and 36% of its revenues outside Brazil. Fifteen years ago, it opened its first foreign operation in Argentina. Today, it operates in 27 countries, adding 10 in 2010 when it acquired American TechTeam, which had operations in China, Germany, and Australia.

Stefanini believes that Brazilian IT industry is quite mature. "We have good installed capacity to meet increased demand, even though we are not immune to growing pains," he says, referring mainly to the lack of skilled workers. He sees the government as sensitive to training needs in the sciences: "There is already a draft bill to introduce subsidized loans for the training of workers — but still nothing concrete."

He believes that, in general, the Brazilian professional "is more flexible, more creative, and participative than in other countries." That is one reason his company stays based in Brazil, from which it supplies contracted services in other countries, such as help desks. But he also recognizes the disadvantages: "The appreciated exchange rate, high labor costs, and the lack of bilingual professionals make operations more expensive."