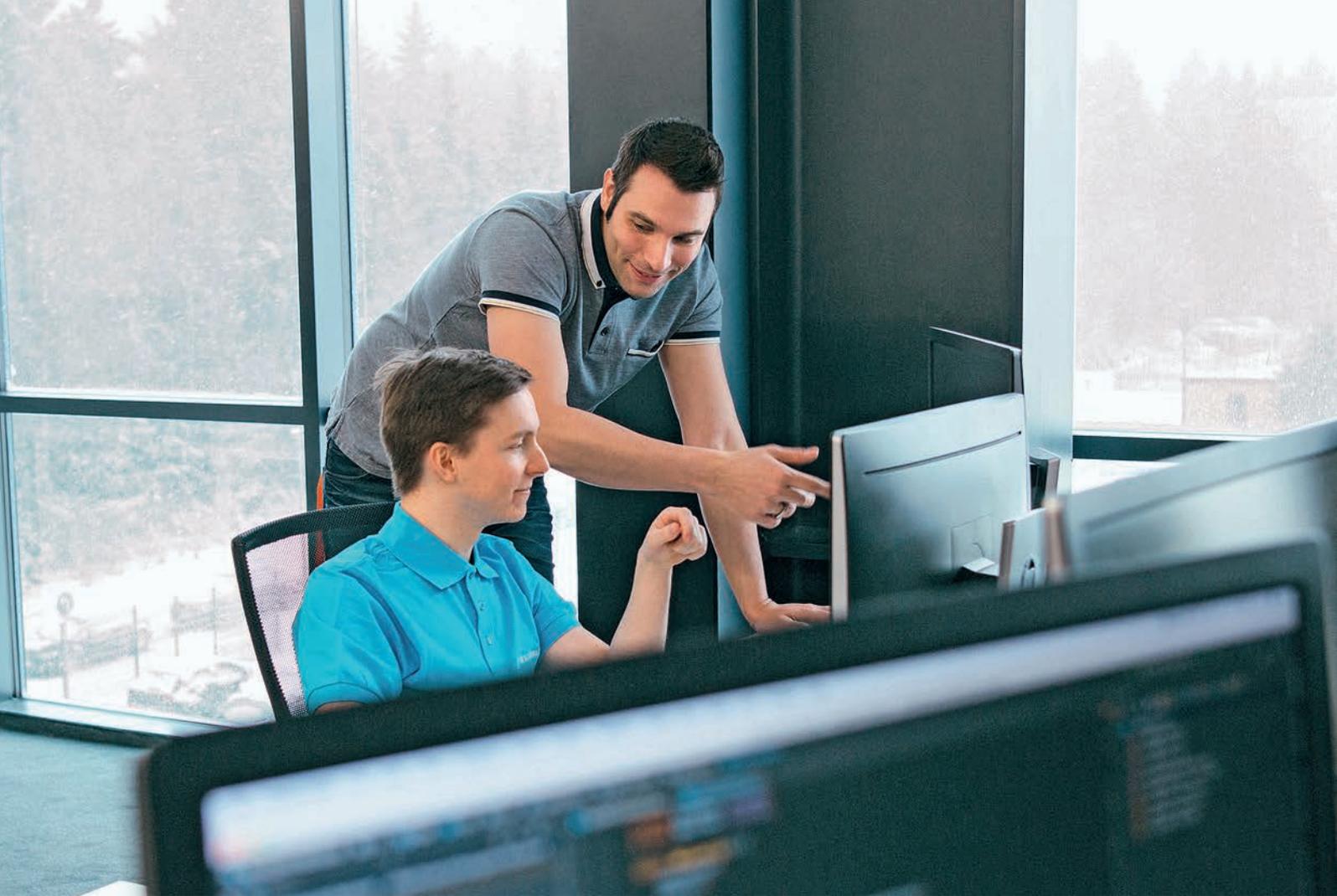


"Where we are is the  
**Cutting Edge**"

CULTURE OF DIGITALISATION  
AT GK SOFTWARE







Specialists, researchers and students work together to develop new ideas for customers.

**Schöneck, a small town** surrounded by mountains and forests in the Vogtland region of Saxony, has always been a sports destination and a health resort, in summer as in winter, attracting both amateur athletes and outdoor types. GK Software has its headquarters in an industrial estate, located between the town and the surrounding woodlands. To visitors, it seems as if the future has already begun here. Or rather, this is where the future of IT in the retail world is being crafted. Why wait for tomorrow if you can do it today?

In September 2017 the company opened a new building on its premises. It has invested five million euros in the project so far, and a company kindergarten and guesthouse are in the planning. The new structure incorporating office space, a café, restaurant and fitness studio represents a new work culture. After receiving a warm welcome, the first thing visitors see hanging in the foyer are the words: “The best way to predict the future is to create it”. This philosophy underlines the company’s objectives. The new building is loft-like, with a sleek, open industrial design.

## EUROPEAN MARKET LEADER IN RETAIL SOFTWARE

**Founded in 1990 as a two-man business**, GK Software is today the market leader in digital solutions for major retail companies. Some 1,000 employees work at 12 locations in eight countries. Roughly 150 corporate customers, including leading brands like Adidas and Aldi, in more than 50 countries use its software solution GK-OmniPOS. The company heads the field in all areas of digitalisation and new business models: augmented and virtual reality (AR and VR), blockchain, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, the Internet of Things and big data.

Global leadership and excellence are the pillars on which the company is built. Chief architect of this philosophy is Rainer Gläss, founder and CEO. His name provides the “G” in GK Software. Stephan Kronmüller, Deputy Chairman of the Board, is co-founder and the “K” in the company’s name. Gläss is much in demand as a businessman and consultant. He is a member of the German government’s IT Summit, among other things. And he is quite serious when he says: “Where we are is the cutting edge.”

The rapid transformation of the economy, also in the wake of Retail 4.0, has caused expectations to rise among GK Software's customers, according to Gläss. Teamwork within the company has had to adapt and employees have to be motivated to support such change. "That may sound easy, but the process has been a long one with far-reaching consequences. You cannot effectively transform an entire corporate culture in incremental steps. This paradigm shift is a major challenge," he says. "Everyone in the company needs to be able to communicate with one another as equals. Over time, you realize that everything is a matter of communication: the environment in which we work, lunch breaks, team spirit and quality standards."

The company's performance figures prove him right: GK Software has reported record sales and earnings to its shareholders in recent years. In 2016, the company gained market leader SAP as a strategic partner, opening the door to customers around the world. While everyone in Germany is talking about new workplace models, they are already reality here in Schöneck. Visitors perceive the atmosphere in the company as extremely



“ Here in Schöneck, people live and work in an ideal environment for exercise and recreation. ”

Rainer Gläss, CEO





relaxed, whether in the lounges, café, restaurant or offices; but it is marked by extraordinary agility.

Digitalisation is the driving force. “The heart of the matter is that in a creative, intellectual process, you have to establish an environment in which people feel they are in good hands”, explains Rainer Gläss. He firmly disagrees with the common theory that new, digital working models alienate people. Employees are less likely to accept change in companies that take a top-down approach to setting targets using classical management methods and insist on implementing these and only these targets.

#### FIRST RESPECT, THEN MOTIVATION

**Gläss does not see his employees** as being at his beck and call, but as equals. In the top IT sector, typical employees who are defined by their employment contract, an eight-hour day and salary, are already a thing of the past. And GK Software is at the forefront of this evolution: Good food, health care, exercise and communication play a critical role in day-to-day work. “It’s

about making sure people act sensibly – for themselves and for the company. Here in Schöneck, people live and work in an ideal environment for sport and leisure. That has a positive impact on the atmosphere in the company”, says Gläss.

“Active Balance” is the name of the new corporate programme. It incorporates an in-house fitness studio with a fitness trainer and a wide range of athletic activities, all free of charge. A new climbing wall adorns the facade of the GK campus. The extensive woodlands and mountains around Schöneck offer ideal opportunities for hiking, cycling and running in summer, with a ski slope and cross-country ski trails right outside the door in winter. Of course employees can use the ski lifts for free.

#### OPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD

**The world is changing**, and the team at GK Software is keeping pace with this global development. Its employees come from all over the world. Although that is not anything exceptional these days, according to Gläss. What is more important is that



everyone contributes to the company's success. "The world is increasingly pervading work processes, and that is perceived as something completely natural. The secret of our success is not that we employ people from all over the world, but that we attract smart, dedicated people who share our philosophy and are open-minded."

Diversity is also important at GK Software, but it is more a result of doing a lot of things right and making the company attractive to people from all over the world. "Doing something right" in this case means that when management makes a decision, it is implemented fully. Gläss does not want to copy trends or follow fashions; he wants to identify the right way to go and then do it. For many companies, AI and VR may still be buzzwords from faraway Silicon Valley, but here in Schöneck, they already are part of day-to-day operations. GK Software invests in this technology because it is convinced that AI and VR will be an integral part of all IT structures in future. High up in the Innovation Center and especially in the student lab on the top floor of the building, specialists, researchers and students are working on new ideas for customers.

GK Software has an important message for its customers: "We aspire to design IT systems better than other providers. We want to lead, not imitate." The company fulfils this goal by thinking far ahead, and deriving something workable from its ideas. Companies in Silicon Valley may have big budgets, but there is no automatic link between money and good ideas. "We have the same opportunities as companies there. Good ideas come from good people. We offer an attractive platform that helps good people to develop intellectually."

Globalisation eliminates the differences between geographic locations, between the USA and Europe, between cities and rural areas. In the IT industry, success depends above all on a corporate culture that is geared to success and the ability of this culture to find and retain the right people. Where this takes place is no longer important; broadband Internet is available everywhere. A company's success is entirely unrelated to the size of the city in which it is based. Success has much to do with how you exploit the opportunities you find there. For GK Software, this is mainly a matter of awareness and the right attitude: "Copying others is always wrong. You need to have the confidence to take the lead."