Scytl
Innovating Democracy

Vote
of Confidence

Scytl, the global leader in electronic voting, is modernising elections and bringing democracy into the digital age.

Images by Andrea Bielsa

This is the electronic age; everything is going digital. Online interaction in banking, travel, shopping, and education is now commonplace. Elections, however, are still lagging in the adoption of technology to bring democracy to the digital age. Scytl, based in Barcelona, is the leader in secure online voting and election modernisation. CEO Pere Valles is confident that every country in the world will slowly but surely move to electronic voting and more efficient election-management technology at some point in the near future.

As Pere explains, the company originated from a research group at a Spanish university, and now has more than 25 offices all around the world. "We started in 2001, as a spin-off of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, with only 10 people with a very strong scientific and academic background. When we saw what happened in the 2000 US elections in Florida between Bush and Gore, we agreed it was the right time to introduce secure technology into the election processes, not only in the US, but globally.

"Since 2001, we've grown fairly consistently at an average of 60 per cent per year. Of our 25 offices,

seven of these are R&D centres where we focus on software development and election-specific R&D. In addition, our commercial offices support our customers and partners across five continents."

Pere has a long history in the technology industry. He worked for a number of large tech companies in the US and is well placed to lead Scytl in the industry. "I've been working in the technology industry for over 20 years—the last 10 years at Scytl. Prior to that, I was in the US in various financial positions in the technology and telecommunications markets.

"I worked first for KPMG in mergers and acquisitions for telecom and technology in Los Angeles and Miami. Then, in 2000, I went to work as the CFO for one of my clients, a company called GlobalNet in Chicago, a NASDAQ publicly traded telecommunications company in the US. I was there for four years until we sold the company. I then decided it was time to come back to Barcelona, where I was born and raised, and I joined Scytl as the CEO."

Despite the company's success, its high growth also presents unique challenges that Pere and Scytl have had to face. "Companies with high growth present unique challenges,"

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Pere explains. "A yearly consistent growth means that the organisation has a different size every year. Putting in place the right structure and the right people in each position to cope with this growth and the increase in scale are some of the main challenges.

"In parallel to our organic growth, we've also grown through acquisitions—six in the past four years. These were companies in the US, Europe, Canada, and Brazil. This adds an additional layer of complexity: integrating six different companies in different countries. By coping with organic and inorganic growth, and by implementing the right structure and contracting the right people, we have been able to navigate through what could have been chaos."

Another challenge is convincing governments and citizens that online voting is secure and not a risk to the democratic process. Given the high sensitivity of elections as a whole and concerns about privacy and security, many remain sceptical of online voting. Cognisant of the security, privacy and transparency concerns, Scytl's investment in R&D in the most advanced security framework is of paramount importance. Due to the sensitivity of elections, security is not only critical, but comes with a ›

series of extra challenges unique to the elections industry. The specialised and advanced security technology that Scytl provides is what sets it apart from other election technology companies.

"Scytl's origins stem from laser focus on the security aspects of electronic voting since 1994. We were true pioneers in the research of election cryptography and security. We've been able to build on this research to create solutions that provide unprecedented security levels in terms of the security and privacy of both voters and votes, and transparency and verifiability of election processes. The combination of security, privacy, transparency, and auditability is what makes Scytl the leader in the online voting space. There are currently 21 countries that are using online voting in their public-sector elections, and of these, 19 are doing this with our technology mainly because of our unique and patented security technology."

In addition to secure and innovative technology and global presence, key to Scytl's success is its unique relationship with strategic global partners. "Relying on trusted partners that are helping take election modernisation to the next level is key. Our partnerships with organisations such as I.R.I.S. (a Canon company) and Microsoft are helping raise the bar in the delivery of election projects across the globe."

In regard to the strategic relationship with I.R.I.S., together both companies provide a holistic solution for more secure, efficient and transparent electoral processes with special focus on online election results transmission and publication, with Scytl focusing on election process expertise, security, privacy, and verifiability technology, and I.R.I.S. delivering capture technology for the electoral process automation and optimisation. "Benefits realised by the election market and citizens

around the globe through our joint partnership are reliable results being published in hours versus days as well as ensuring a transparent process by moving a paper process to a software and traceable process," says Günter Hensges, Chief Operating Officer at I.R.I.S.

Pere is extremely proud of Scytl's ongoing successes and believes the future will be even brighter. The company currently provides eDemocracy technology to more than 42 countries, and is planning for an IPO in the next three years. "Thanks to our technology and our dominant position in the emerging market of election modernisation, we have the right ingredients for a very successful IPO.

"We've been able to expand the company internationally. We are proud to be the company that is helping transform the elections industry by introducing innovative technology into a space in need of evolution." ●