

Small Firms Get Help to Go Online

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St. Petersburg-based hosting company Infobox on Tuesday launched a new project called Nastart.ru that uses Microsoft technology and allows small and medium-sized businesses to get online exposure and cut costs by creating a free web site.

The new project will help these companies save "thousands of dollars," said Sergei Malgin, Microsoft's head of development for the northwest region.

As of 2009 only 20 percent out of about 3 million to 4 million Russian small and medium-sized enterprises had their own web sites, according to the State Statistics Service.

The others did not have them for two reasons: lack of resources and lack of knowledge of how to start a web site, Infobox general director Alexei Bakhtiarov said.

The new service allows the first 100,000 companies to join for free. Then, by entering data (text and pictures) into one of the hundreds of available templates, they will be able to get a domain name and launch a corporate web site.

Infobox offers several payment plans, one of which is a free option. Paid plans offer a number of value-added services such as e-mail, corporate portals and consultations.

Bakhtiarov expects the project to pay off in three to four years.

He did not specify the amount of investments made, but said the company will be rolling out a mostly offline advertising campaign in August and September to target small and medium-sized enterprises by posting ads at places where companies get their registration.

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