

Even a One-Man Show Is Welcome at Skolkovo

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A man standing in front of a banner for the Skolkovo innovation center, the government's showcase effort to generate technology products and reduce the nation's dependence on natural resources. **Sergei Porter**

Dmitry Asonov, founder and sole employee of startup software company Proofreading Lab, is clear about what his newly gained residency at the Skolkovo innovation center gives him.

“The primary reason I applied for Skolkovo residency is money,” Asonov said. Skolkovo not only offers a grant of \$50,000 for small businesses, but more importantly will match any investments the businesses can attract by a factor of up to three. This co-finance strategy adds immediate value to the startup and is a powerful incentive to outside investors.

Asonov's company — whose product he claims is the most sophisticated proofreading software available, capable of picking up textual errors far more intelligently than a spell checker — was the 89th firm to gain resident status in the government's showcase effort to

spawn innovation and wean the economy off its dependence on natural resources.

To gain resident status, a company must be a Russian legal entity. It is not even necessary to have the company registered at the time of application.

“I applied as a private person. This meant writing a 10-page summary of the project, including development lines and commercial plans.” The application was then submitted through Skolkovo’s web site.

Applications are evaluated by a randomly selected group of 10 out of the approximately 100 Russian and international businesspeople and researchers on the Skolkovo evaluation committee. If more than half the evaluators give a positive review, it means acceptance as a Skolkovo resident.

Asonov registered the company, and Proofreading Labs was accepted as a Skolkovo resident within three months.

Skolkovo residents also receive immediate tax breaks — they pay no profit tax and a significantly lower salary tax than nonresidents.

Asonov’s second major reason for applying for Skolkovo residency was Skolkovo’s huge bank of government contacts, which he refers to as “GR” or “government relations.” He now has channels to reach people responsible for decisions about major government web sites, which are primary targets for Proofreading Lab’s services.

Despite the absence of a physical site — the innovation city will only see its first occupants in 2015 — Asonov is excited about the social network and pool of contacts he gains with his new status.

Asked what he would have done without his Skolkovo residency, Asonov replied that it would not have been a catastrophe, but the residency makes things much easier for him.

Asonov also sees an advantage in the level of transparency Skolkovo demands. All moneys awarded through Skolkovo’s co-financing are displayed in detail on their web site. Residents who receive co-financing are regularly reviewed by the Skolkovo investment committee.

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