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## ***Focus on Russian businesswomen: Natalya Kasperskaya, InfoWatch***

By: Modern Russia and Natalya Kasperskaya, InfoWatch on March 07, 2012

*As part of the “Focus on Russian businesswomen” series to mark International Women’s Day on March 8, Modern Russia spoke with **Natalya Kasperskaya**, the co-founder of computer security firm Kaspersky Lab and current CEO of InfoWatch. She discusses her experiences as a leading female executive and entrepreneur in Russia and how the business environment has changed in recent years. Kaspersky Lab was featured as a “Russian Company to Watch” on Modern Russia last year.*

**You were the first CEO of Kaspersky Lab from 1997-2007. In terms of specific effects on the company during that time, how would you say the market and business environment changed in those ten years, especially given the explosion of Internet usage around the world?**



Natalya Kasperskaya, co-founder of Kaspersky Lab and current CEO of InfoWatch

How do I answer this question? Everything has changed. In 1997, it was easy to find a professional with the necessary qualifications for relatively low pay. Now, it is unrealistic, especially in the IT sector. It has become fashionable to hire Russian programmers, which has led to foreign companies creating development centers in Russia and regularly inviting senior university students to undertake internships abroad. There is a catastrophic lack of human resources. Genuine professionals are hard to find and their services are very expensive.

But there are positive changes too. Compared with the 1990s, the government’s attitude to hi-tech business has changed. Among the measures to support Russian [software] developers has been the reduction of social tax to 14 percent. For the business sector, where salaries make up 75 percent of all costs, it’s a breath of fresh air.

In terms of technologies, we have seen a great leap in the past 10 years. For example, before 2005, the market for data loss prevention (DLP) simply did not exist: there weren’t the huge volumes of data that currently circulate in corporate networks. Today that market exists, and there are few competing DLP-solutions. The talk is not about whether it is necessary to protect information but rather how to do it correctly and most effectively.

**You have been in charge of two companies from the ground up in Kaspersky Lab and now InfoWatch. What is your take on the business environment for start-ups and other entrepreneurial corporations in Russia at present? What are some of the challenges you faced when getting those businesses going when first starting out?**

I should tell you right away that we had no serious problems in the 1990s. Luckily, we avoided all the horrors which managers of companies in other sectors faced. The IT business was too intellectual to interest those with criminal ties. I would say that both then and now, I do not recall any especially favorable conditions for business development.

I believe such conditions exist only in the US, in the sense that there is a particular business environment with investors present at all stages of development – from business angels to large investor companies. This is only now developing in Russia. We have financing available for start-ups, we have large companies such as Russian Venture Company, but there is definitely a lack of support “mid-way” when a business has outgrown the idea stage but is not yet standing on its own feet. It is difficult to attract funds for such business because investors struggle to evaluate its prospects and future returns.

But just ten years ago this was missing! Incubators such as Skolkovo could only be dreamed of then. Now there are technoparks with low rent, investors and finally, government support. We have recently proposed that the government apply the privileges present at Skolkovo to all Russian technoparks. I think the idea will be supported. It’s logical: for example, there is a whole range of interesting projects in the Novosibirsk technopark. So why would hi-tech companies get privileges in Moscow but not in Novosibirsk?

**Do you feel that working as a leading female executive in Russia has been an asset or a hindrance at times during your work? Which specific challenges do women face on the Russian labor market, especially when they want to work in business? How could their situation be improved? And what advice would you give Russian women who are striving for a successful professional life?**

Last time I was looking for a job was in 1993, so I do not really know how difficult the Russian labor market is for women. But I am absolutely convinced that it is not necessary to create any special conditions for women. Business is a competitive environment, and any added limitations or quotas bring with them additional difficulties. Let’s assume that I need to hire an expert. I find one, but he happens to be male (it just so happens that most programmers and system architects are men.) If there are “female” quotas, what should I do with this expert? Reject him or ask him to change gender?

Neither do I think that the situation for businesswomen in Russia should be improved. In our small and medium businesses 43 percent of senior managers are women. That’s a remarkable figure. It’s high time to think how to bring women back into families, and not how to facilitate their positions in business. We do not have a problem of female managers lacking fulfillment, but rather, we have a problem of mothers lacking fulfillment. It is here that we need state support because business cannot ensure childcare for working mothers. It is only very big companies such as Kaspersky Lab that can afford such care and services. Women are forced to choose between career and family, which should not be the case. The country does not need this.

**With Russia now Europe’s largest Internet community, where do you see future prospects for InfoWatch in such a competitive sector? Is there plenty of room for growth in Russia alone, or are there plans to push InfoWatch into new developing markets?**

We are not only planning but already actively promoting InfoWatch solutions outside Russia. The Russian market of Data Loss Prevention solutions is currently very narrow. We have secured leading positions in it but every new percent of the market share costs us too much. It is much easier to enter global markets. We currently work in Europe, the Middle East, India and see customers' interest to our technologies everywhere. We have very interesting deals. I think, by the end of the year we will be able to talk about substantial increase of clients outside Russia.

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*Ms. Kasperskaya holds a degree in applied mathematics from the Moscow Institute of Electronic Engineering and is the co-founder of Kaspersky Lab, where she was CEO from 1997-2007. She was elected to the post of Chairman of the Board of Directors at Kaspersky Lab in 2007, and since October of that year she has also been the CEO of InfoWatch, an innovative company developing unique technologies to protect corporate information from internal threats.*

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