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Many Small Valleys

"We have the unique opportunity in Europe to create our own successful tech industry." Gianpiero Lotito believes in Europe's prospects against Google and Co.

by Ulrich Schäfer

Are Europeans simply too old to take on the Internet to be successful? Are the major companies of the digital age therefore founded in Silicon Valley because the Americans are younger on average - and hence more innovative? A few days ago, at the Italian-German Economic Forum in Bolzano, this issue was presented to Gianpiero Lotito, 55, the head of the Italian search engine company Facility Live. And he had to smile. Because he, a man from Pavia now in his mid-fifties, is the best evidence that there is no need to be young in order to engage in battle against the US Goliath as Europe's David. Lotito, with his white beard, white mane, and small glasses, is two decades older than Larry Page and Sergey Brin, the founders of Google. He was no longer a student when he created Facility Live, which, as he says, provides innovative search software for businesses that does not simply list the received hits, but organises them in a structured and simplified manner. Lotito is glad to tell us the story of how he had his software patented first in the United States (and then in another 42 countries). He used a comparison to describe his application with the US American patent authority: when you do a search on Leonardo da Vinci, what does Google return as a long list? And what does Facility Live show in a variety of different windows when you run the same search? "We took three screenshots and then explained in 20 pages why we are better. The US patent authority saw for itself," says Lotito holding up the patent certificate as evidence of this. As the man from Pavia admits, he and his colleagues are "a little crazy." Nonetheless, as this former musician, book author and technology consultant says, he has earned more money than any other tech start-up in Italy. Facility Live has also been admitted to a support program for the London Stock Exchange, and he has already spoken three times before at the European Parliament. "Europe above all" is his big issue, the one he believes in - very strongly. "We have the unique opportunity in Europe to create our own successful tech industry. There is no need for us to go to Silicon Valley. We can do it here," says Lotito. And this process has already been set in motion in the start-up industry, as well as in politics. Since this movement is picking up speed, on Tuesday Lotito and two dozen other companies launched the

European Tech Alliance, an association of fast-growing start-ups from all over Europe. These include Spotify, the music streaming service from Sweden, Blablacar, the car-sharing service from France, and Rovio from Finland, the company that invented the computer game Angry Birds. "European in origin, Global in mindset " is the motto of the association that wants to help the EU Commission and the EU Parliament to create a Digital Single Market. As Lotito says, it will be important in the next 12 to 18 months to take the right steps towards adopting uniform standards in Europe with regard to data protection and the promotion of modern technologies, and to build an even faster broadband network. Americans created the basic technologies of the Internet; Europeans should now build on these with its own technologies. Europe won't be able to form a Silicon Valley, "But we can create many small valleys because the digital single market will create opportunities for Europe's tech companies that seemed unthinkable only a few years ago," concludes Lotito.