

Hewlett-Packard to Open St. Pete Lab

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American IT giant Hewlett-Packard announced plans to open a research center in St. Petersburg on Monday. Local experts considered the move positive, both for HP and Russian software developers.

HP's decision to open a lab in St. Petersburg is a result of a strategy "establishing research centers in growing economies," HP said in a statement. The task of the new HP Labs Russia is to develop advanced data mining technologies.

"Russia's high growth and pool of talent make it an exciting location to expand HP's global research capabilities," Shane Robison, HP executive vice president and chief strategy and technology officer, said in the statement distributed on the web Monday.

HP Labs Russia will be the third facility that the company has opened in the past five years. HP Labs China began operations in Beijing in 2005 and HP Labs India opened in Bangalore in 2002. HP also has facilities in Bristol, (U.K.), Haifa (Israel) and Tokyo (Japan). The company's headquarters is in Palo Alto, California.

The lab in St. Petersburg will work on new methods for extracting, analyzing and organizing information. Initially, it will share HP's existing premises in St. Petersburg.

"The opening of HP Labs Russia is a recognition of the country's success in science and technology research," HP quoted Academician Evgeny Velikhov, president of Kurchatov Institute, as saying.

"HP's involvement with Russian R&D organizations will not only benefit the economy, but our overall scientific and technological development as well," Velikhov said.

In the last year HP has launched a number of projects in Russia, including the establishment of the first external HP next-generation data center at the Kurchatov Institute to conduct research into future utility computing systems.

The new lab will conduct joint research on information management technology with research centers in Palo Alto, Bristol and Beijing and collaborate with computer scientists and engineers in HP business units around the world. Joint research projects are expected to be established with Russian universities and research institutes.

At the moment HP is seeking a director and staff for the lab comprising "a couple of dozen" scientists. The total number of scientists in HP Labs is 650. A local expert said HP would benefit by focusing on high-level research.

"I think the St. Petersburg labor market is very attractive for IT companies in terms of available high-end specialists — software engineers and software architects. Advanced specialists were often left without good job opportunities in the city," said Mikhail Zavileiskiy, Chief Operating Officer of DataArt in St. Petersburg.

It takes three to seven years to become a qualified software architect, he said, and St. Petersburg, along with Moscow, is the place to find such specialists.

"Middle-range software specialists, on the contrary, are in deficit. To hire a lot of middle specialists here is not an easy task. Neither Intel nor Sun have managed to do this," Zavileiskiy said.

"Russia's image benefits from the opening of such high-end research centers," said Nikolai Puntikov, general director of StarSoft Labs.

"When we promote our products and services abroad we always list Intel, Motorola and other giants that already have local research labs. It helps us to position Russia not as a country of cheap labor but as a country of qualified specialists," Puntikov said. Unlike ambitious Google, HP does not intend to hire thousands of programmers and Puntikov said that another research center in the city "would not harm the local labor market."