From Inventing the Enterprise Software Sector to Helping the World Run Better

THE EARLY YEARS
On April 1, 1972, five former IBM employees – Dietmar Hopp, Hasso Plattner, Claus Wellenreuther, Klaus Tschira, and Hans-Werner Hector – started the company *SystemAnalyse Programmentwicklung* (System Analysis and Program Development). Their idea was to create standard enterprise software that integrated all business processes and enabled data processing in real time.

SAP’s founders and employees worked closely with customers – often sitting side-by-side with employees in customers’ offices to learn their business needs and processes. By 1975, they had built applications for financial accounting (RF), invoice verification, and inventory management (RM). Some of their early customers were the nylon factory belonging to ICI in Östringen, Germany, Knoll, Burda, Linde, and Schott. The blend of real-time data processing, standardization, and integration were the basis for SAP’s transformation from a small German company into a global leader in business software. In 1979, the company started developing R/2, the second generation of its software. In 1980, SAP’s roughly 80 employees moved into their first own office building in Walldorf, Germany.

FROM R/3 TO GLOBAL PLAYER
Even while R/2 was enjoying huge sales success and one year before SAP went public with an IPO in 1988 – the company’s managers were looking ahead to its third generation of software. The SAP R/3 success story began in 1992, with the client-server software smoothing the path to a globalized economy, turning SAP into a global player with subsidiaries and development centers across the world.

In 1999, SAP responded to the Internet and new economy by launching its mysap.com strategy. Ten years later, the company branched out into three markets of the future: mobile technology, database technology, and cloud. To rapidly become a key player in these new domains, SAP acquired some of its competitors, including Business Objects, Sybase, Ariba, SuccessFactors, and Concur.

INTO THE CLOUD WITH SAP HANA
In 2011, the first customers started using the in-memory database SAP HANA. Data analyses that used to take days or even weeks were now completed in seconds. Four years later, SAP launched SAP S/4HANA, its latest generation of business software, running entirely on SAP HANA. In 2019, SAP acquired U.S. company Qualtrics, a leader in experience management software, placing SAP at the leading edge of this growing segment.

Today, SAP builds solutions for the Internet of Things and machine learning, for complex analyses and blockchain. SAP HANA is now available on the three largest public cloud platforms. The company’s integrated applications connect all parts of a business into an intelligent suite on a digital platform. SAP has more than 215 million cloud users currently, more than 100 solutions covering all business functions, and the largest cloud portfolio of any provider. SAP operates 69 data centers at 35 locations in 15 countries.
SAP IN NUMBERS

SAP, headquartered in Walldorf in the south of Germany, and listed in Frankfurt and New York, is a market leader in business software, with more than 440,000 customers in more than 180 countries, and 100,330 employees worldwide (as of December 31, 2019). About 80% of its customers are small and midsize companies. Total revenue in 2019 was €27.63 billion, including €7 billion from its cloud business (which is expected to triple by 2023). SAP works with about 21,100 partners and builds software solutions for 25 industries. In 2019, it invested more than €4.3 billion in research and development, including at 20 SAP Labs development centers worldwide. SAP’s business is helping customers optimize their business processes. SAP’s purpose is to help the world run better and improve people’s lives. Today, 77% of all business transactions worldwide touch an SAP system. For example, SAP’s customers produce 78% of the world’s food products and 82% of the world’s medical devices.