



Interview

OUR SUCCESS IS PRIMARILY DRIVEN BY A DEDICATED TEAM WITH A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC FOCUS

RĂZVAN ENE, General Manager, Crayon Romania

1. We have witnessed in 2023 several fluctuations in the macroeconomic environment, inflation and recessionary concerns, and higher interest rates. How did you navigate between such factors, and what are your company's results?

The year 2023 marks our third anniversary on the Romanian market, following the decision of Crayon Group in 2019 to expand its business in Central and Eastern Europe. With the support of a financially strong organization and by building a solid team in Romania, we could navigate through the pandemic and post-pandemic time with agility without any major problems.

Offering services that are in high-demand locally accelerated our growth, while the excellent results were driven by our position as a trusted advisor for the customers we support. Thus, we consistently achieved double-digit growth year-over-year. As of today, we have surpassed our overall result from last year, and we forecast at least

20% growth by the end of this year.

We have created a strategy that gives us great flexibility and allows us to adapt to changes that may occur in the market. In addition, we have a team of highly experienced professionals who know how to respond when the economic context becomes complicated.

2. How do you perceive the IT demand for 2023 in the Romanian and global markets? Is IT still the main engine for improving productivity and cost efficiency? What about the pace of IT demand?

We made a strategic investment in the local market, aligned with the global IT trends. We believe that our strengths lie in the areas of enhancing productivity, using the latest technologies, and the power of the public cloud, combined with our 20+ years of experience and expertise in cost optimization.

Romania has much potential to catch up in the IT sector, public services digitalization, and modernization, cloud adoption, and

improved cybersecurity. Our sister companies in the CEE region help us gain a broader perspective of the progress in Poland and the Baltic countries where IT is still the main development driver.

Geopolitical factors influence the implementation of modern tools to combat cyber threats, and some companies, including the public sector, embarked on a journey to accelerate their digital transformation, application modernization, and the overall concept of using IT in their daily operations.

3. How do you approach organizations looking to upgrade their technology infrastructure and leverage the power of software they use?

We work with our clients to understand their specific needs and goals. Technology is not a one-size-fits-all solution because different companies have distinct levels of digital maturity.

We start by assessing the current state of technology in a company, identifying the gaps and the readiness for digital transformation. We consider various aspects of technology when designing a customized solution for each client. Our aim is to build a solid foundation for sustainable growth with clear steps and milestones to achieve the desired outcomes.

4. In the European context, when the so-called PNRR seems to be the main engine for the national economies to go digital, how do you feel the appetite of each sector (public sector/private sector) in relation to your company to use such financial resources? What are the trends, both in the public and private sectors?

We believe that European funding presents a significant opportunity, not only for Romania but also for all Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. Given that beneficiaries are also responsible for a portion of co-financing, there should be strong commitment towards strategic transformational projects.

Crayon is actively engaged in this area, dedicating resources to both advising on how to access these financing streams and participating in tenders for the digitalization of public services.

Obviously, there are distinct differences

between public institutions and the private sector. In the public sector, there seems to be a certain reluctance towards adopting public cloud solutions, although this is not universal.

Interestingly, younger public sector entities display a greater interest towards newer technologies. A handful of enthusiastic people within these organizations can significantly influence the success of a digital transformation project, and we take pride in collaborating with such dedicated people.

Evidence of our successful partnerships shows up in multiple projects across various sectors – including utilities, higher education, and public authorities and agencies – where organizations harness the power of public cloud, and innovative technologies to equip their workers with the best available tools.

Since the onset of the pandemic in 2020, the private sector has become increasingly dynamic, and many business owners have recognized technology as a catalyst for their businesses growth. This realization has significantly propelled Crayon Romania's progress over the past three years.

We have numerous instances where we have assisted companies across various industries in swiftly adopting innovative technologies, and rapidly transforming their internal collaboration, while streamlining operations, and mitigating risks.

At this moment, we witness a transition towards advanced public cloud workloads, with process automation, and security at the forefront of our project pipeline. Moreover, our primary focus is on cost optimization for our clients. We achieve this by blending the best industry practices with modern platforms to enhance the end-results.

5. How can you help companies/clients to accelerate their digital transformation? What about the future of hybrid work in a way that balances business needs with employees' expectations? Do your customers have such requests?

Crayon exemplifies the “follow the leader” approach as one of the most digitally advanced companies currently active in the market. We leverage our own digital transformation as a powerful example of how such a shift can foster a company's growth.

Our hybrid work model, which I believe is



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among the most effective globally, aids us in assisting our clients on their digital transformation journeys. We not only facilitate the seamless integration of modern technologies for our clients but also expedite their adoption process.

Crayon is equipped with both the expertise and platforms necessary to support rapid adoption, particularly for end users who are most affected by the new types of work. This comprehensive approach underscores our commitment to leading by example in the digital age.

6. In your view, what is the role of AI as a tool in the future business of companies and how can you help clients to implement AI instruments? How would you describe the interest in the Romanian market for AI tools and what drives such interest?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been a significant focus at Crayon for over ten years. An interesting fact that many people in Romania may not know is that Crayon has more than 100 data scientists who serve customers worldwide. Microsoft acknowledged this initiative in 2019 when they recognized Crayon as the Partner of the Year for AI and Machine Learning (ML), which was a big honor. This recognition underscores the importance of AI to Crayon and its influence on our decision-making processes.

While we are currently developing our local AI capabilities, we are not hesitating to leverage our global resources, which have extensive experience in various application areas.

However, it is important to note that when it comes to local opportunities, the market's ability to absorb and adopt this new trend in AI and ML is a significant factor. We believe there is considerable ground to cover around digital transformation, and a new approach to Artificial Intelligence can be fully realized only after certain stages are completed.

There are a few early adopters in the market, typically those with a strong interest in recent technologies and with available budgets. However, some solutions may still be too costly for most prospects, and there is not a straightforward method to demonstrate the

Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) and Return on Investment (ROI) for such projects.

Crayon Romania is at the forefront of AI promotion, with a wealth of information available on our website. Our year-round digital campaigns provide interested individuals with relevant insights, success stories, and practical applications of AI. Additionally, we host regular webinars and customer events focused on technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning.

In our view, the key drivers for AI adoption should be:

- Optimizing operations
- Transforming products
- Empowering employees
- Engaging customers

These areas offer significant potential for leveraging AI technology.

7. Crayon Romania experienced a remarkable growth of 73% in 2022 compared to the previous year, and in the first half of 2023, you have achieved a 15% growth year-on-year. What factors contributed to this impressive evolution, and how do you plan to sustain this growth in the coming years?

Our competitive advantages are no longer a secret. Firstly, we have one of the most skilled teams in the market, with vast experience and expertise in the software business. Our success is primarily driven by dedicated people with a customer-centric focus. Our employees at Crayon can effectively demonstrate how technology can streamline processes, enhance collaboration, and lay the groundwork for informed decisions.

Another key factor to our success is our strategic focus on collaborating with a select group of software vendors. Our deep knowledge of Microsoft, Veeam, IBM, VMware, Oracle, and Adobe has enabled us to deliver successful projects across all our customer engagements. Moreover, our operational efficiency at Crayon is supported by innovative platforms that provide valuable insights into our business, and help us anticipate future trends.

Last year, we launched a new line of business for software distribution. This move not only boosted our results but also laid the

foundation for further collaboration with the most active players in the local IT market.

Our growth so far has been purely organic, and we recognize that maintaining this pace can be challenging. Our strategy for the coming years is to consolidate our customer and partner base and launch unique managed services to better serve our clients.

8. You have declared that approximately 40% of Crayon Romania’s business comes from interactions with local players, including the public sector. Can you elaborate on the strategies that have proven successful in catering to both global companies and those with 100% Romanian capital?

Our industry-agnostic approach has significantly contributed to earning the trust of diverse customers. We have leveraged our software business expertise, particularly as a licensing advisor for medium to large organizations, and our cost optimization methodology.

The robust expertise and valuable resources we have in digital transformation enabled us to swiftly engage in pertinent and strategic discussions with various stakeholders, from privately-owned companies.

9. In the rapidly changing IT landscape, partnerships and collaborations are crucial. Can you share some insights into key partnerships that have been instrumental in Crayon Romania’s success and how these alliances contribute to the company’s growth strategy?

As previously stated, our expertise and experience are centered around a selected group of software vendors. We pride ourselves on our top-tier partnerships, which are backed by the highest level of certification and a proven record of accomplishment.

Our exceptional collaboration with Microsoft, for instance, has led us to be recognized as the Partner of the Year within just two years in the local market. Many of our successful projects are built on Microsoft technology, supplemented with solutions from Veeam, Adobe, and VMware.

We advocate a cloud-first strategy for our clients, recognizing Microsoft as a pioneer in tools that enhance employee productivity.

Furthermore, the security and availability solutions provided by Veeam and VMware serve as valuable enhancements to Microsoft’s offerings.

One of our key advantages in the local collaborations with major market players is our focus on software rather than hardware. This makes us a trusted partner for top systems integrators when it comes to strategic market projects.

10. What is the vision for Crayon Romania in the next 3-5 years, and how do you anticipate the company evolving in response to market trends and technological advancements?

Our strategy is dynamic, undergoing a thorough analysis every three years to determine our objectives for the upcoming period and the necessary steps to achieve them. It is unequivocal that our people are the cornerstone of our business, and all efforts and investments move towards enhancing our expertise and acquiring new competencies.

As a customer-centric organization, we aim to leverage our existing customer base by collaborating with them to generate impactful projects within their companies. Another significant aspect is the expansion of our partner portfolio for our indirect business, which I anticipate will see substantial growth in the coming years. It is a privilege for us to work with numerous agile and innovative companies, that offer a wide array of cloud-based solutions, and are eager to adopt the latest technologies.

11. What message do you have for current and potential clients, partners, and the broader business community regarding the company’s commitment to innovation, service excellence, and contributing to the digital transformation landscape in Romania?

We have a proven track record of executing successful and swift digital transformation projects in the local market. Numerous customers can attest to the positive impact our engagements have had. Particularly, how their interactions with Crayon have reshaped their perspective on newly adopted technologies.

We are confident that both existing and



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potential customers will find Crayon a trusted advisor for three key areas: cost optimization, digital transformation for frontline workers, and cybersecurity.

Our goal is to introduce innovative technological solutions and a fresh approach in Romania, drawing from the best practices in other regions where Crayon operates.

We aim to rapidly import and localize services that can enhance the digital

capabilities of our customers and partners, thereby creating a competitive advantage. We believe that evolution happens only through a collective effort.

Crayon is dedicated to investing in its team, leading the change in technological innovation, and creating novel solutions and platforms. This commitment ensures our continued relevance in the local market.

