

Russell Reynolds Associates' *Conversations on Convergence* features the thoughts and ideas of top decision makers in the world of convergence. We are helping to cut through the hype around this topic by speaking directly with those who are defining the future of this industry. Read them all on our Web site at [www.russellreynolds.com](http://www.russellreynolds.com).



## Conversations on Convergence: No. 7, 2008



Patrick Adiba, Executive Vice President, Rest of World—Olympic Games—Global Sales, Atos-Origin

Patrick Adiba provides strategic direction and executive management to Atos-Origin as the member of the Executive Committee in charge of the Olympic Games and Major Events. Before joining Atos-Origin, he held management positions at SchlumbergerSema, most recently as Vice President Human Resources, and prior to that as Vice President and General Manager for SchlumbergerSema in Latin America.

**Q. You and your team have a one-of-a-kind mission. What does this mission involve?**

**A.** Atos-Origin has been an official partner of the International Olympic Committee since 2001. Our job is to supply all the technology needed to run the Olympic Games — we are in charge of the design, integration and deployment of all of the systems that make the Olympic Games possible: the hardware, the software, the telecoms systems, the network, everything. We supported the Games in Salt Lake City, Athens, Turin, and Beijing; and we will do Vancouver and London as well.

We have three main groups of “users”: The first group is what is called the “Olympic family,” and that is the athletes, coaches, journalists, security teams, and other employees on site. The second group is the on-site spectators and visitors. The third group is all the spectators in their homes around the world.

We design and deploy a Games Management System which supports the accommodation, transport, accreditation, staffing and all the other things that allow the “city” of the Olympics to function; and we

**“We’re in charge of the design, integration and deployment of all of the systems that make the Olympic Games possible”**

design and deploy an Information Diffusion System, which manages all the timing and scoring, sends results to scoreboards and to the press and enables the commentator information system. Of course, all of that is in absolute real-time.

It’s quicker to say what we *don’t* do: We are not responsible for the anti-doping testing, we don’t manage the system for selling tickets and we don’t do the video production, all of which are the domain of specialists. But all the other information technology systems are the work of some 4,500 staff managed by Atos-Origin.

I would argue that it is one of the most complex technology projects because we cannot delay the start date for any reason, and we cannot tolerate any errors during the 17 days of the Games. Other projects can often delay their start date if things aren’t quite ready—but we cannot. It’s a real constraint. For example, some of the venues for the Athens Games weren’t finished on time so we couldn’t start work on installing everything until much later than we anticipated. But we still had to finish everything on time.

**“We cannot delay the start date of the project for any reason, and cannot tolerate any errors for the 17 days of the Games.”**



## Q. How do you do it?

A. Risk management is the key to our work at the Olympic Games. We freeze everything one year before the start of the Games. Any requests for changes after that require a full review which results in an impact statement. We have to decide whether we can honor the request without putting the operation at risk. And we do this for every request, even if it comes from the President of the IOC or the Head of State of the host country. We have

“It’s entirely about risk management. A small change might have a cascade effect on many other systems and processes”

to, or we can’t manage the risks properly. For example, two days after the start of the Winter Games in Turin, we were asked to change the way the qualifying system worked for one of the events. We prepared an impact statement, and we had to refuse the request. The change seemed small but once we studied it, we saw how it would create a cascade of changes on many other systems and processes. It was just too risky; we had to refuse to do it.

Another example: We manage the systems that allowed the 340,000 people in the Olympic family in Beijing to be accredited, and believe me, we’re not just talking about a badge hanging around a person’s neck. In fact, the accreditation for the Beijing Games also served as an official visa for entering China, that’s how secure and complete the information gathered needs to be. The system behind that process had to be completely secure and functional.

For some systems, we used up to four levels of redundancy. We had an entire duplicate of the data center which was housed completely apart from the Games, on a different seismic plate in case there was an earthquake under one of them. Disaster recovery procedures were in place and tested regularly. It’s risk management.

## Q. What are the human capital implications?

A. We had 4,500 people helping us run the Beijing Games. About 85 percent of the staff were local. It’s a classic recruitment process: We write job descriptions and we hire people. About two years before the start, we go to universities in the host country to identify the best students. We hired 100 students in Beijing in this way.

Training is very important. Some people start three years before the event, and some people start three days before, but everyone who works for us is fully trained. We use both e-learning and what we call “tabletop” exercises which are simulations of real situations. There are then tests and if someone is not up to the job, they’re out. We expect everyone to respect our processes and do things the way we have agreed to do them. That, too, is part of our risk management.

Because the Chinese language and culture are so unique, we made sure our core management teams for the Beijing Olympics were Chinese nationals. We planned ahead—we sent 14 Chinese managers to Athens in 2004 so they could live through the Games in major roles at Atos-Origin. It seemed more logical to teach the Atos-Origin way of running the Olympics to Chinese managers, than to send experienced but non-Chinese managers to run the Games in Beijing.

“The entire core management team in Beijing had held important roles in Athens.”

## Q. How has convergence affected your project?

A. People “consume” the Olympics in a different way than they did before. It used to be that people would watch an event on TV, live if the time zones were aligned, and if they weren’t, then they’d be happy to read the results in the newspaper the next morning and watch it on TV after the fact. Now, people want to see the events live, wherever they are. They want to know immediately not only who won, but also who placed second and third, and how the results compare to other races and records.

“People want richer information, in real time, in a mobile world.”

The Atlanta Games in 1996 were the first “Internet Olympics” and of course in recent years, the Internet has become a real presence in the Games. The latest trend is mobile. There’s a real balance now between TV and “new” media. So for us, convergence means that we need to be capable of providing the same information on all media, because people want richer information, in real time, in a mobile world.

**Q. What challenges does convergence bring to your business?**

A. Security is a challenge, especially since 9/11 – we need to protect the Olympic Games from cyber-terrorism. Every day of the Beijing Games, we had a multitude of issues to deal with. Of course they’re not all real security problems, but we have to take a look at every one. We have to determine what’s a danger, what’s

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not. If we always assume the worst, then we would “close down” the system so much that it would have a negative impact on the user experience, which is definitely not what we want for the Olympic Games! Our challenge is to find the right balance between the user benefits of new converged technologies, and the safety and stability of the project. We have to draw a line somewhere. We would not deploy a new technology just because it’s nice to have, it must have a material impact on our customers and users. We need to weigh the benefits against the risks, and we’re always going to choose “safety and quality” over “innovation”.

**Q. What do you see on the horizon?**

A. Content is going to become richer. Today, content is just data in a one-way news feed, but as we move forward it will be much richer, more interactive, more animated. Instead of just receiving a news feed, users will be able to be more selective, probably even adapt and personalize the feed. I also expect we’ll see much more information prepared for “communities” of users, small groups with very specific centers of interest. Convergence for us means looking far, far ahead: We’re already asking ourselves what we might need to provide for the 2020 Olympic Games.

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## About Russell Reynolds Associates

**Leadership.** In today's ever-changing global business environment, success is driven by the talent, vision and leadership capabilities of senior executives.

Russell Reynolds Associates is a leading global executive search and assessment firm with more than 300 consultants based in 39 offices worldwide. Our consultants work closely with public and private organizations to identify, assess and recruit senior executives and board members to drive long-term growth and success. We value teamwork, serving our clients with a collaborative approach that spans our international network of sector and functional experts.

Our in-depth knowledge of major industries and our clients' specific business challenges, combined with our understanding of who and what makes an effective leader ensure that our clients secure the best leadership teams for the ongoing success of their businesses. For more information, please visit us at [www.russellreynolds.com](http://www.russellreynolds.com).

## Our Communications and Convergence Practice

The Russell Reynolds Associates' Communications and Convergence Practice sits at the intersection of dynamic digital content, which is reshaping the way we work and play, and wireless and broadband networks, which keep us connected seamlessly around the globe. We also have significant experience in helping our clients recruit in the managed services and outsourcing areas. The combination of our experience with service providers as well as infrastructure solution providers (who design, build, and deploy their platforms and networks) allows us to work at the forefront of technologies including IPTV, WiMAX, FTTx, IMS, Ethernet, 3G/4G and VoIP. Finally, our success with assisting media and content providers and aggregators to leverage these powerful new technologies positions us at the heart of the convergence movement as the key human capital solutions provider on a global basis.

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## Americas

### Atlanta

1180 Peachtree St., NE  
Suite 2250  
Atlanta, GA 30309-3521  
United States of America  
Tel: +1-404-577-3000

### Boston

One Federal Street  
25th Floor  
Boston, MA 02110-1007  
United States of America  
Tel: +1-617-523-1111

### Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires Plaza  
Manuela Sáenz 323  
Seventh Floor, Suites 14 and 15  
C1107CBP Buenos Aires  
Argentina  
Tel: +54-11-4118-8900

### Chicago

200 South Wacker Drive  
Suite 2900  
Chicago, IL 60606-5802  
United States of America  
Tel: +1-312-993-9696

### Dallas

8401 N. Central Expressway  
Suite 650  
Dallas, TX 75225-4404  
United States of America  
Tel: +1-214-220-2033

### Houston

600 Travis Street  
Suite 2200  
Houston, TX 77002-2901  
United States of America  
Tel: +1-713-754-5995

### Los Angeles

11100 Santa Monica Blvd.  
Suite 350  
Los Angeles, CA 90025-3384  
United States of America  
Tel: +1-310-775-8940

### Menlo Park

2500 Sand Hill Road  
Suite 105  
Menlo Park, CA 94025-7015  
United States of America  
Tel: +1-650-233-2400

### Mexico City

Torre Reforma  
Paseo de la Reforma  
115-1502  
Lomas de Chapultepec  
11000 México, D.F.  
México  
Tel: +52-55-5249-5130

### Minneapolis/St. Paul

225 South Sixth Street  
Suite 2550  
Minneapolis, MN 55402-3900  
United States of America  
Tel: +1-612-332-6966

### New York

200 Park Avenue  
Suite 2300  
New York, NY 10166-0002  
United States of America  
Tel: +1-212-351-2000

### San Francisco

101 California Street  
Suite 2900  
San Francisco, CA 94111-5829  
United States of America  
Tel: +1-415-352-3300

### São Paulo

Av. Nações Unidas, 8.501  
11º Andar  
05425-070 São Paulo  
Brazil  
Tel: +55-11-3566-2400

### Stamford

301 Tresser Boulevard  
Suite 1210  
Stamford, CT 06901-3250  
United States of America  
Tel: +1-203-905-3341

### Toronto

Scotia Plaza, Suite 3410  
40 King Street West  
Toronto, ON  
M5H 3Y2  
Canada  
Tel: +1-416-364-3355

### Washington, D.C.

1701 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Suite 400  
Washington, D.C. 20006-5810  
United States of America  
Tel: +1-202-654-7800

## Asia/Pacific

### Beijing

Suite 1320, China World Tower I  
No. 1 Jian Guo Men Wai Avenue  
Beijing 100004  
China  
Tel: +86-10-6505-2688

### Hong Kong

Room 1801, Alexandra House  
18 Chater Road Central  
Hong Kong  
Tel: +852-2523-9123

### Melbourne

15th Floor  
Bourke Place  
600 Bourke Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000  
Australia  
Tel: +61-3-9603-1300

### Mumbai

Unit 9(A), Grand Hyatt Plaza  
Santacruz (East)  
Mumbai 400 055  
India  
Tel: +91-22-6733-2222

### New Delhi

A4, Tower A  
The Qutab Hotel and Apartments  
Shaheed Jeet Sing Marg  
New Delhi 110 116  
India  
Tel: +91-11-4603-4600

### Shanghai

Room 4504, Jin Mao Tower  
88 Century Avenue  
Pudong, Shanghai 200121  
China  
Tel: +86-21-6163-0888

### Singapore

2 Shenton Way  
#08-01 SGX Centre 1  
Singapore 068804  
Singapore  
Tel: +65-6225-1811

### Sydney

Level 40 Aurora Place  
88 Phillip Street  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Australia  
Tel: +61-2-9258-3100

### Tokyo

Izumi Garden Tower 14F  
1-6-1 Roppongi  
Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-6014  
Japan  
Tel: +81-3-5114-3700

## Europe

### Amsterdam

World Trade Center  
Tower H, 18th Floor  
Zuidplein 148  
1077 XV Amsterdam  
The Netherlands  
Tel: +31-20-305-7630

### Barcelona

Edificio Prisma  
Avda. Diagonal, 613, 2ªA  
08028 Barcelona  
Spain  
Tel: +34-93-494-9400

### Brussels

Boulevard St.-Michel 27  
B-1040 Brussels  
Belgium  
Tel: +32-2-743-12-20

### Copenhagen

Østergade 1, 1st Floor  
DK-1100 Copenhagen K  
Denmark  
Tel: +45-33-69-23-20

### Frankfurt

MesseTurm  
60308 Frankfurt/Main  
Germany  
Tel: +49-69-75-60-90-0

### Hamburg

Stadthausbrücke  
1-3/Fleethof  
20355 Hamburg  
Germany  
Tel: +49-40-480-661-0

### London

24 St. James's Square  
London SW1Y 4HZ  
United Kingdom  
Tel: +44-20-7839-7788

### Madrid

Calle Miguel Angel, 11  
Seventh Floor  
28010 Madrid  
Spain  
Tel: +34-91-319-7100

### Milan

Via Mascheroni, 5  
20123 Milan  
Italy  
Tel: +39-02-430-0151

### Munich

Ludwigstraße 7  
80539 Munich  
Germany  
Tel: +49-89-24-89-81-3

### Paris

7, Place Vendôme  
75001 Paris  
France  
Tel: +33-1-49-26-13-00

### Stockholm

Hamngatan 27  
SE-111 47 Stockholm  
Sweden  
Tel: +46-8-545-074-40

### Warsaw

Belvedere Plaza  
ul. Belwederska 23  
00-761 Warsaw  
Poland  
Tel: +48-22-851-68-38

### Zürich

Genferstrasse 21  
8002 Zürich  
Switzerland  
Tel: +41-44-447-30-30