The Adventist Technology Institute (IATec) is a technology development and support institution of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) managed by the South American Division (SAD). Its headquarters is located at Santana Avenue, no. 1995, postal code 13184-210, in Parque Hortolândia neighborhood, city of Hortolândia, state of São Paulo, Brazil.

Currently, IATec’s facilities include an auditorium, an industrial kitchen, a restaurant, 10 meeting rooms, and 280 work stations where 202 employees work. There are 21 employees working in the business-analysis area, 19 in the support area, and 118 in the development area. In addition, there are 9 interns, 4 administration workers, 12 in the infrastructure, and 16 in technical support.

Moreover, the institute has some services that are outsourced, among them: cloud hosting services (by Algar, AWS, Azure, Godaddy, IBM), software licensing (by SoftwareONE, Microsoft, and Adobe), integration and communication services with government systems (by Migrate, Itwork), as well as surveillance and security services.

This entire structure is used to develop four types of services: development and maintenance systems, technological consultancy, and technical support. The creation and constant improvement of software to meet the accounting and human resource demands stand out, as well as solutions for congregational administrative expedients and academic management of colleges.

Origin

Adventists believe that “the church is God's appointed instrument for the salvation of humanity. It was organized to serve, and its mission is to take the gospel to the world.” This has been recognized since the beginning as the main purpose of the SDA Church. However, from an early age it was also recognized that the fulfillment of this missionary task required support for ecclesiastical activities through what can be called “support activities.” These are necessary activities so the church can remain organized, to be more efficient on managing the resources entrusted to it, and to comply with the legal requirements to which it is subject.

Time has passed and demands of support for the church’s main activity have also persisted. As the gospel advances and the church grows, so does the need to maintain and improve these activities. An important contribution to this has been made by the information technology. Since the first computer manufactured in the 1930s, the information technology has shown to be an important tool to support organizational demands. Some say that we live nowadays in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, in which companies and entities around the world are challenged by the impact of intelligent machines. It is not by chance that information technology has played a role in culture, entertainment, economics, communication, and even religion.
In this context the use of technology has proven to be an important tool to support the church missionary work. God gave human beings enough inventive and improvement capacity in the technological field so that this medium could also be used to facilitate the advancement of His work. Considering this reality, SAD noticed that there was sufficient demand to justify the creation of an institution that would be responsible for planning and offering necessary customized technological solutions for the smooth running of the SDA Church institutional activities in South America. Thus, it was with this objective in mind that IATec was created, becoming the Adventist institution that provides solutions in the field of information technology.

Organization

On October 13, 2015, the vote to create IATec was registered in the minutes of the South American Division. During the meeting several factors were considered by the participants such as justification for the opening of this institution. Among the topics discussed was the need to concentrate all SAD software development teams in one place that up to then were distributed in five different centers in South America, making it difficult to monitor and integrate the work carried out in each region. In addition, SAD headquarters did not have facilities in adequate conditions to accommodate the necessary expansion of the technological area. Although the decision to create the institution happened in 2015, IATec started operating on January 1, 2016, as approved in the South American Division Steering Committee Minutes of October 2015, with the vote number at 2015-256.

When IATec was created, as well as the purpose of improving the technological structure of the church in its territory, the SAD sought not to financially burden the organization. That's why the choice of the city of Hortolândia as the headquarters of the institute was strategic. Among the aspects considered to define its location were: the logistical ease, made possible by the geographical proximity of two international airports; and the fact that the region is surrounded by various universities, including the Brazil Adventist University, campus Hortolândia (BAU-HT), which hosts the institute headquarters. In addition, Hortolândia campus offers a degree in information technology, which through the internship program at IATec, can prepare students to better serve the SDA Church in this field.

History

On February 19, 2016, leaders of the South American Division visited the site chosen for the establishment of the Adventist Church technology hub. During this meeting, there were deliberations on the architectural design of the building, which aimed at the initial capacity of 200 employees, with the possibility of expanding to accommodate up to 500 workers. The idea was to erect a structure that would allow the expansion of operational capacity, when necessary, without interfering with what was already done. South American managers also set the appropriate date for the beginning of the work of construction of IATec’s headquarters, which at the time was temporarily operating on the UNASP-HT campus.

The project was carried out as planned, and the Adventist Technology Institute was inaugurated with its own headquarters in 2017. The ceremony took place on August 14, attended by civil, political, and religious authorities from local and global levels. On the occasion IATec was acclaimed by local authorities as a landmark established in Hortolândia, which was already recognized in Brazil for being a reference center in the technological area. At the ecclesiastical level, it was reaffirmed that IATec was created to provide solutions in information technology (IT) to assist in the fulfillment of the SDA church mission to preach the gospel.

The establishment of a denominational institution in the field of technology has influenced the development of the worldwide church in this aspect. On March 25 and 26, 2018, IATec hosted an international meeting of financial managers from thirteen Adventist territorial divisions around the world. This event contributed for the presentation of products and technological solutions that were being designed in Brazil and Bolivia. The export of these ideas to other regions of the globe, as well as to other countries in the South American continent, were the objectives highlighted during this meeting. Thus, technological advances can facilitate and cheapen denominational processes in areas such as financial management, people, education, literature sale, and administration of the church secretariat.

Still in this aspect, another reason why IATec was chosen to host this worldwide denominational meeting was the recognition that “South America is at the forefront on several areas, including technology.” Local congregations in “payroll, accounting, and the church management system are already working well and have therefore been exported.” As far as it is known, there is no other institution in this segment, maintained by the SDA Church, that is exclusively dedicated to this purpose. Thus, IATec becomes vital to offer solutions to the technological demands of the Adventist Church in its various acting fronts.

In addition to the systems already mentioned, there are other software developed by IATec to meet denominational needs. One of them is the Adventist Commercial System (ACS), a system that facilitates commercialization. There is also the Adventist Publications Ministry System (APMS), a system developed to manage the activities of canvassers. Furthermore, there is the Adventist Accounting Notification System (AANS), created to control finances through debit and credit notices between institutions. The Adventist Finance System (AFS), also in the financial field, provides greater control over all monetary movements carried out by Adventist institutions. Through this system managers have access to the tax documents of each purchase automatically.

IATec also provides the Adventist Payroll System (APS), a program developed to optimize work in the human
resources sectors. It contains all information about the relation between contractor and employee. On the other hand, the Adventist Accounting Software International (AASI) allows control of all the institution's accounting processes. The Adventist Secretary Administration System (ASAS), used by administrators, manages all the data referring to the workers of a certain institution. The Adventist Business Intelligence System (ABIS) provides artificial intelligence support to the SAD management decisions to amplify the effect of its management strategies. There is also the Adventist Payroll System (APS), which assists in the creation of the Electronic Invoice for Services in cases and institutions that need this tool.16

For the performance of all these systems, IATec develops operation tools, which are implemented in the scope of infrastructure. The operational sector works to provide and maintain adequate computing environments for IATec systems, seeking to guarantee their security, high availability, and performance. One of the areas responsible for such a service is Systems Administration, which takes care of the entire computing environment of the technological institute. Another important IATec department is the Network Administration, which takes care of everything related to connectivity and physical support for the functioning of the systems. Finally, there is the Helpdesk, a sector that offers technical support to users (Adventist institutions) in all the systems mentioned.17

Meanwhile, the institutional infrastructure sector builds solutions by maintaining a constant channel of support for institutions, coordinating research and development activities, in addition to encouraging a collaborative environment within the scope of the SAD. Furthermore, this section shares technology with Adventist institutions around the world. The five programs developed by the institute in this sector are GaniNet (controls network services), GanSecurity (used as a computer protector and traffic and bandwidth controller), NGINX + (used as a proxy solution--proxy), in addition to NxFilter (Internet content filter) and GanRack (documents and manages data activities and other network resources).18

Regarding the technical support developed by IATec, the institute has a team of qualified professionals to meet customer demands in several areas in order to guarantee the efficiency of the processes carried out in the institutions that use the systems. The so-called Business Support Service is divided into seven areas: commercial, accounting, educational, financial, human resources, secretariat, and treasury. In the commercial area, among the users there are store attendants, while in the accounting area there are accountants and other members of accounting teams. In the educational area, users are academic secretaries, coordinators, counselors, teachers, and students. Users in other areas are cashiers, HR personnel, secretaries, and treasurers for the congregations, respectively.19

The Church has been promoting events to talk about how technology impacts people's lives. In this context, from April 28 to 30, 2019, the "IATec Summit," an event about technological trends, took place. About three hundred professionals of the area participated in the program. Of these, 150 were from IATec, while the others worked in the systems area at other SDA institutions. In addition of debates, the event provided some workshops, in which participants learned to solve typical technological problems of church institutions. The "IATec Summit" was attended by Adventist Church presidents of South America and worldwide.20

Despite celebrating all its achievements and progress, during its first years in operation IATec faced many challenges. Among them, the need to adapt the systems to the rapid changes in accountability--required by the Brazilian government--and compatibility with the new restrictions and laws regarding data privacy stand out, as Brazil is going through a moment of intense legislative restructuring in this area. There is also the challenge of constant improvements demanded by the technological market itself, which requires permanent investments. In addition, the institute constantly deals with the frequent switching of users of its programs due to the turnover of people in certain functions in Adventist institutions.21 The challenge of developing products for mobile devices must also be considered, as well as the need to produce more complex software but with simpler usability.22

To overcome these challenges, IATec got into action to restructure its teams and strengthen the institute's departments. After the restructuring, the institution got even closer to each of its customers to offer greater training to users. Thus, one of the main lessons learned by IATec was to understand the need to remain close to its users to better meet their expectations. This has also been done through the creation of videos and manuals for using the systems, made available by the institute. In addition, IATec's team learned to focus on processes that generate fewer financial losses, to increase their knowledge of the Brazilian tax system, and to promote integration between their business and development teams.23

To obtain even more satisfactory results in the future, IATec is working with a fiscal configuration service that helps in the administration of the demands that are sent to it. In addition, the institution aims to continue promoting integration between the business and development teams, expanding the participation of its customers in business initiatives, and developing a solution to reduce user turnover. It has also planned to keep its team up to date through courses and training, motivating its employees to achieve an ever-greater engagement. It is still the desire of its leaders to work with long-term planning to facilitate the creation of more stable and functional products.24
In its plans IATec has on the radar the need to work with specific software implementations in more Adventist institutions, as well as modules for human resources. In addition, the institution plans to unify the SAD accounting system and improve its customers’ experience by offering new features for existing systems. There is also an intention to implement business intelligence (BI), make know-how products available in the technological area to other divisions, strengthen the training program for users, and schedule events to train professionals in person. It is also in the planning to continue with the improvements required for the ACS and APMS systems, to produce higher quality applications and with a focus on the user experience, as well as maintaining the security and transparency of their processes.

**Historical Role**

IATec has been acting in a remarkable way in its mission, and for that it operates both in the SAD territory, as well as providing services to the SDA Church in other divisions. An example of that is the development and maintenance of the Adventist Church Management System (ACMS), a system that seeks to facilitate the management of Adventist congregations’ secretariats and treasury. This system is used inside and outside the South American territory, with eight divisions being served, covering a total of 40 countries.

With its technological solutions in the accounting area, IATec serves the following institutions in South America: South Brazil Union Conference (USB), Central Brazil Union Conference (UCB), West Central Brazil Union Mission (UCOB), Northeast Brazil Union Mission (UNEb), North Brazil Union Mission (UNB), Southeast Brazil Union Conference (USEb), East Brazil Union Mission (ULB), Northwest Brazil Union Mission (UNOB), Argentina Union Conference (UA), South Peru Union Mission (UPS), North Peru Union Mission (UPN), Bolivia Union Mission (UB), Ecuador Union Mission (UE), Chile Union Mission (UCH), Uruguay Union of Churches Mission (UU), Paraguay Union of Churches Mission (UP), Parana Adventist College (IAP), Brazil Adventist University (UNASP), Bahia Adventist College (FADBA), Amazon Adventist Colleges (FAAMA), Peruvian Union University (UPeU), Bolivia Adventist University (UB), Bolivia Adventist University (UB), Paraguay Adventist University (Unapy), River Plate Sanitarium and Hospital (SAP). And the following in North America: Southern Union Conference (SUC), Columbia Union Conference (CUC), Atlantic Union Conference (AUC), Mid-America Union Conference (MAUC), Southwestern Union Conference (SWUC), North Pacific Union Conference (NPUC), Pacific Union Conference (PUC), Trans Pacific Union Mission (TPUM), Micronesia Mission (GUAM), and Adventist World Radio (AWR).

In turn, with its software for human resources, IATec serves more than four hundred institutions in the South American continent, of which 322 are Brazilian. In addition, the same solution serves 81 other entities outside the South American continent, 64 of which are in the United States alone. The solutions for the educational area make it possible to serve eight Brazilian Unions, plus the Chilean, Paraguayan, Argentinian, and Uruguayan unions. Finally, software in the commercial area serves 144 establishments in Brazil.

As noted, although IATec's history is short, its influence already extends to Adventist organizations around the world. And with technology increasingly present in the daily lives of people and organizations, the institute will continue to be challenged to provide the IT solutions necessary for the smooth running of the SDA Church evangelistic mission. Focused on that purpose, there is no doubt that God will continue to conduct the plans and works of this institution so that its contribution to the preaching of the gospel will be more and more effective every day.

**Leaders**

Director: Eliezer Magalhaes (2016-Present).
Treasurer: David Contri (2016-Present).

**Sources**

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NOTES


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16. Ibid.


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26. Carlos Alberto Blotz (Information Technology Governance), e-mail message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associate editor), August 19, 2019.
28. Carlos Alberto Blotz (Information Technology Governance), e-mail message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associate editor), August 19, 2019.
29. Ibid.
30. More information about IATec can be found at http://iatec.com/pt/ and on social networks– Facebook: @InstitutoAdventistadeTecnologia and YouTube: IATec--Adventist Technology Institute.