Interview: Vytautas Baublys – CEO, Softneta, Lithuania



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Vytautas Baublys, co-founder and CEO of Softneta, introduces the award-winning Lithuanian IT company, and its service offering, explaining how software-based specialized healthcare solutions improve the quality of patient care. Further, he discusses the importance of the company's FDA-approved platform, facilitating the communication flow between scientists, doctors and patients, allowing them to share information instantly.

Can you introduce yourself and the idea behind establishing Softneta to our international readership?

My name is Vytautas Baublys and I am the co-founder and CEO of the Softneta company. I founded the company together with Tomas Dumbliauskas in Kaunas, where I studied medical engineering at Kaunas University of Technology. After getting my degree, I worked in a hospital where I identified the need for more integrated software systems. With Tomas, prior to establishing the company we developed a product that we later sold to GE. This gave us the minimum funds needed to start our own company, together with investors from Practica Capital, that provided us not only with the capital investment but also their time and expertise. This allowed us to penetrate different markets and grow the company. Starting with small revenues but company was growing double every year. Our international sales grew from EUR 150,000 to 600,000. We provide innovative, software based, specialized medical imaging and communication solutions to improve the quality of healthcare. Currently we are focused on reinventing our product that will mostly be used in Lithuania, but we are planning to introduce it into foreign markets.

Could you expand on the rationale behind such corporate operations and how has it reinforced your strategy?

The process of completing the investment took 2-3 years. Founder of Practica Capital, Anatolijus Faktorovičius, was working for one of the biggest Lithuanian medical companies which was producing infusion pumps amongst others. He ensured we do not only get the capital investment, but also helped us understand the challenges by sharing his expertise. We used most of this capital injection to penetrate new markets. We had proof that our concept is working on a small scale, and we wanted to grow further and go bigger. One of the challenges we face is trying not to lose the essence and the focus of the company, which is hard when the growth is so fast.

What are the major accomplishments of the company since its foundation a decade ago?

Since 2007, one of the main milestones was to realize that 800 clinics all over the world are using our business solutions. We have now accomplished seven national projects, one in Switzerland and six in Lithuania. Further, our database reached 370,000 case studies, that are shared free of charge. Most of them are used in second opinion cases, and people’s lives are saved because of this service. Softneta is also the first company to receive FDA approval for our product, MedDream WEB DICOM Viewer, meaning the viewer is FDA cleared for diagnostic use. We have done a lot of work towards the certification of our portfolio, which is a big advantage allowing us to work with many more countries that prior to that, considering our aim was always to become a global player. We are also aware that Harvard and Oxford university are using our services.

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You divide your business into four business lines: viewer, pacs, workstation, and telemedicine. How can your products help healthcare professionals to offer better treatments to patients?

The first function which we are providing is accessibility. All of our solutions are first trying to solve the problem of data being accessible immediately. If you open our website you can see the online demos, allowing you to test the product. So click and you see it and you can try the product. We can receive data from the devices, we translate it to the doctors, helping them to make the decisions, or to the machines to help them operate. We run to fulfil all this circle of data. Telemedicine could be recognised in two parts, human consultation, or human machine. There is a lot of variations and we work in all off them. We create best practice.

We designed our product that way so it can be integrated in the third party. If the scientist is doing a lot of work how to improve the processes but is not a programmer, we understand it. Softneta provides them platform how to integrate the system in the hospital and healthcare environment. As an example, in Estonia, a person had a heart attack, and they needed a case-study, and the hospital was able to send the study through the servers.

How do you ensure that your solutions always remain at the forefront of the technological developments?

We are trying to use the best new practices for product development, so we cover most of our products by automatic testing, which is done by robots. Also, our documentation is generated automatically, by robots. We are adding more and more automated check-ups to ensure the safety and security of our staff and our product. This is crucial, because with a fast-growing number of developers it is tough to ensure there are no mistakes. We utilise the most sophisticated and precise mechanisms to protect the product quality. It is combination of checking and acting proactively. Softneta has a fast-growing number of partners, customers, and we take into account their feedback in regard to the improvements needed. We are listening to every customer and trying to adjust within our capacity.

Is Lithuania ready to fully embrace the digitalization era and to adopt such technologies?

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It is a hard question, as we have been involved in setting up the medical archive system for the country. As Lithuania is a small country, and considering that the implementation of such a system and the political debate about such a system would certainly take less time than more developed and bigger countries such as Spain. The system is working, but in order to fully launch and implement it, we would have to have political cooperation. I am sure that from 2018 all parts of the e-health project will work very well. The system is working well, we already have over 1 million treatment cases stored in the database and this number is growing every day. Every big project we run has a long preparation time before operating in its full capacity.

We also look at Switzerland, as we are involved in the DIOCOM Share national project of the application of 160 hospitals united in the country, and we already launched it last week, and it successful. Every country now has different challenges and different approaches while implementing such projects. Estonia has the national archives for the past 10 years, but the difference between the Lithuania and Estonia is that Estonia has only 60 hospitals for the 1.2

million population, two very big ones. It was much easier for them. Our situation we have 160 big hospitals and every hospital needed to have isolated data and exchanged the data within the seconds, and we managed to accomplish to have the system working. It is one of the most unique system in the world. We also negotiate with different countries to replicate that system.

Looking at the impact, we see that Softneta has already helped a lot. Focusing on the hospital which we are currently discussing, we believe that we saved EUR 12 million. Softneta participation helping to set up Lithuania's archives also saved a lot of money. Our approach is unique, as we try to be the global solution. Softneta even provides free of charge services. We might be small, but we are very ambitious and our vision is to create huge market and infrastructure such as Skype which could generate for the brave and very promising scientist the infrastructure to implement the ideas of the medicine processes.

Will the government continue or enlarge support for the collaboration?

We do not want to limit the access to our ideas, not to governments or people. Our aim is to create an open platform for anyone to participate in medicine not being the programmers. Such like the smartphone was created, many people were involved in IT programming developed many systems on that platforms. We need to consider that the era of medicine is changing in a very interesting way. From the patient and doctor systems, it is evolving and becoming the patient and machine communication, with the machine finding the doctor anywhere in the world. It is still not here, but after 10 years probably no one will speak to doctor, instead, the scenario is that we will speak with the machine and the machine will consult with the doctor. It will all most probably happen at home. We realized this evolution is happening approximately seven years ago and we aim to be the software and the solution to unite it all.

One of your priorities is to continue driving the internationalization of Softneta; indeed, you have already conducted operations in more than 35 countries such as Australia and the US. What is your next step moving forward?

The next step is to finish our in-depth project we received from European Union, and the final vison is for the DIOCOM library to be a tool for the scientist to present their ideas to the doctors instantly. It is hard to believe and understand it without seeing it. Our DIOCOM library needs to change and become the tool for doctors and scientist to communicate together. To see how the science can improve the medical world. Medical world could upload some sample data and scientist could show them the result. Not the programming, just showing the results. It involves a lot of technology but the idea is very simple – to shorten the timeframe. We aim to make the results and ideas available

for the doctors in days or weeks, but not in years' time. We want to be that smartphone for the science and medicine to communicate through our platform. Not only the human-human communication, but also human-application amongst others.

What are Softneta's competitive advantages that position the company as the partner of choice for the industry and set apart the company from any of its MNC competitors?

Our technology, vision and our approach to medicine is the competitive advantage of Softneta. You won't find any player that will give you the services for free. When I speak with the big companies and tell them about my dream, which is having Sofneta available to everyone free of charge, they are surprised. Such as Google has done in the past, creating a search engine and making it available to everyone. Back then no one would understand how activity as such can be profitable. We have many ideas, but the main idea is global awareness that this is Softneta is doing. Most companies focus only on patients, or only on the doctors, while we want to be the first to cover all the stakeholders with the same interface. This is what makes us unique and gives us the competitive advantage.

You are a visionary in your niche. Looking ahead and as founder of the company, where would you like to bring Softneta's footprint by 2020?

My biggest achievement would be a million users utilizing our software. If we reach that goal, it will mean that doctors and scientists are not the only ones using it, but patients also.

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