Patrick Van de Velde – General Manager Sweden & Business Unit Leader Applied Markets, Promega



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Patrick Van de Velde, general manager of Promega's Swedish affiliate and also responsible for the company's operations in Nordics, highlights the reason why Sweden has been selected as one of Promega's 16 global offices. Having built the branch from scratch, he underlines the main growth drivers of the company in the Nordics and explains how Promega is extending the lifespan of its products moving into the applied sciences field.

Patrick, in 2007 you took on the task of establishing Promega's presence in Sweden from scratch. What are the main milestones you have achieved since then?

We started off as Promega Sweden only, but during the years we grew into an organization covering the Nordics area, including Norway, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and even the Faroe Islands as well as Estonia. As we kicked off the branch with optimal operational costs, we are keeping the size of the office in pace with revenue growth. One of our key successes was to establish most parts of Promega's excellent portfolio throughout the whole region and secondly to have built a very engaged and committed team, with many people covering multiple roles. Our marketing manager, for instance, is also working at the Dutch affiliate.

All members of the team are specialists in a certain area for the Nordic territory, while also having a general role in customer relationship building at the local regional level. This creates an

interdependency, as people are continuously helping each other out. This organizational learning effect can also be seen as a major contributor to our success, as we are more focused on the overall target as a team. The model is quite demanding for each individual indeed, but I also see it as an exciting opportunity to have multiple roles.

Sweden is one of Promega's 16 global offices. In your opinion, what makes Sweden an attractive market for the company?

The Nordic countries have a very strong government collaboration in R&D, with only a few countries spending a higher percentage of their GDP in this area. The history of Sweden, being a pioneer in protein science together with strong research institutions, such as the Karolinska Institute, creates a very attractive environment to be part of. Promega is an emerging but still relative small player in the global bioscience field, but we have a strong market share in our core competence technologies.

Looking at your portfolio, you have expertise in many areas of biotechnology. Could you introduce Promega and its flagship service areas here in Sweden?

The cradle of our technology is genomics, but there is a lifecycle to each technology, so genomics today is very much commoditized. We deal with this portfolio life cycle by creating highly specialised business units and application. We can mention the well-established area of genetic or human identity; we are developing the microsatellite instability analysis in a diagnostic tool for cancer. Our second core technology is bioluminescence, which has passed the share of our genomics portfolio. The bioluminescence portfolio has become an important tool for fundamental research, drug discovery and many other areas. Promega's continued research in this particular area has led to greatly improved versions of luciferase; most notably here is NanoLuc, which is an engineered luciferase which is smaller, much more stable and, through its designed substrates, much brighter. We are in a constant flux of creative scientific innovation.

How have Promega's operational areas developed in recent years?

Since I joined Promega, the developments have been very significant. In genetic identity, we grew the business in the Nordics from nearly zero and became a market leader. We are entering new

areas like cosmetics where our bioluminescence technology is deployed to modify skin cells and thus enable cosmetics industries to avoid animal skin testing. Promega is also rolling out a suite of applied products and applications to determine GMO testing, pathogen testing and testing microbial conditions. The ATP (adenosine triphosphate) is the currency of life, hence also an indicator of microbial conditions, which can be detected by our more stable and sensitive luciferases. We can satisfy the customer needs in laboratories with our own internal suite of GloMax instruments. For certain industrial applications that require inline analysers, we have a collaboration with Hach Applitek.

In general, we can claim that quite a lot of those applied areas that have been developed in recent years are the result of partnerships through which we are mutually enabling society to resolve scientific and applied challenges.

What is your partnership approach in the innovative Swedish ecosystem?

The task for a general manager of Promega is always related to create contacts with different stakeholders in the given country, to collaborate in different projects. I can confirm that partnerships play a big role for Promega. Even though it is not always easy to find mutually satisfying partnerships, we are proud of the progress made in the Nordic region.

As there are many players in the biotechnology field in Sweden, what is your approach to finding the right talent for Promega?

Finding the right talent is never an easy task, as Promega always looks for more than previous professional or academic experience. It is not only about adding headcount, as the cultural aspect is very important for us. Being able to be part of the Promega team is a crucial aspect which we are looking for when we are recruiting. Being one of the largest privately-owned life science companies, we are different from most publicly traded biotechnology companies. Having worked for publicly-traded companies, the pressure for the next quarter result is reduced and allows us to have a longer-term perspective Promega understands that certain projects need time to fulfil expectations; giving projects more time to mature is a balancing act between fast results and identifying early failure. In my view, this environment is very stimulating, as ideas have a chance to develop, which is fostered by our Promega culture. Performance is the ultimate target here, of course, but we have a thick layer of flexibility and innovative thinking with patience to let

technologies mature. For us, finding the right person to join our staff is quite challenging, as we really need people who buy right into our culture. Promega spends a lot of time in the recruitment process for this very reason.

What do you see as Promega’s competitive advantage in the Nordics?

We have a narrow portfolio compared to our competitors, so we are very specialized and knowledgeable in our areas of focus. Our very high customer-focused service with over 99 percent delivery efficiency is a differentiator. Our sales representatives are all trained as service technicians as well, therefore our salespeople are responsible for either fixing the product themselves or shipping a replacement right away. This way, we ensure continuity, so the client’s business is not affected, which then creates a special connection with the customers.

Looking forward, what is your vision for Promega in the Nordics over the next five years?

We still have the possibility to double our revenue in the next 5 to10 years, while integrating the workflows of our customers to provide a superior service to them. As mentioned, we are looking particularly at new niches, especially as our genomics segment has reached the peak of its product cycle and applied areas such as genetic identity and bioluminescence become more important. I see a lot potential for Promega here, as we can provide solutions rather than only offering products to the industry. Customers have different mindsets, as their needs evolve and go beyond the basic science. We are in an era where the utility of science becomes more important and we are happy and very capable to serve this demand successfully. At Promega, we are expanding the life span of technology, by shifting our focus on what the technology can do for the process of the customer.

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