Tomas Blomquist – CEO, Biotage, Sweden



Biotage is a separation science company and is based in the world capital of separation science, Uppsala

16.10.2019

Tags: Sweden, Biotage, Strategy

Biotage, a Swedish company that specializes in separation technology, from analysis to industrial scale, and high-quality solutions for organic and analytical chemistry, has been a story of success since its creation in 1997. Upcoming CEO, Tomas Blomquist, provides insights into the company's goal of becoming the market leader in separation science and outlines his ambitious strategy after he takes over on November 6, 2019.

What have been your first impressions of Biotage?

My first impressions have been overwhelmingly positive. I have joined a company that has been a story of success, especially since 2006 when Torben Jörgensen, the management team and board started a turnaround. Biotage has a very competent, engaged team that is willing to take the company to the next level. At the moment, I am focused on getting to know the people, the teams, the sites, the customers and the partners. My mission is to listen and learn so I can then be able to assess what is the company's best interest. Biotage has established itself with a platform for continuous growth and scale up and I want to be part of a company that has high aspirations, which attracted me to this position.

Being a Swede, the opportunity to join a global company based in Sweden is a huge privilege. Biotage is a separation science company and is based in the world capital of separation science, Uppsala. The city has a rich separation science and chemistry history, holding many patents and

has won two Nobel prize awards 1926 and 1948 within this area.

Coming from the position of Commercial VP for Abbott's cardiometabolic business area, and having a vast experience working for other big companies like J&J and Roche. Can you explain what specific knowledge you acquired that you believe will be key in your new role at Biotage?

I have gained international experience, built successful companies with great people and have been working with and being trained by many of the best. I have managed manufacturing companies with complete functional structures, which is a clear advantage because you get to know the whole business. My focus has been in particular within commercial excellence, finance optimization, value expansion programs, organizational and people development, and in developing purpose and performance-driven cultures within the life science industry, which all will be important elements that I will leverage leading Biotage.

Since users of Biotage products include government agencies, academic institutions and the pharmaceutical and food industries. How do you intend to manage the different relationships, having such different customers in nature?

Having these types of clients and partners is a luxury. Biotage is growing and becoming very broad, so we must act in different end markets, customer segments and application areas. As such, we must build and develop specific skillsets and capabilities within all these areas that we wish to focus upon today and tomorrow. Having four focus areas is a beauty, but even though they might look broad, the separation science combines the four focus areas. They are organic chemistry, analytical chemistry, industrial-scale process chemistry and biomolecules. Biomolecules is a new space for Biotage after the acquisition of PhyNexus earlier this year.

What are the main strengths of Biotage's products and solutions?

One of the strengths of Biotage is that we are fast and work very closely with the customers. We look to the trends driving the market, but we also listen to the customer needs and try to solve their pain points. That is how we execute and develop a very robust and advanced quality portfolio both within hardware, software and services. Apart from the efficient workflow, we focus on

reducing solvents and we are very proud of being a “green chemistry” company and offering the broadest product range for medicinal chemists working with small molecules.

From personalized medicines to the rise of biologicals, can you expand on what do you see as the most exacting opportunities for Biotage to increase its partnerships with pharma and biopharma companies?

Biotage is eager to be an important player in the pharma and biopharmaceutical market. The National Innovation Council, led by Prime Minister Stefan Löfven, has three focus areas: life science, environment and digitalization. Coincidentally, Biotage is already present in all those fields and intends to explore them even further. Another example is the Life Sciences Office led by Jenni Nordborg, which has spoken repeatedly about personalized medicine. Biotage is also present in that space and will continue to explore. We have done research on lipids, which will be one of the building blocks of individualized medicine, we have analytical systems that will benefit from more advanced diagnostics and pharmaceuticals. There is an important opportunity for the company because the volumes will increase, and we will be there to support the industry.

Looking at the megatrends of the business, eight out of the top ten best-selling pharmaceutical products are biologicals. The move from chemical to biological is more than clear. As such, Biotage is in a unique position to succeed also in this area. Apart from being an attractive space, it is a bigger market that Biotage has not touched before. We are the niche market leader in flash chromatography. With the PhyNexus acquisition, we have become a technology leader within dual flow chromatography offering automated high-throughput protein, monoclonal antibody and plasmid purification. We are now looking into revolutionary automation platform for larger lab-scale protein and plasmid purification (10 mg of plasmid DNA). The growth range is greater than in other markets.

With 24 years of executive experience, what is your take on fostering a successful post-acquisition integration?

When it comes to acquisitions, the integration aspect is crucial. Biotage has acquired two companies in the last 22 months: Horizon Technology and PhyNexus. The Horizon deal has broadened our presence in the environmental space, which will increase our talk around sustainability. That being said, our focus at the moment is on organic growth, but we are regularly

exploring acquisitions. We have companies on the radar, and I am learning about the business and potential partners, we know that our high ambitions as a company will not only happen organically.

You just touched on the sustainability aspect. How high is the topic on your priority list?

Sustainability and corporate responsibility are very high on the agenda and will be even higher. Biotage believes sustainability, growth, business development and innovation go hand in hand. From a product perspective, Biotage works on reducing solvents, which is a critical component of the early stage of pharmaceuticals manufacturing. We are reducing the solvents step by step; the end objective is to get rid of solvents in its entirety to reduce waste. It is something that we are working towards.

Moreover, through the acquisition of Horizon Technology, we can also offer water, soil and plant extracts purification solutions and SPE systems for the analysis of a wide range of applications, including environmental, food safety, beverage and agriculture.

The most important matter, however, in regard to sustainability is to take care of our most important asset that is our people, and we are continuously working on assuring equality, diversity and to developing our people. Biotage also has an anti-corruption policy, a code of conduct, a whistleblowing system and have developed a Biotage Group modern slavery and trafficking statement. Apart from that, we are a member of the United Nations Global Compact, and also have specific programs to reduce environmental impacts in for instance our manufacturing operations. As a global company with Swedish DNA, having a culture and ways of working sustainable makes us proud.

Leveraging your long-standing experience working for international operations of global companies, to what extent do you expect Biotage’s international footprint to increase in the coming years?

We already have a great foundation to begin with. The next phase is to expand to attractive new market segments, customer groups and application areas. Our vision and ambition are to keep on scaling up the international footprint. We are already present in the United States, China, India, Japan, Korea, UK and Sweden with manufacturing and R&D sites, but also have several commercial people across Europe. We also have dedicated team members present in our global regions supporting our indirect channel business. We will continuously look into new areas that can benefit

from our technology, services and solutions and will also explore further internationalization and acquisitions.

Biotage already spends 7.4 percent of its sales on research and development. What is your approach when it comes to supporting R&D operations?

Biotage is built around great separation and software innovations, it is what has developed the company into a soon 1-billion revenue SEK (US$100 million) Swedish unicorn. My role as CEO will include accelerating and prioritizing research and development. The ambition from the board and management team is to increase the expenditure ratio into double-digit ranges. We need to make the right bets in the right direction, for which I still need more time with the team.

There is global demand for higher quality, increased levels of automation, and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) designed to streamline the work of chemists, which directly impacts Biotage. How do you approach the opportunities presented by automation and AI?

Those areas will be a fundamental element of the research and development efforts. For instance, we are already looking at how to utilize technology, digitalization, data analytics, AI and big data as a component of our business model. We have a superb hardware and software R&D team that gives us an edge in those innovative areas.

What are the advantages of being part of the Swedish ecosystem?

First, everybody has easy access to healthcare in the country, and Swedes are good at quickly adapting to new technologies. Second, there are cultural elements that provide incentives to land on the best decisions possible like the non-hierarchical structure of teams and the emphasis on collaboration. Sweden has a history of quality and excellence in life science. Innovation is part of the country’s DNA.

It cannot go unsaid that Sweden’s Biobanks, well-educated people with excellent academic centres such as the Karolinska Institute, Stockholm School of Economics, Royal Institute of Technology, Uppsala and Lund University, Sweden’s national and Quality Registers, and the personal innovation and invention ownership (not linked to academia), distinguishes Sweden from many markets and

has resulted in many successful Swedish companies over the years. I intend to become more involved in the life science ecosystem not only in Sweden and Nordics, but the international landscape. We will have strong connections to Uppsala, Medicon Valley, SciLifeLab but also to incubators and start-ups. We are perfectly situated in international life spaces with our site presence in Cardiff, Shanghai, Delhi, Seoul, Tokyo, the Boston area, Charlotte and the Bay Area in California. We expect to play a big role in everywhere we operate, together with academia, the government, industry associations like SwedenBIO, Swedish LabTech and MedTech, and the wider life science industry.

Biotage will be a global company with natural components of the Swedish culture, especially when it comes to sustainability and innovation. However, knowing the export importance of life science in the country, I believe that Sweden should look to establish a Minister for Life Sciences.

What are the main goals you wish to achieve during your time leading Biotage?

I wish to create superior and sustainable results for Biotage personnel, customers, partners, environment and shareholders. Apart from delivering the aspirational organic growth and EBIT targets from our high calibre board, I want to maximize the exciting product portfolio that we have and expand in attractive high growth and profit segments. For me, it will be about allocating resources, strengthen capabilities in a smart and prioritized way so Biotage is in the best position to succeed and continuously grow. We aim to be a purpose and people-driven organization that will attract, retain and train the very best people in the life science industry. The Biotage team is committed to strengthen the Swedish and international life science ecosystem, deliver world leading added value separation science solutions, services and products to our global customers, and put Swedish life science much stronger on the global map.

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