

Predicting the future of optical elements: Lidaris Ltd

What motivated you to start Lidaris Ltd?

Andrius Melninkaitis: Like most research start-ups, we started in a university laboratory. We were thinking big, but at the time there was little demand for research projects in Lithuania. The market was too small for us to survive. We couldn't build our future relying on project funding, salaries were low and team members saw no prospect in staying. It was time to re-think our business model. 2012 saw a start-up boom. There was a political will to commercialise as many activities as possible. That was our opportunity to commercialise research projects, diversify the research model, attract clients from the open market, and have a sustainable source of income. We immediately received a lot of interest in our research. I was puzzled: Why we did not get the same interest while being a research team at university? It hit me – commercial organisations prefer to do business with other commercial organisations rather than public research centres, associated with bureaucracy, lack of speed and sometimes inefficiency.

What are the problems or challenges that your company offers a solution for?

We perform optical resistance tests on various laser parts, measuring the quantity of light they can withstand without breaking. Optical resistance threshold data is needed for traders, manufacturers, and users of these products. Many companies need to know the reasons for defects of optical elements to eliminate them. We started doing in-depth research with different companies to help them solve these flaws. Also, we offer dedicated services. There are companies in need of quick results, so we have separate contracts with them and organise services exclusively for those companies. We work as a division of that company serving their testing needs, which



Andrius Melninkaitis, CEO of Lidaris Ltd (photo: Lidaris Ltd)

is accelerated and individualised to a specific company.

How much time passed between having the idea for your start-up and your launch?

It happened spontaneously. For quite some time we considered starting a company, but didn't have enough determination. The decision was made when the Agency for Science, Innovation and Technology (MITA) announced grants for start-ups. Our application was evaluated successfully, and we were ready to launch the company very quickly. Other favourable circumstances appeared as well – our project was funded by a spin-off policy measure to encourage the creation of start-ups from universities. It was a matter of three months from the submission of the application to the establishment of the company. ▶

Company Facts

Lidaris Ltd, registered in 2012

Number of employees (2020): 17

Business area: Optics characterization services focused on Laser-Induced Damage Threshold, improving the quality of high power optics

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Who helped you getting started? For example friends and family, incubators, investors or mentors?

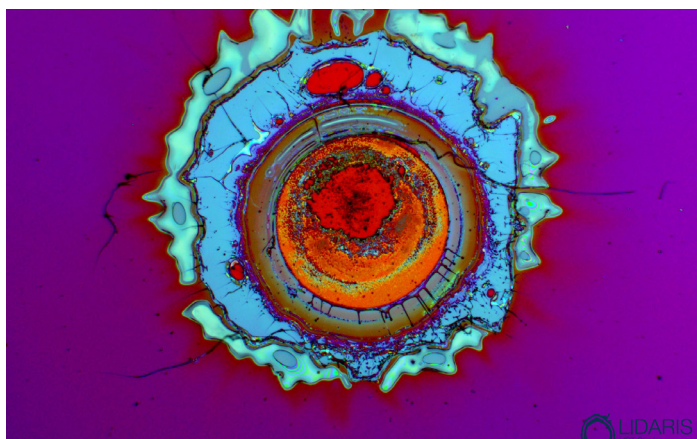
The biggest help was to come to an agreement with the university to rent infrastructure for the company's activities through an Open Access Centre. This really helped because otherwise a very large investment would have been required and we could hardly have done it.

What was your biggest problem in the start-up process? And what was your biggest mistake, or was there an obstacle that you did not expect before?

Overnight, we turned from students and teachers into entrepreneurs. We had almost no experience in business development and management and we still feel the lack of it. It was necessary to change the mindset from scientists to entrepreneurs, to stand in customers' shoes, and understand how the business world works. Everything had to be created from scratch.

What kind of structures would have helped you to cope better?

We received a lot of support, I can't complain. There were many different calls for projects in Lithuania and we participa-



Picture of a laser damage (photo: Lidaris Ltd)

CAROTS (Commercial Analytical Research Organisations Transnational Strategy) is an international project that aims to establish a new type of private or public-private company in the Baltic Sea Region: Commercial Analytical Research Organisations (CAROs). CAROs, as intermediary bodies between industry and academia, provide enterprises with much quicker yet complete assistance in analytical research in areas like New Materials, NanoTech or Life Sciences. The project is led by DESY, Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron, in dialogue with ten project partners and twelve associated organisations from across the Baltic Sea Region.

For further information visit
www.carots.eu

ted in them. Also, various calls where start-ups were not excluded from eligible companies, many events for start-ups, and funding possibilities. And of course, the Open Access Centres, as I already mentioned before.

What has been your most interesting company case so far?

The most interesting project was with the European Space Agency. We were lucky that Lithuania showed ambition to be an associated member. We managed to win one of the grants from the first call, where there was a need to characterise the optical elements of satellite lasers. The goal was to predict the future of the optical elements. We really enjoyed the project and learned a lot. We use this know-how in our daily work.

What is your biggest challenge at the moment, personally in your role and for the company?

At a personal level, balancing personal time and work, as the balance is shifting in the wrong direction. At the company level, finding project managers. It is becoming difficult to find skilled employees in Lithuania. Our area of expertise requires at least three years of managing experience to grow to a level where someone can lead the project. The only trained professionals are the ones at Vilnius University or in our company. Also, the competition is enormous. Lithuanian companies are growing fast, everyone needs skilled employees and there is a shortage.

What would help you most right now to reduce costs, increase your visibility and to co-operate with other intermediaries?

Reducing costs never hurts, but that's not the path we can choose at the moment. As mentioned above, skilled, experienced, and self-sufficient project managers with technical knowledge would help the most.

What is your number one advice for a new founder of an intermediary?

Trust yourself! Concentrate on what is needed to be done rather than on challenges. Try to find your niche. If you are doing something useful, someone will notice. Check if there is a demand for your services. Don't believe everyone who says that your work is unnecessary. In the beginning, we were told nobody would need our research, but it turned out it's only not needed in Lithuania. To only focus on a local market is also a big mistake. Focusing on the global market is the way to a sustainable future. Be visible. Earn a trusted name. ■



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