

Wise Words with John Sjölund



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The diagnosis of diabetes can be a scary piece of news to receive. However, for many sufferers the only difficulty they will face is remembering to inject themselves with insulin at the correct intervals three times a day. John Sjölund was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at the age of three, and was very aware of how easy it was to lose track of his injections. This memory lapse can be life-threatening and John wanted to invent a simple device that would help people keep track of their daily dosages. He came up with the idea for [Timesulin](#), a replacement cap for an insulin pen that also has a display which shows how much time has passed since the last injection.

Prior to setting up Timesulin John worked for marketing company Acceleration. He project managed a number of high profile campaigns, including one of the largest UK supermarket chains and two of the top five cruise companies. In 2010 he set up Timesulin, and alongside this he works with the International Diabetes Federation to improve awareness of diabetes among young people in Africa. When we first came across Timesulin in 2011 the company was just starting out and the product was not yet on the market. We caught up with John to find out how things have progressed since then.

1. Where did the idea for Timesulin come from?

I've been living with Type 1 diabetes since I was three. Now, diabetes has never kept me from doing anything other than indulge in too much candy, but it takes a lot of mental capacity – you're constantly checking in with your body to see why you're feeling a certain way, wondering if it could be blood glucose related. Add into that mix that the average person with diabetes takes more than 1,500 insulin injections per year (four a day), that these shots don't hurt and that we are not (typically) traumatized by the experience of injecting, and you quickly have a scenario similar to 'Did I switch off the coffee machine?' or 'Did I lock my car?'. The problem with an accidental double dose of insulin is that it can have very dire consequences, as I found out twice in 2010 when I wasn't sure whether or not I had taken my shot and administered another. A plummeting blood glucose level can be scary – and even deadly – and there was just no concrete way of knowing whether you really did inject or not before it was too late. That's when I figured 'Enough!' and set about finding a team of engineers to figure out how we could create a super simple solution to making life with diabetes easier for me and the 366 million other people in the world who live with this condition.

2. Can you describe a typical working day?

Oh I am not a morning person, so every wakeup is slightly painful. I usually snooze the alarm an average of six times before I check email on my phone (I am a new Android guy, still trying to figure out if it was the right move from my iPhone) and respond to anything I can do immediately. Then it's breakfast while watching the news and coffee, or straight onto a conference call while I walk down to the office from my apartment. I am lucky! After years of commuting to the office, a recent move has put me within a five-minute walk from home. (This is the beauty of being an entrepreneur – you are able to decide where to put the office!)

Daytime is all about meetings with the team and customers. We have offices in both Stockholm and London, which means that we do all our communications via Skype. I utilize SkypeIn numbers, Skype Video, Skype Chat...the entire kit. Being local for me means having an Internet connection these days. Come 5pm the emails and meetings tend to slow down and then the real workday starts, giving me the time to focus on the longer term objectives we have – I find I am most productive between 5-9pm.

I typically leave the office at around 7pm and constantly check my phone for updates when I'm not 'online'. Since we currently sell in over 40 markets – there is never a time where some market that isn't online and waiting for a response.



3. How do you unwind or relax when you're not working on Timesulin?

Exercise usually – I try to do compete in least one endurance event per year – this year I am aiming for Stockholm Triathlon and a half-iron man if I can convince my wife that the extra training time required will in fact be helpful to unwind. We will see.

Other than that, I love watching documentaries (I just got the Boxee box and am still figuring out what to do with all the content on there!) and do my best to read the entire Internet every evening. I am a huge fan of the Zite app!

4. What's the secret ingredient to success as an entrepreneur?

I think being able to handle uncertainty well and being a problem solver are the two main ingredients to success. Other than that I was given the following advice, which has rung true: When you start a business it will take more time and more money than expected.

5. What drove you crazy when building your business?

My biggest frustrations have been related to communications difficulties – particularly when speaking with people in their non-native languages. I quickly learnt the value of having a native-speaker on your side to help in the negotiations! My business runs at an enormous pace – we have gone from an idea on the back of a napkin to having a Class 1 medical device available in 40 countries around the world in around 18 months! When starting off I could go crazy with impatience and it has taken some time to gather a team that runs at the same pace as me. I have learned that I can be pretty demanding of those I work with...

6. What motivates you to keep going?

We are building a solid business, which is great, but at the same time we are truly making a difference to peoples lives! I get the pleasure of being an entrepreneur with the humanitarian benefit of being able to help people who got struck with a chronic condition. And we get daily feedback from Timesulin users who send in handwritten thank you notes to us for making life easier for them – it doesn't get much better, I tell you!

7. If you were to start again, what would you do differently?

I was very naive when we started this business. I assumed that everyone would be willing to bootstrap it and work with passion to reach the dream of being a profitable business together. Not true. If I were to start again I would be more selective in who I surround myself with. And I would have very good contracts in place from the word go!

8. Where do you see your business in five years, and how will you get there?

Timesulin is a brand of Patients Pending Ltd and I hope that in five years we will still be using simple technologies to make the daily life of people living with chronic conditions a little easier. I think we will be forming global commercial partnerships to help with distribution so we can widen our reach.

9. If you weren't working on Timesulin, what would you be doing?

My background is in digital marketing, so I assume I'd be helping companies with conversion optimization on their websites.



10. Tell Springwise a secret...

After a recent sun-seeking trip to Egypt I just learned that I love cheesy, all-inclusive charter trips! When you, as I do, spend at least 100 days a year traveling for work, the pleasure of simply following somebody with a yellow sign telling you which bus to get on and what time to show up for cocktail hour is completely underrated.

11. Any final words for aspiring entrepreneurs?

Get your hands on data and bring that into your strategy process early on to help you make informed decisions. We've done a lot based on gut feel, but nothing speaks louder than simple, clear data. We use Salesforce.com for CRM and Desk.com for Customer support, creating simple scenario models. With that said – plan less and do more. Connect with me on Twitter if anybody is interested to learn more [@johnsjolund](#) and [@timesulin](#).

Thanks John!

You can read more about Timesulin [here](#), or visit the Timesulin website [here](#).