



SÉBASTIEN DELETAILLE

The art of tech entrepreneurship



Rainer Maria Rilke wrote: "That something is difficult must be one more reason for us to do it." That could serve as a fitting illustration for the career of Sébastien Deletaille. Former CEO of Riaktr, a star of the Belgian tech world, this engineer with inexhaustible energy is back in action, at the helm of Medispring.

CV Express

2007

Sébastien Deletaille is awarded a degree in Management Engineering from SBS-EM summa cum laude.

2007-2009

Initial post as a consultant at McKinsey & Company, where he goes on to become a junior associate.

2009-2018

Accompanied by Loïc Jacobs van Merlen, he founds Real Impact Analytics, a start-up specialising in big data. In 2017 the scale-up pivots to become a product company, which is named Riaktr.

2019

After resigning as CEO of Riaktr, he takes on a new adventure in e-health, as head of Medispring. It is a new organisation, structured as a cooperative involving GPs, which aims to revolutionise computerised medical records.

It was not by chance that Sébastien came to SBS-EM in the autumn of 2002. Even in his final year at school, this young man was feeling the beginnings of a taste for entrepreneurial adventure. "I had started up a mini-business in the last year," he remembers. "A course in management engineering seemed perfect to continue along that track." For a young man whose parents love antiques and whose father was also head of one of Belgium's four motorcycle companies, it turned out to be the right choice. "It was a great time! It is unbelievable how much I learned and the experiences I had, such as co-founding the Entrepreneur Circle at ULB. Not forgetting some memorable encounters, particularly with some of the lecturers who inspired me to continue along my chosen path." It was also during his studies at the University that he became friends with Loïc Jacobs van Merlen, his future brother in arms at Real Impact Analytics.

Promotion and resignation

Initially he adopted quite a classic approach. He chose to start working for consultancy giant McKinsey. It was a brief but nonetheless formative experience. "I acquired skills, learned to communicate with CEOs and met some extraordinary individuals. It was a rich, complex and highly varied opportunity. For example I went from phosphate, bauxite and gold mines in Saudi Arabia to providing strategic support to help the Belgian Olympic Committee win more gold medals." Sébastien found that the environment suited him perfectly and was given a great promotion... but chose that moment to resign! "I enjoyed those two years a lot, but deep down I wanted to be an entrepreneur, not a consultant." Guided by his passion, he moved off at a tangent ... closely followed by Loïc.

"We had wanna be entrepreneur syndrome to some extent, because we didn't know what project to focus on."



“ BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR IS MAINLY ABOUT **GETTING UP AGAIN AFTER A SETBACK** ”

Text: Nelson Garcia Sequeira
Pictures: Laetizia Bazzoni

The big jump

With three ideas in mind and € 10,000 to spend, the two friends decided to take the plunge and create an operational start-up. "We had wanted to be entrepreneur syndrome to some extent, because we didn't know what project to focus on," he says. "But resigning from your job gives you the urgency and energy you need to succeed." As they started "fishing" for success, they got a bite with one of their ideas. These were the first steps towards Real Impact Analytics. "One of my assignments at McKinsey involved creating Excel models for telecom operators in Côte d'Ivoire. So why not replicate this geomarketing software in other African countries?" From Liberia to Guinea-Bissau, the friends travelled through West Africa offering their services. They sniffed out one big fish: the beginning of the big data wave, which has now become a tsunami. "At the beginning it was a bit of a lucky break, but we realised the huge amount of data that telcos had. It was an unexploited gold mine!"

A great story

Real Impact Analytics became a synonym for success. The company became a leader in the Belgian tech world under Sébastien's attentive leadership. "Starting your own business, growing fast, raising funds from venture capitalists, passing the 130 employee mark. The less good times were memorable too, like when we lost two million euros in the 2016 Brazilian political crisis ... That was quite a unique experience!" The adventure meant a longer and more complex transformation than they had expected. The aim? Scaling up from

- ▶ Ingest 2007
- ▶ CEO of Medispring



services to a product company. "Changing the nature of a business is a risky decision. We certainly underestimated the size of the pivot that would be involved, both operationally and commercially. But we managed it!" In 2017, after three years of hard work, 90% of the company's contracts had been transferred to a recurring income system. This success was celebrated by rebranding the organisation, which became: Riaktr.

Turning the page

In late 2018 the small world of big data was hit by a storm: Sébastien Deletaille left his post as CEO. This outcome had become inevitable... "In reality it was a non-event, but I accepted my responsibility for the sake of Riaktr's long-term future," he explains. "There was an increasing divergence from the company's investors. We just didn't agree any more... It's as simple as that." He bowed out, but not before appointing his successor: "That allowed me to leave with a clear conscience." He ended this chapter without bitterness, but it cannot be doubted that this success story has formed his vision. "Being an entrepreneur is not just about →

HERITAGE: from art to entomology

Being a child of parents who love antiques, Sébastien grew up surrounded by beautiful objects.

This setting has given him a taste for art. "That is one of the most beautiful gifts they gave me. When you have the opportunity to look closely at works of art which are 3,000 years old, it cannot leave you untouched."

Also inherited from his family: entomology. "We regularly travelled to Latin America to hunt for butterflies in the heart of the tropical rainforest." In this way, collecting insects became a passion for the whole family. "I still travel today whenever I can: I have visited almost a hundred countries."

My love of nature and the wonders of the arts: these are two inexhaustible sources of creativity. "These trips have opened my eyes to history, geography, colours etc. Travel is also an excellent way of stepping back and getting things in perspective."



“OUR SOFTWARE HAS TO PERFORM TEN TIMES BETTER THAN THE COMPETITION’S PRODUCT”



starting something; it is mainly about getting up again after a setback." Overcoming challenges and enjoying the good times. "In the end it is a human adventure above all! An entrepreneur is just a spark: a person who can identify a good deal. After that he needs to surround himself with competent teams and make progress together."

A blank sheet

After a few months of reflection, Sébastien got back in the saddle quite quickly. This time he set his sights on Medispring, a new e-health organisation. "It's great to launch into a new and completely fresh adventure, with ambitions to grow." Another factor here is that this is a sector that is close to his heart. "That is the icing on the cake. Our aim is to reinvent the computerised medical record," he says enthusiastically. It is clear to him that the conditions for this project are perfect. Although he was delighted with its cooperative dimension (it is run by and for GPs), Sébastien identified that the organisation had disruptive technology potential. "The challenge is incredible: this is one of the rare areas where there is a chance to reinvent everything in a digital form. There is room here to create a European tech champion. It is a huge market, with extensive opportunities for growth and vulnerable competitors."

Revolutionising e-health

The company has raised more than a million euros and its turnover is more than one and a half million euros, but that still leaves plenty for the new CEO to aim for. However, this young man does not conceal his ambitions to anchor health technology around the

family doctor. "Everything still remains to be built in this sector, mostly because the existing solutions are obsolete. We want to be the first tech company to get ahead without commercial representatives. Our software has to perform ten times better than the competition's product. Once we are well established in Belgium, the sky is the limit!" He has also found this experience stimulating in organisational terms. "The cooperative approach is an alternative to the existing financing and governance models. We also have a responsibility to prove that it can be done in a different way ... with users as the shareholders in their own technological future."

Will this be another success? "I'll let you know in five years," he concludes with a smile. We look forward to finding out.■

If you'd like to suggest an alumnus or alumna or present your project in this section, write to us at sbs-em@elixis.be.

HIS WORK on the IAB

Since November 2018, Sébastien Deletaille has also been a member of the International Advisory Board (IAB) of SBS-EM. The engineer takes this role very seriously. "It is an honour to give something to the institution where I was trained. My contribution involves bringing the atmosphere of the digital revolution into the University's strategic thinking."

The CEO of Medispring is aware of the challenges we face in the present, together with a clear view of the needs of tomorrow. "Formal lectures are a thing of the past. So is the idea of a "fixed" degree. Study is evolving and becoming more interactive, with lifelong learning. We are on the right track at Solvay, but that means getting the whole community involved, particularly older people. Their support is vital, whether that means giving their time, offering advice or making micro-donations!" The appeal has been launched...