

# Treadmill for fish is an export success

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Danish marine biologist left the world of university bureaucracy and started a niche company developing fish respirometers. His past in the field of research has led the company to international success.

It all started with a kind of treadmill for fish, built in a small garage business in Aalborg, Denmark, back in 2002.

Today, the respirometers for fish have become more than a full-time job for marine biologist Jannik Herskin and his three employees.

Herskin points to his research background as he explains how his company manages to compete on an international level.

With his employees also having experience in marine biological research, they all draw on their experience from previous laboratory work.

"We know the technology, and we also know the research which the technology is going to be used for. It is a rare and good combination," says Herskin.

## **It started with a treadmill for fish**

The company, 'Loligo Systems', develops equipment for the study of fish physiology.

The data from the equipment is used by researchers who, for instance, study the world's fish stocks, the migration patterns of fish, or how climate changes affect marine life.

One of the things the company has developed is a so-called 'swim tunnel' that essentially functions as a treadmill for fish.

The current in the tunnel forces the fish to move. Meanwhile, the equipment measures the movements of the fish either through sensors or video surveillance.

This way, it is possible to determine how fish react to different temperatures, how fast they can swim and how much energy they use when swimming from one place to another.

The swimming tunnel is just one of many products the company has developed.

"We have developed equipment for measuring everything from small larvae to large sharks. And our product solutions are never the same, since we always adapt the products to the needs of the individual research project," says Herskin.

In addition to the customised products, software and consulting is a big part of the company's services, and this combination is what makes the company internationally competitive.

### Consultation is exportable

94 percent of production from Loligo Systems is exported.

The U.S. and Canada, where the major universities can finance specialised equipment, take the largest share of the exports.

Another third of exports goes to Australia and Asia. Sales are especially increasing in China, which has led to the company now hiring a representative employee there.

"The Chinese do not import much in general, so the big interest in importing our products comes as a bit of a surprise. But our products seem to sell well in China."

The Chinese interest probably comes because the company sells specialised knowledge, and also because China is currently focusing a lot of its investment on research.

### Doesn't miss life as a researcher

Jannik Herskin has dreamed of becoming a marine biologist since he was 12 years old.

He wrote his Master's thesis at the marine biological laboratory in Helsingør, Denmark.

But despite his persistent attitude and his strong résumé, the chance of finding a research position at a university was slim to none. Life as a researcher was a constant battle for positions and funding.

In the temporary research positions he did have, most of his time was spent doing things unrelated to research, and grants were not always given to the ideas with the most potential, he felt.

It was admittedly a bit of an accident that respirometers would end up as Herskin's livelihood, but life as a self-employed person suits the former researcher well.

Herskin believes his change of carrier was, by and large, made possible by the support system for entrepreneurs at Aalborg University.

"I was teased by my colleagues because I was one of the only one who did not have a VAT registered company on the side. The environment at Aalborg University inspired me to test out my ideas as an entrepreneur," he says.

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