



## **Winning the SME Grand Slam – Is it Possible?**

*Yes, if you have the right business idea, you can go all the way! Piql, a Norwegian technology company, is among the top 2% of Europe's innovation-driven companies and has received grants from the three major EU funding programmes: SME Instrument Phase 2, Eurostars-2 and Fast Track to Innovation. It is a fantastic achievement and probably one of the only SMEs that have accomplished this.*

*As Piql also holds the all-time Nordic Innovators' Record, we are eager to learn more from the founder and CEO of the company, Rune Bjerkestrand.*

### **1. What has been the driving force behind Piql?**

Before we started to develop Piql Services, we only saw expensive, risky and short-term digital solutions on how to preserve data. We thought that there must be a better solution, at least a long-term one. Therefore, we realised that we had to completely rethink data storage and make a paradigm shift in how to store data for long periods.

As we all know, the world is becoming more and more digital, with a growth of 40% per year. Moreover, we see constant tech upgrades and the impermanent nature of digital information. This means that data is not only at risk of being lost but also risks its authenticity being compromised.

So, our driving force is to ensure future access to today's digital data with storage technology that can last the test of time.

## **2. What are the biggest challenges you faced or are facing?**

We started in 2002 with a vision to “bridge the gap between the digital and analogue world in the motion picture industry.” The market opportunity was that more movies were shot and produced digitally, whilst there were still cinemas that only projected 35 mm analogue film.

Piql’s ambitions may have seemed a bit over the top at the time, coming from a country with no track-record from the motion picture industry. Yet, the company managed to revolutionise the way the film industry prints its movies. The digital film recorder Cinevator® printed movies up to 100 times faster than its competitors. We had a great success and sold our technology from Hollywood to Bollywood. At the time, we knew that more and more cinemas were being digitalized and the need for our Cinevator would decrease.

In 2007 the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, known as the Oscar awards, published the report “Digital Dilemma,” which addresses the challenges related to securing long-term access to the motion picture industry’s valuable assets: the movies. The report stated that even recent Hollywood productions worth hundreds of millions of dollars may soon be lost forever as current preservation technologies are incapable of securing future access.

### **New Business Model needed**

Investigating this issue further made it clear that the threat of losing data is not unique for the motion picture industry; the same is faced by all industries and sectors that hold valuable digital data, both in the private and public sectors. A new application of Piql’s expertise in digital imaging was found; securing future access to valuable data by using photosensitive film as a digital storage medium.

Therefore, we changed the focus of the company and found a new business model. The challenges were then of course to raise enough money to support all the needed R&D activities to develop the required technology.

After years of intensive research, development and searching for funding to pursue Piql’s vision, we were almost ready to enter the market with Piql Services. However, one of the biggest challenges were that we had no money to commercialise our services. However, receiving funding from the Horizon 2020 SME Project and the Fast Track to Innovation made it possible.

## **3. When did you realise that the EU funding programmes were an option to get soft funding?**

We had our first Eurostars project back in 2009 when we started the development of the core technology for Piql Services. So, you can say that EU funding has been important during the whole development phase.

## **4. How did you hear about Nordic Innovators?**

Through Innovation Norway, we had actually given up on the idea of Piql succeeding in SME Instrument Phase 2. We had always written our funding applications ourselves with success, but after trying five times for the SME Instrument Phase 2 unsuccessfully, we realised we needed professional help.

### **5. How did Nordic Innovators make a difference to your project?**

With a fresh set of eyes, Nordic Innovators saw our project from a new perspective, asked critical questions and structured the application in a new manner. The consultant made it more to the point and easier to understand the concept of our technology.

### **6. What is the competitive advantage of Piql?**

We use an old technology for a new purpose. It is not about making data easy to access but making sure that it lasts well into the future. Most other storage technologies fail after a few years. None can last longer than a few decades. On the contrary, our technology can last hundreds of years with proven accessibility and reliability. Moreover, it solves problems that have been raised in the past with data stuck on unreadable media.

We have built the technology to be entirely self-contained with instructions visible on the film describing manual extraction. Data stored this way is safe and authentic; key needs in a world where technology moves so quickly and new cyber risks appear every day.

### **7. After winning “the SME Grand Slam” - how is your relationship with EU?**

We are proud of achieving EU’s acknowledgement for our innovation and we have an excellent relationship with our Project Officer. It is amazing to be a part of the European Innovation Council family and be invited to events and exhibitions where we meet other innovative companies and potential investors. This funding has opened a new world for us!

### **8. What are your recommendations for other SMEs implementing their EU project?**

Be practical and do what is best for your company. Also, keep in mind that all the project reporting should be for your own benefit and not written just to fulfil EU requirements.

### **9. If we see into the future of Piql – what lies next?**

We are so eager to start the Pilot Testing in our Horizon 2020 projects and we have produced ten new piqlReaders that soon will start their world tour to clients all over the world.

Lately, we have entered into several collaborations to preserve data, e.g. with “Riksarkivet (the National Health Archive of Norway) to deliver the first digital preservation project of its kind. The exciting thing about this project is the implications it has for how we think and manage historical health data globally. This project will allow the re-use and maximizing of the benefit this data can provide.

We have also found new ways to meet the needs of our clients with upstream services, broadening our client base and helping earlier on the data storage or preservation journey.

## 10. If you had one piece of advice to start-ups, what would it be?

If you have a great idea and you know there is a market need, never give up pursuing your dream!

### About Piql

Piql is the most trusted and resilient digital preservation provider in the world. The digital data is preserved by printing it, using QR technology (binary code), onto photosensitive piqlFilm. By printing this data to film, it can last for hundreds of years, without the need for migration. At the same time, it is a zero-emission solution.

Piql offers tailored services to a range of sectors including historical and memory, audio visual, private enterprise and government. Piql can store any kind of information – documents, images, sound, film or entire databases – on the same unique digital storage medium. Moreover, Piql also offers storage in the Arctic World Archive, an offline vault deep in an arctic mountain holding precious world memory. The archive ensures the protection of the most sensitive and irreplaceable data for future generations. Growing all the time, the archive holds treasures including The Scream by Edvard Munch, ancient manuscripts from the Vatican Library, and archives from various nations.

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