St John's Innovation Centre Tenant Spotlight:
Challenges and the changing landscape of UX

St John's Innovation Centre, the leading incubator in Europe, had the pleasure of interviewing tenant Leo Poll, President of Akendi UK Limited, exploring UX and how the industry is evolving with the emerging 'Internet of Things'.

What is unique about your business?

Akendi leverages equal parts user experience expertise and creative design excellence. We uncover deep insights about user behaviour, combine this knowledge with inspired creative design, and pragmatically architect the experience to meet your organizational goals.

The results are intentional product and service experiences that enable organisations to increase uptake, engage users, and improve their effectiveness.

How does your business benefit from an Innovation Centre location?

Innovation that doesn't meet user needs will never gain traction. We help create products and services that are not only useful but also usable. Working around other entrepreneurs and growing businesses can only enhance the innovation; as everyone knows that innovation cannot take place in isolation.

If you could offer an entrepreneur one piece of business advice, what would it be?

Get a full grip on user needs first and then create an innovation roadmap to meet those needs with the technology you expect to be available at that moment in time – validated needs are more valuable than patents.

What drew you to the sector you currently work in?

UX is a multi-disciplinary activity and is really about tailoring innovation to end user needs. Technically everything is (almost) possible, making it work for people is where the real challenges are for me.

How do you and your team stay on top of industry trends?

By challenging the status quo through our own media channels (e.g. blog, and participation in relevant events.

How do you distinguish yourself from your competitors?

We pride ourselves on delivering evidence-based design solutions that meet real user and customer needs.

How has your life experience contributed to where you are today?

I graduated from the University of Eindhoven with an M.Sc in information technology followed by a Ph.D. on "Visualising Graphical User Interfaces for blind users". I was then hired by Philips Research to initially work on the UX of mobile phones but gained additional managerial and business development skills as a board member of Research Connectivity board as well as the business manager of a few start-ups. My current role requires broad technical knowledge, UX skills as well as business and managerial skills.

How do you see your industry developing in the next 5 years?

Many companies are acknowledging the importance of UX and the impact of not getting it right on their revenues. This is not limited to just software and websites but, with the advent of the Internet-of-Things, it will increasingly involve physical objects. Connecting all of these in a way that makes sense to the end-user or, in other words, in a way that users can just pick it up and use it is where the challenges are in the real world.

How do you deal with challenges in business?

We deal with them head on. As a business you need to continuously keep an outside view and never stand still. That means that you will increasingly face new challenges in this changing landscape.

Have you ever turned down an opportunity/a client?

Yes and we will in the future. Any client who simply wants us to design something without involvement from the end-user will be turned down, unless there is already a validated piece of user research available that we can base our designs on.

What are your thoughts on crowd funding?

It is a good way of gauging whether your offering is not only useful but also whether people are prepared to put their money into.

Which leaders do you admire and why?

Leaders with charisma who do not need to conduct performance reviews with their staff to know how they are doing.

What would you say to aspiring entrepreneurs who are trying to figure out their motivations and values?

Think about what you want in life and what you want to look back on at the end of your career, don't fall into the trap of wanting to become what your friends/colleagues are. What is right for them is not necessarily right for you.

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