

## Get Together with VirtaMed AG

„We simulate reality“, Dr. Denis Steinemann explained. He and his business partner Dr. Raimundo Sierra reached the expansion phase with their startup VirtaMed. The two founders told us during the Get Together in a cozy atmosphere at the office of Evernote how they had turned their idea into a product and further to a successful business.

„It's a win-win-win situaion“, Denis told us while presenting us their costumer market. With their realistic simulators they have found two different customer types and the patients benefit from every situation. Their goal is to make the training for surgeons on simulators mandatory to shorten their education time and in the meantime to prepare them for their first surgery. Because this is most likely one of those situations where „learning-on-the-job“ is not much of a benefit for every party. "If you go on a flight, you expect the pilot to be educated. The same situation you have with surgeons. Have you ever asked the surgeon before a surgery if she or he has done this before? Well, you should.", Denis explained.

It all began back in 2001 with a simulator project at the NCCR CO-ME of the Swiss National Science Foundation which lasted until 2007. Then they were pushing the idea of making a company out of this. With more and more support they were able to grow. Now they have around 40 employees and have developed 18 different simulators for the medtech industry.

They have two different types of customers, hospitals and industry customers. „We didn't chose one over another.“, Raimundo explained. First, they focused on hospitals. It takes a lot of time because the hospitals need to get first the budget and then the salary system of the surgeons needs to be revised as well. So in this sector it happens in small steps, but it is very important to reach their goal. On the contrary, the industry customers handle with more speed. „We didn't know that this industry existed when we started“, Raimundo explained and added, that it was important because those customers enabled them certain cash flows. With this balance, they can maximize their sales and in the meantime pursue their goal of integrating their simulators in the education of surgeons. „We are able now to grow on our own“, Raimundo added.

„We were really successful until now, but how do you really scale this up?“. VirtaMed is now in a situation where they develop from a successful startup to a „well-oiled engine“. Getting bigger and bigger means of course that everything needs to be more planned

and reported. „We need to face the question of how are we dealing with more planning but at the same time we don't want to lose our agility.“. Communication, planning, technology, quality and capabilities are the soft challenges they face during the change and which every startup need to have in it's mind when they are at this stage.

When their simulators will be integrated in the education of the surgeons, they will face more challenges, among others regulations. Raimundo and Denis hope that when the time comes they will be part of the process and that the regulations won't affect them in a negative way. „We want a regulation but we want to shape it“, Denis added.

There will come some challenging years for VirtaMed and they are only few steps away from reaching their goal. With their success story Denis and Raimundo inspired us and especially fascinated the pioneers at the apéro with the simulator they brought with them.