

"The secret for Spanish companies' development is international export"

In Spain there is talent. The entrepreneur Alicia Asin Perez, just aged 30, is CEO and founding partner of Libelium, a company based in Zaragoza that sells sensors for Smart Cities worldwide. Libelium was established in November 2006 as a spin off from the University of Zaragoza after detecting the need to develop technology capable of monitoring wirelessly any environmental parameter.

From then until now, Libelium has been granted numerous awards by prestigious national and international organisations (the latter, a recognition to innovation in the XIII Young Entrepreneur National Award, offered by the Princes of Asturias) and has positioned itself in the industry as an internationally successful



company. And the fact is that Libelium sells devices in 75 countries and its customer base include among others Acciona, IBM, Boeing, Telefónica and Sony Ericson. The rapid international design of the business vision of this company founded by a group of university students and their active presence in international industry forums is amazing. Alicia combines her work as CEO lecturer in scientific committees at international conferences and has recently joined the faculty of the Columbus business school (USA).

EN. While the market for data acquisition is not new, the implementation of these measures wirelessly indeed is. When and how was this idea born?

AAP: About 10 years we began to hear about what we know as "motes": small battery-operated devices that send sensory data wirelessly. The idea originally emerged in industrial environments, where changing the layout of a factory entails an expensive rewiring of all control devices. The idea began to be "exported" automatically to other scenarios, especially in outdoors environments where deployment of a wired solution is not possible (such as forest fire detection).

EN. Waspnote is a device developed by Libelium that allows to capture and send data to the Internet in real time, supporting the development of smart cities. What is the practical application of this mechanism for the energy industry?

AAP: Applications are many and varied. On the one hand we can act in the field of process optimization. For example, by sending solar panels' performance data through the Internet in order to anticipate when to carry out maintenance actions or even remotely perform meter reading in the houses (known as Smart Grid) enabling a cheaper data acquisition for utilities and a more accurate billing for the user. On the other hand, there are applications aligned with energy saving, as is the case of Smart Lighting which combines ambient and light sensors to know when to turn on or off the streetlights with the consequent energy savings. The same further applies to private households, where their energy consumption can be measured using sensors to check appliances' efficiency and look for savings. Finally, we can also use sensors for energy infrastructures perimeter security control.

EN Why the name Libelium?

AAP: I am asked many times! There is a great relationship between insects and the "motes". In both cases, communication consists of small messages that are relayed along all the swarm (or network in case of wireless sensors). Hence, we wanted to choose an insect name. Choosing the Latin form was meant to allow for a global name without resorting to anglicisms typical of technology firms.

EN Who are Libelium's potential customers?

AAP: systems integrators, consultants, engineering firms and research centers.

In general, we provide technology for third parties to present end customers with solutions.

EN. In 2007, with the financial crisis about to start, the company made a profit of 50,000 euros. Four years later, in 2011, in the throes of recession, it ended the year with revenues of 1,800,000 euros. What were the key elements of your business strategy?

AAP: A great deal of work and hold fast to the initial vision. From the beginning we conceived our product horizontally, sensors that could be used in any sector, and we avoided providing the service to end customers. Many advised us against it, but we are confident our original idea and the time has shown that this was a correct strategy. Moreover, our thinking has always been extremely comprehensive and we have equipped the company from the beginning with all the processes needed to scale it up, which has allowed us to grow.

EN Q: What are Libelium's goals on the short and long term?

AAP: The main goal is to strengthen internationalization. Right now we are selling in 75 countries, but we want to strengthen some markets by increasing the number of distributors and even with our own offices, as is the case in the U.S.

EN Do you think that internationalization is currently the best option for the development of Spanish companies?

AAP: Certainly, and even more in the case of new technologies. Why should you surrender a market share from the beginning when you can embrace the whole? Certainly there are business models and products that are more difficult to export, such as the case of services, but in many cases the first step would simply be to have the web translated into English so that the company can start be reached from anywhere in the world. I would just point out that rather than internationalization, the secret is "global exports"; the more geographic markets are reached, the less dependent one becomes on the vicissitudes of each of them. This is not about leaving Spain because of the crisis and focusing on other market that could well enter recession in a few years ... No one can ensure the markets' stability in the long term.

EN When it comes to starting up a business, is it enough to have a good idea?

AAP Ideas are worthless if they are not put into practice. I would say precisely what is most valuable is the implementation capability; ideas.... we all have them every day, but only a few are capable of turning them into a reality.

