

30 Fabulous Companies of the Year 2020

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An Interview with eSMART Technologies SA Leadership: 'We've Introduced the Latest Technologies in terms of Safety, Comfort, and Energy Efficiency in Homes and Commercial Premises'

The Silicon Review

"We think of the buildings and the everyday lives of people who live or work there and we imagine solutions to make their life easier and help them to take responsible action."

eSMART Technologies SA develops intelligent systems for building automation. It can manage building functions such as heating, lighting, electricity, or videophone systems with a touchscreen in the living room or a smartphone app. The screen can also display the current use of electricity and water in real-time, informing occupants about energy consumption.

This spin-off of the EPFL (Ecole Polytechnique de Lausanne) developed a technology that requires no additional cables and can be integrated effortlessly and cost-effectively into existing buildings.

The company was incorporated in 2009 and is headquartered in Renens, Switzerland.



Fabrizio Lo Conte (CEO), Laurent Fabre (COO), & Jérôme Ramelet (CSO), eSMART Technologies SA Leadership, spoke exclusively to The Silicon Review. Below is an excerpt.

Why was the company set up? And how did you expand your company and its offerings over the years, Mr. Ramelet?

Fabrizio Lo Conte and Laurent Fabre, doctoral students at EPFL at that time, identified that the automatic management of housing, although advanced, was only accessible to new buildings and remained unaffordable. The challenge was to create a technology in building empowerment that is simple, accessible, and fun to use.

They developed a technology that requires no additional cables and can be integrated effortlessly and cost-effectively into existing buildings. The micro-modules mounted directly behind the switches communicate via the existing wiring. Thanks to the easy installation, eSMART has amongst its customers some of the major construction companies and property investors in Switzerland.

We have developed several functions for building automation that we have implemented in our products. Today, eSMART is the leader in the connected and sustainable buildings market in Switzerland with more than 4,000 apartments equipped.

How successful was your first project roll on? Share the experience, Mr. Lo Conte?

The first installation was carried out in 2009 at EPFL, where the spin-off was commissioned to help image the consumption of an entire floor of a building.

The project then made the headlines in the specialist journals and eSMART was contacted by one of the major players in Swiss construction, Losinger-Marazzi, an entity of the multinational Bouygues (133,456 employees in 80 countries).

What challenges did you face in your initial years? What can your peers learn from it, Mr. Fabre?

A lack of confidence on the part of market players due to the youth of our company and lack of experience in the real estate market – were the challenges we faced initially.

We also had difficulties to have a good quality after-sales service, although that has been taken care of. After-sales service should never be underestimated when hardware and key functions are involved

It taught us that customer service is often set aside by entrepreneurs when it is a crucial point in a company.

“Earning trust and respect of consumers all around the world is through consistent focus on delivering high quality in all of our actions.” How do you interpret this statement, Mr. Ramelet?

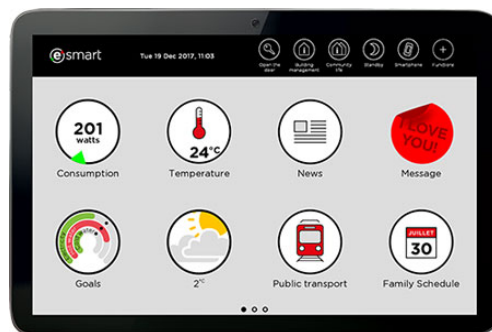
Expanding a company all around the world or becoming the market leader in several countries need focus and perseverance. We're running a marathon, not a sprint. This is the spirit in which we strive to continue forward, it is easy during the good days and necessitates more effort during the tough days.

Fostering a culture of feedback is crucial to the success of every organization. How is this true with your company, Mr. Lo Conte?

Switzerland is a small country where information goes very fast, not maintaining a culture of feedback and leaving dissatisfied customers can be fatal to a company especially for us who have companies as customers.

If our products do not satisfy them, they will no longer do business with us and they will advise us against other companies.

Being the first company in the real-estate market proposing connected apartments, we receive direct feedback from our users and customers, and we address it immediately.



If you have to list five factors that have been/are the biggest asset to your organization, what would they be and why, Mr. Fabre?

Following are the factors that have been the biggest asset to our organization:

- Having been able to hire the right talent,
- Having been close to our customers since day one; we were the young techenthusiasts proposing an innovative solution in a market that had never heard about the solution before,
- Having been at the right place at the right moment with the right product; that can also be seen as luck,
- Trust of our early customers who believed in us and gave us the opportunity to transform our slide deck into a concrete apartment,
- Last but clearly not least, innovation, price, and contest that allowed us to move from a technical prototype to a nice well-running product, among the other such as VentureLab, the FIT, and the Swiss Economic Forum, which have had the biggest impact in our growth.

Customer service varies, but companies can still be successful. How do you maintain your customers' trust and loyalty, Mr. Ramelet?

By having competent people in the customer service and by sending people directly to the field to explain, reassure, and repair

What do you feel are the reasons behind your company's reputation, Mr. Lo Conte?

The reasons behind our company's reputation include an immense commitment of the team, an innovative and revolutionary product mixed with a very healthy and serious corporate culture.

Do you have any new products ready to be launched, Mr. Fabre?

We have just launched a new product, eSMART-hello; it includes the same functionalities as our flagship product but at a lower cost. It uses our application.

Where do you see your company a couple of years from now, Mr. Ramelet?

We see our company as a leader in Europe and expand into different countries and continents. Certainly, partnerships with other actors in our segment will help us grow even more.

Leadership | eSMART Technologies SA

Fabrizio Lo Conte: Fabrizio Lo Conte, **Co-founder**, serves as the **Chief Executive Officer** of eSMART Technologies SA. Fabrizio is an engineer (micro-technology); he is specialized in high-voltage embedded circuits. Fabrizio with his vision and open-mindedness defined the company's guiding principle.

Laurent Fabre: Laurent Fabre, **Co-founder**, serves as the **Chief Operating Officer** of eSMART Technologies SA. Laurent is an engineer (micro-technology); he is specialized in smart grid technologies. He organizes and structures the product offer.



Jérôme Ramelet: Jérôme Ramelet, **Commercial Director**, serves as the **Chief Strategy Officer** of eSMART Technologies SA. Jérôme is an engineer (electronics); he is specialized in industrial and building automation. He defines and applies the commercial strategy to the company's customers.



"We develop intelligent management systems for your home or workplace. Available locally or remotely, they give you the opportunity to know where, when and how you consume energy and provide the tools to reduce it."

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