

Wearables need a makeover: Interview with Dmitriy Poltavtsev, Smartline founder

Swarovski professional turned entrepreneur Dmitriy Poltavtsev wants to make wearables fit in with peoples' daily lives. He's created Smartline for those who want to live consciously, but aren't keen on FitBits, Apple Watches and other more bulky pieces of kit.

Once confined to the safe and exacting hands of artisans, jewellery now boasts a £315B market – and a production process to match this. Though nowadays made via 3D modelling and printing, and mass manufacture, a bracelet or necklace remains a treasured and unique gift.

As the wearables industry – now itself worth £20B – shifts away from sports and towards everyday life, it's looking to the jewellery world for advice. As evidenced by the titanium AppleWatch, and the Fossil hybrid watch, for example, style, comfort and sustainability are becoming crucial.

Dmitriy Poltavtsev helped several jewellery manufacturers adopt new technologies in a former role at Swarovski – before streamlining B2B and B2C operations as part of its European management team. Now, he's founded Smartline, which provides elegant jewellery with integrated health-tracking technology.

I spoke to Dmitriy about why people are starting to track all aspects of their health – from blood pressure and sleep quality to calorie intake – rather than just exercise, and why the smart bracelet might be about to take over from the smartwatch.

[Maddyness] Tell us what Smartline does and how it came about in your own words. Did you have expertise and experience in the field you chose?

[Dmitriy] I studied IT and Mechanical Engineering at university, coming up with a software solution to jewellery procurement, and thus helping shift jewellery brands from being ‘artisan’ to something scalable, before joining the team at Swarovski.

Over the course of my nine years in jewellery, I operated at the cross section of jewellery and technology – mastering disciplines like 3D printing, CAD-design, micro-precision manufacturing, data analytics, and so on.

Eventually, noting the exponential growth of the market and feeling the effects of a sedentary lifestyle myself, I became interested in wearable technology. I found the concept of activity tracking fascinating but – coming from Swarovski – thought plastic trackers looked a bit weird when paired with nice shirts and dresses! I figured creating an elegant bracelet, packed with useful sensor tech, would allow me to fully leverage all my previous skills and experiences.

Smartline was founded in 2017, at a time when other wearable solutions were primarily focusing on sports and workouts – not really on lifestyle or health beyond exercise itself. Based on market research, we decided to create a health companion for every daily situation – rather than just workouts – to match the wearability and aesthetic attraction of a piece of jewellery.

Three years later, Smartline has a revolutionary, now patented, technology to combine jewellery metals and wearable electronics and is preparing to release the most elegant and comfortable everyday health companion out there. It’s a health tracker with a slim, elegant and minimalist look and feel. It can collect accurate and detailed activity and health vitals data – from steps and active minutes to resting heart rate and temperature – before providing meaningful insights. There is no compromise on accuracy, style or comfort.

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Why have we moved away from just tracking exercise and towards tracking other aspects of our lives? How do wearables need to evolve?

Non-invasive sensor technology has come on leaps and bounds; it is now capable of measuring ECG, resting heart rate and even oxygen levels with high degree of precision.

We know that changing behavioural patterns is often the best way to prevent various ailments – and tech can really help us do this. High-quality lifestyle recommendations are now readily available, and – as healthcare itself becomes more remote – I think we will see deeper integration of health and wellbeing wearables and apps into a wider digital health ecosystem.

People want to feel in charge of their health – and the amount of personalisation, diagnostics and recommendations now offered by wearables helps them get there.

More recently – COVID-19 marked a really big shift; so many more people are being conscious about their health and aspiring to healthier lifestyles. They are searching for ways to be active during the day, and to maintain a good daily routine, even if they can't make it to the gym.

In order to get a complete and accurate picture of one's state of health and

habits, the health and activity data needs to be collected not only during the short period of exercise, but continuously throughout the day and night.

Thus, the requirements to the technology and design and comfort of the devices are changing. To put it simply, you want to wear something that's very comfortable, ideally 24/7 'wear and forget' levels of comfort.

At the moment, the health wearables market is stuck with the watch form – which is big, bulky not comfortable for continuous day and night use. Many people don't wear watches at all. There is now the option to buy various metal covers or straps for classic workout trackers to hide silicone/rubber as much as possible, but this means compromising on connectivity and sensor performance. I think we need a solution that balances attractive design, comfort and sensor/data accuracy.

In 2018, you won a place at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas. Tell us about how you got there and what it meant for Smartline.

We first showcased our concept to the public at CES. We were ranked in the top 8% of all accessory category catalogue views and received a huge amount of interest from trade partners everywhere from Europe and the USA to China and Japan.

It was so great to be there, surrounded by the world's most innovative startups; it provided a real boost to our motivation to work harder on going from concept to MVP. Later in 2018, we won a substantial proof-of-concept grant in the Netherlands and largely remained in a semi-stealth mode developing our product from the concept/raw invention to MVP.

We also showed prototypes to trade at VicenzaOro, Basel Watch Fair and other places. Interestingly, in Basel – a space traditionally dedicated uniquely to high-end watches – we saw plenty of smart watches and hybrid high-end watches. Even Samsung was there, which would have been unthinkable for Basel in the past! This provided further confirmation that the traditional jewellery/watch sectors and the wearable/high tech sectors are converging.

Style doesn't feel intuitively like a key part of healthcare, but are there ways in which it is?

It might not sound intuitive, but throughout history people have looked for healing properties in stones, metals and other elements. While we obviously take a more scientific, data-based approach (!), we're all about merging science and creativity into one solution.

Jewellery technology and stylish design is a real enabler: people want to wear our devices for longer, and their health benefits accordingly. Correct and continuous wear gives us reliable data, which translates to more accurate insights and actionable personalised recommendations.

The 'Prioritise your Life' aspect of the app suggests you see potential mental/physical health impacts coming from constant connectivity and, for example, social media notifications. Why specifically?

This is an interesting one - we discovered that 40% of our customer base looking to convert from Apple Watch or FitBit devices have switched off the notifications on their smartwatch, because they found them annoying or distracting.

There is a lot of research on how constant notifications can disrupt concentration. More and more people are starting to prioritise authentic communication, feeling the need to disconnect from the busy world for time with loved ones or deep and productive work.

Because of this, and in line with our philosophy of minimalism, the Smartline bracelet allows users to

set simple notification filters. They can make sure they get truly urgent notifications on their wrist, but leave the rest for later.

We call this feature 'Controlled Do Not Disturb' – meaning that if you put your phone on silent no notifications will disturb you unless they are truly urgent. We see this to be a working solution for those who want to disconnect for meditation (for example), but are afraid to miss some kind of a very urgent and important notification. This gives peace of mind; people can disconnect, but remain in control.

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