Open Robotica launches, aims to ease robotics software development
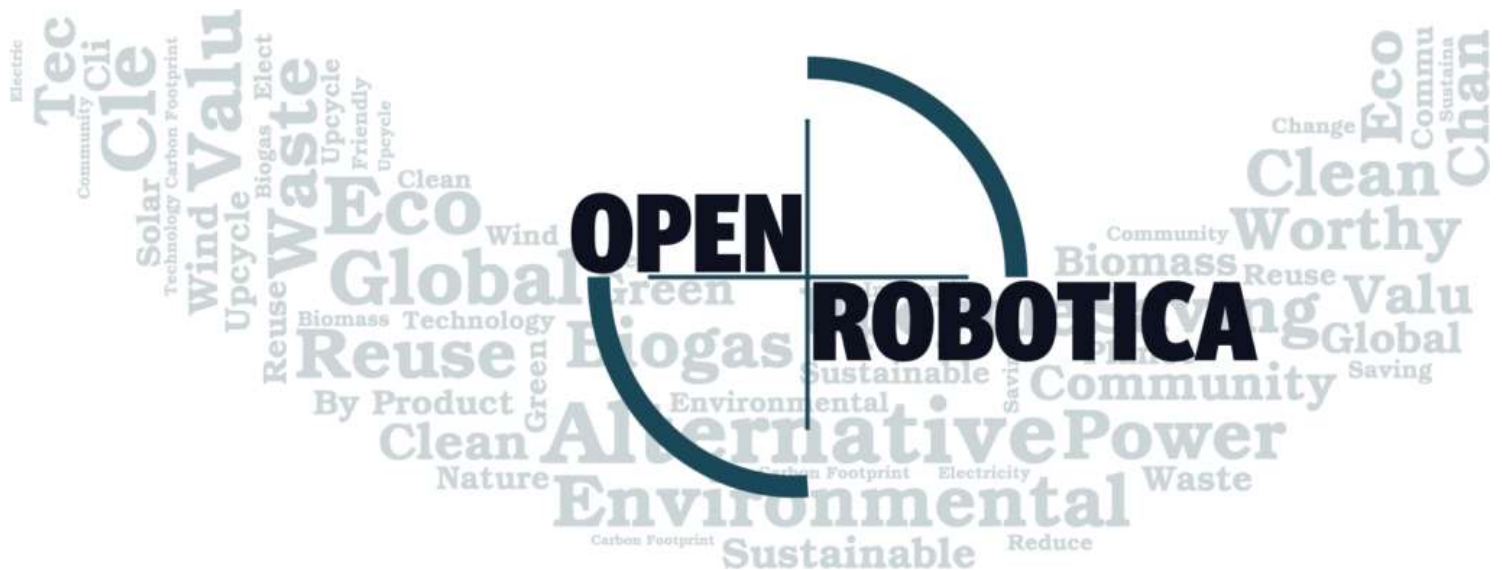
By Eugene Demaitre | September 11, 2019

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"Industrial production with a more organic/randomized settings, such as food manufacturing, agriculture, warehouses or waste sorting, are either over served or non-consuming verticals with early stage robotics solution having high risk, investment cost and utilization complexity," said **Open Robotica** on **its Facebook page**. "This results in very low, single-digit automation rates and manual labor being the primary challenged workforce. Hereby creating a blue ocean for disruptive, cost-efficient and accessible solutions."

Learning from Blue Workforce

Blue Workforce made the Ragnar collaborative robot. In April, the company **filed for bankruptcy** after it failed to find financing. However, gripper maker **OnRobot A/S picked up its assets and employees**, demonstrating the resilience of the **still-growing** Danish robotics community.

Hjornet also previously worked at Adept Technology, which **Omron Corp. acquired** in 2015. He posted the following to LinkedIn:

Preben Hjørnet   in
Senior Advisory @ openROBOTICA
3mo · Edited

#openrobotitica , we are happy to announce officially that we are alive (again) .We are moing into GROWALL startup hotel in the center of Aalborg as of 3. september. And yes we bring a coffie machine and you are always welcome to come see us. Wish us well , we have an important mission...

The Robot Report asked Hjornet about the business model, technical goals, and prospects for Open Robotica, and here are his responses (edited for length and clarity):

Hjornet: For years, the intensive though scattered community activity around **open robotics** has been **a trend** we have followed with great interest. Industrial robotics has struggled with acceptance because it hasn't been able to break through as an open innovation platform, holding back the much needed reduction of cost and complexity in all phases of the lifecycle.

Preben Hjornet

By analyzing the root causes and fearlessly believing we would take a few chances, we framed a strategy of how to get involved. We hope to catch some traction.

Open Robotica is based on the idea of uniting and connecting different stakeholders and resources in the ecosystem of open robotics. There is so much you could dive into here, but we have narrowed down our focus within a space where we have tight relationships and obtained critical insights.

Further down the road, we hope to attract teams with complimentary domain/technology excellence to harness synergetic value of the shared and accumulated assert base.

How much of its "DNA" in concept or technology does Open Robotica share with Blue Workforce?

Hjornet: Surely, the experiences we have gained throughout the years working with the platform around the portfolio of Blue Workforce have been valuable and leveraged in our framework.

It's still our belief that rather than isolate yourself in a closed, proprietary product, service, or technology base, you gain manifold by sharing in an orderly fashion governed by natural incentive instruments. We had a similar product philosophy at Blue Workforce, but here we need to restructure our asset base and market position.

Within Open Robotica, you should not expect to see hard assets like the robot and **gripper** hardware. Open Robotica is much more a service-oriented company.

Open Robotica and open source

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Hjornet: We are keen on making an impact, and nothing beats a real-life showcase. Though we have a pretty solid picture of where we are heading and with what vehicles we should move forward, we have distilled down a handful of things we will bring on first. We are still a couple of months away before we can present them. I can say this much … it's within the food and agriculture robotics space.

On another dimension, we are looking at a way to connect talented contributors who are looking for a more free lifestyle than the classic employer/employee paradigm. Inspired by other value networks, I see an opportunity to offer a more attractive alternative for them to be empowered and still have an attractive way to support their lifestyle and proudly contribute to problem solving that matters to them.

Are you working with ROS and the open-source community on software development for robots?

Hjornet: We are crawling ashore after a big personal hit by the traumatic downfall of Blue Workforce. One of our key activities is to recapture relationships with a selected subset within the core of open robotics including ROS. But we're also looking at adjacent communities that are highly relevant for robotics, such as AI and IoT and the associated middleware platforms and frameworks.

The deep dives we made also exposed us to a scarily complex and dynamic technology stack that needs to be stitched together into a viable and maintainable product. Not all of it is at the same level of maturity, but in fact, there is a lot you can take on. For me, it has been an exciting exercise to explore around and map.

to fast-forward this transition.

Company goals

There isn't yet a mission statement on Open Robotica's website — can you summarize it?
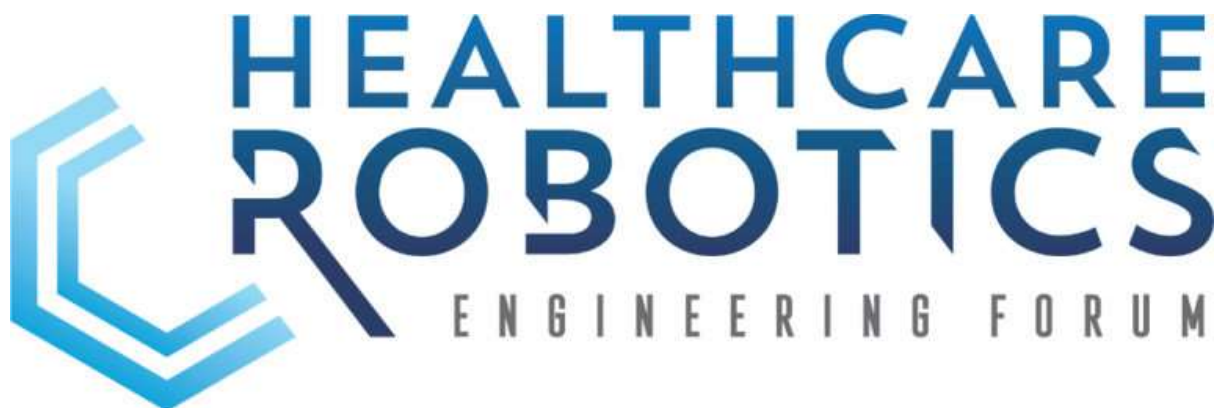
Hjornet: "Democratizing robotics through a best-in-class shared-service robotics offering and service program." That is the shortest, fastest, and most solid and cost-efficient route to job fulfillment.

Do you have any customers lined up?

Hjornet: Yes, a handful, and we are now open for business.

Do you have investors, and are you looking for funding?

Hjornet: We are open to funding. We foresee different kinds of opportunities, including crowdfunding and others. But we are looking for equity-equivalent opportunities, too. We have not yet taken on any funding, but as you may expect, it's on the agenda.

The Robot Report is launching the **Healthcare Robotics Engineering Forum**, which will be on Dec. 9-10 in Santa Clara, Calif. The conference and expo will focus on improving the design, development and manufacture of next-