

DECATHLON – SPORT FOR ALL, ALL FOR SPORT

vision by Gavin Griffiths

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Decathlon is one of the world's most recognised sports retailers with approximately 90,000 employees across 29+ countries, and as I understand in being from the United Kingdom where over 40 stores have now opened, this appeal is only strengthening! As an adventurous, adrenaline-seeking, part-time athlete, I have personally looked to Decathlon for essential equipment in many challenges, from running a crazy series of marathons – such as last year completing 25 marathons in 1 month circulating the UK, or in 2013 running 900 miles from John O'Groats to Land's End – to cycling over the Alps in 2015, trekking around Mt Hekla in Iceland, and camping out in the rainforests of East Africa.

A key message of Decathlon, which as a patient advocate living with the autoimmune condition type 1 diabetes draws my interest, is the tag-line: 'SPORT FOR ALL, ALL FOR SPORT.' And so, as someone who was not allowed to participate in school sports days until Year 9, age 13, through the unnecessary fears for my health, who was told, aged 8 post-diagnosis, my dreams in sport – particularly in playing football as an unfortunate Crystal Palace supporter – were over, as continuing could bring "significant risks" to my health, I write this vision to you through the belief that your brands & growing platform at Decathlon host major potentials to generate positive, impactful, grassroots change for many around the world.



From the background of world health and diabetes care, 'diabetes' as a whole (all types of it) and its prevalence is a global typhoon of devastation, impacting every country's national

health budgets (**causing at least USD \$730 billion dollars in health expenditure in 2017**), and more closely, the lives not only of those diagnosed but every connected family too. Statistically the total estimated number of people living with diabetes according to the *World Health Organisation* (WHO) **has risen from 108 million people in 1980 to 422 million people in 2014**. It is now believed there's over 450 million people living with diabetes worldwide & this growing figure is estimated by the *International Diabetes Federation* (IDF) to reach 629 million people by 2045, if not before. In addition, again from IDF sources, an estimated 350 million people were living undiagnosed with t2 diabetes in 2017. **Diabetes caused over 4 million deaths** that year, a figure which continues to advance.

Is encouraging more sport and exercise an answer? I believe to an extent, yes – but in a diverse number of ways! There are different types of diabetes, even type 2 itself has multiple reasons for diagnosis, from obesity (as we hear a lot of in the media) to age, ethnicity & genetics. Type 2 is where the body is unable to use insulin as well as it naturally should, 'insulin resistance,' whereas type 1 occurs when the body's own immune system mistakenly attacks & destroys all the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas, meaning there is no insulin production and the patient therefore has to calculate every detail of every meal to insert their own insulin & effectively survive. It goes without saying that being more active in life has health benefits; the fitter one can be, even the smaller decisions such as opting to walk or ride a bike to work over driving each day, can go a long way towards reducing prevalence in key forms of type 2 diabetes. Coming from the perspective of a type 1 diabetic, whilst there were plenty of initial short-term 'fears' for my health when it came to sports, for hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar levels) can potentially happen, what I know is that the more active I am, the easier my daily management becomes with diabetes – I find

when in good shape, training regularly, I need less units of ‘basal’ (background acting) insulin, my body responds better, my long-term hba1c% improves in my 3-6 month check-ups. Activity can be a key! And it is not only for those with any type of diabetes, but for all medical conditions, for overall better health and greater prevention of some chronic diseases.

Last year I lost a dear uncle to cancer. Whilst it is not so easy to write this, I can’t help but feel had he of led a more active lifestyle, the cancer he initially developed may not have been so severe. This again may not apply to all forms of cancer as it is a horrendous condition, however, just like forms of type 2 diabetes, it is known that there is partly a lower risk of getting certain types of cancer if maintaining healthier lifestyles and exercising more frequently, as the *National Cancer Institute* shares.

This brings me to you, Decathlon, a major sports retailer and known brand – in fact owner of at least 20 brands in your stores, reaching out to not just one sport or one style, but diversely across many areas of people’s interests – and people don’t have to be the crazy endurance athletes to go to Decathlon, they can be casual 60-year-old ‘cyclists’ like my dad, or weekend dog-walkers like my cousin. You have the capacity to bring in the many to your stores, of different hobbies and lifestyles, you have a reach which has the potential to keep expanding, and the more it does – and does so stating to the average person “hey, here’s an activity for you, try this, something new,” – the more a platform of empowerment advances to engage people into sports, the better it will be for people’s health all around the world.

Empower being a key word. Your ‘stores’ need to be more than just a ‘store’ or a big warehouse of cool clothes and equipment; your stores need to be the base for change to people’s lives, a source of empowerment to all who enter; a home for those making big steps in their lives, a place to connect fellow ‘athletes’ – and not the “*Nike*” glamorised ‘Cristiano Ronaldo’ fake-idol athletes, but the real people, with real interests, real stories and accomplishments. A Decathlon ‘store’ has the potential to be a Decathlon club, where those training for the

Virgin London Marathon meet and start on a weekly training route together; where those diagnosed or at risk to a chronic disease meet up once a week / month, discuss it together, are not isolated or alone, and take on an active hobby which helps combat it; where those who come into the store to shop find empowerment every weekend, with a local hero sharing their story, their accomplishments.

Furthermore, I feel this ‘real’ approach, this personal connection with people, should be the face of Decathlon, online and across all social media channels too. Not only adverts of ‘normal people’ in categories of different activities, but the gritted faces of sporting passion and accomplishment from the ‘average person’ – the person told they cannot do this, or do that, yet went the extra mile again and again and again. That, as a type 1 diabetic, interests me; that as a human being interests me – the world lacks this at present. I’m tired of watching over-paid prima-donna’s being idolised in marketing campaigns, quite frankly!

Whilst Decathlon ‘Stores’ could grow as bases for diverse Decathlon ‘Clubs,’ I also believe they have the potential to form into ideal bases for education stations. Hosting open sessions for people to attend, ranging from shared advice and question & answers on sports nutrition, to hosting diabetes group meet ups – I run active ‘clinics’ myself, where team insulin has to breakdown team carbohydrates in games & the practical style of learning always is well received by people of all age groups – cancer group meet ups, building families and connecting people through the power of sport, sport for all, all for sport!



2015 post before cycling 1500km over the Alps, age 24: “you know what, in 5 years I’ll have my sports brand on the shelves in there.”

theidiathlete Liked by kaylie_in_the_sky and 14 others
theidiathlete I've raided Decathlon. Now to go and cycle 1500km next week in the #mHealthGrandTour2015
You know what, within 5 years time I'll have my sports brand on the shelves in there :)
25 Aug 2015