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Frode Weium

The Timex Formula: Joakim Lehmkuhl, Scientific Management and Timex Watches

In 1942 the Norwegian engineer Joakim Lehmkuhl became president of the Waterbury Clock Company in Connecticut, later known as the U.S. Time Corporation and the Timex Corporation. Lehmkuhl had never seen the inside of a watch. Nevertheless, he made Timex wristwatches a worldwide success. How did that happen? What was the Timex formula?

As a student at MIT and Harvard, Lehmkuhl was introduced to scientific management and modern principles of mass production. In 1920, after returning to Norway, he expressed these ideas in his book *Rational Labour Management*. He also founded the technocratic and anti-socialist party *Fedrelandslaget*. According to Lehmkuhl, rationalization of production had to be paralleled by social reforms. When the Nazis invaded Norway in 1940, he fled the country together with shipowner Thomas Olsen. The two men ended up in the United States, where they took over the nearly bankrupt Waterbury Clock Company.

A Timex advertisement from 1952 characteristically stated that 'American science and production techniques have finally created the first truly modern watch'. Sticking to the same formula, based on assembly line production of inexpensive and solid watches, Lehmkuhl led the company until 1973. He won a reputation as the Henry Ford of the time-keeping industry. Furthermore, new ways of distribution and innovative marketing were among the reasons why the company grew into the world's largest manufacturer of wristwatches. Timex watches were identified with an active and modern lifestyle.

This lecture tells the fascinating story of how Joakim Lehmkuhl and Timex changed the watchmaking industry. It seeks to explore the relations between Lehmkuhl's pre-war ideas and the principles behind the Timex formula.



Dr Frode Weium is a historian and head of collections and exhibitions at the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology in Oslo. He has more than twenty years of curatorial experience. His research has mainly been concerned with the history of music technology, sound recording, and the engineering profession—the latter leading to his interest in Lehmkuhl and Timex. His publications include the book *Material Culture and Electronic Sound* (co-edited with Tim Boon, 2013).

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