

VentureLab Twente Entrepreneurs

2010 volume 2



VENTURELAB
TWENTE

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Foreword



During the last decade, the Netherlands has become increasingly entrepreneurial. Having lagged behind in the past, we have now become one of the frontrunners in Europe. The career dreams of many young people are now focusing less on working for a large firm and more on starting their own businesses.

The ability to cope with the challenges that currently face our society will require more creativity, innovativeness and entrepreneurial spirit. We need an entrepreneurial ecosystem in which our state-of-the-art academic research is more readily translated into economic and societal value.

The University of Twente has a long and rich history of bringing its academic staff and knowledge together with the business community, other research institutions and the financial world. It has been able to shape a climate in which knowledge valorization is accompanied by the stimulation of university spin-offs.

Unfortunately, many university ventures in the Netherlands lack scale and remain relatively small. We must work together to place more emphasis on the importance of shaping the right conditions for rapidly growing ventures (i.e. 'gazelles'). Attracting a higher volume of gazelles is a high priority for the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation, as this type of company creates the greatest added value in terms of employment and, even more importantly, innovation and productivity growth.

By establishing the VentureLab, the University of Twente and its partners have once again demonstrated their ability to shape the right entrepreneurial ecosystem.

I wish all of those involved with VentureLab Twente much success, and I am looking forward to further cooperation and mutual inspiration.

Drs. Rinke Zonneveld

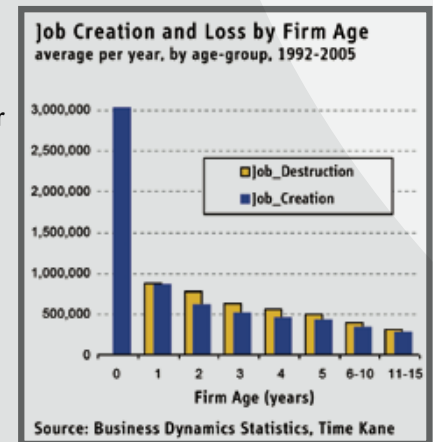
Director of the Entrepreneurship Department
Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation

Message from the Academic Director

In these turbulent times, which are marked by the closing of R&D and/or production units in long-established, large companies in pharmaceuticals (MSD-Organon, Solvay), automotives (Opel) and other industries in the Dutch and Flemish low countries, the role of new innovative enterprises will become even more important for sustainable economic growth. I would like to share a graph that I found in the blog of Norris Krueger (a colleague in entrepreneurship research). The graph was made by Tim Kane and based on US statistics.

The conclusion is clear: start-ups are an important source of job creation! As Krueger observes, the stimulation of growing start-ups is important for creating jobs in our economies. Even though these figures refer to the US, similar mechanisms are likely to be at work within the Dutch economy. Entrepreneurs create jobs!

One of the questions that we investigate in our research on 'entrepreneurship in networks' at NIKOS (Dutch Institute for Knowledge-Intensive Entrepreneurship at the University of Twente) involves how to help more people start businesses successfully. As a knowledge centre, we have conducted several studies to identify factors affecting the growth of spin-off ventures. Many policy measures are oriented towards creating meso-level conditions in which firms can thrive. Examples include cluster policy and the creation of multiple valleys, as stated in the Dutch economic policy. Although these conditions are very important, the main entrepreneurial action involves people, as well as organizations that are 'under construction'. Although they may use these meso-structures, their businesses are built primarily within the micro-networks of the markets in which they work. This requires entrepreneurial competencies.



In VentureLab Twente, we make sure that ambitious starting or growing high-tech entrepreneurs are aware of this necessity. Our weekly monitoring of the entrepreneurs' activities further sharpens our insight into how 'high-tech high-growth' business can be developed and supported.

VentureLab Twente combines the networks, and experience with supporting business development of the University of Twente/NIKOS and Knowledge Centre for Innovation and Enterprise at the Saxion University of Applied Sciences (SKIO). It was designed according to principles based on our academic knowledge and practical experience in implementing enterprise-support programmes. Our programme offers ambitious entrepreneurs and business developers the opportunity to receive training, coaching and expert support in the areas of strategy, technology, finance, organization, marketing and sales, in addition to personal and team skills. Our services also include laboratory facilities and access to national and international networks in the worlds of business, science and finance.

We wish to maintain contact with the alumni of our programme in order to follow their long-term development. This will make it possible to reinforce our insights regarding the growth of high-tech ventures by comparing the growth of VentureLab Twente alumni to that of other ventures.

Prof. dr. Aard J. Groen

Scientific Director of NIKOS and Professor of Innovative Entrepreneurship





Message from the Programme Director

This is the second issue in the series of VentureLab Twente Entrepreneurs.

In this issue, 15 participants proudly present their companies. VentureLab Twente is proud to have contributed to their initial success.

After welcoming the first participants in May 2009, VentureLab Twente has now developed into an innovative environment in which entrepreneurs learn, share and collaborate. Within this environment, their business development processes are accelerated and their chances of success are increased. Most of the participants from the first group (which finished in June) have joined our alumni network. The VentureLab Twente Community now numbers more than 100 participants.

VentureLab Twente is improving itself continuously, with the goal of increasing its value to participants. Our team of business coaches has grown to more than 30. All of our business coaches have relevant business experience or expert knowledge that they want to share. We have started holding training sessions for our coaches to help them improve their skills and to allow better matches with participants. We have also established relationships with several Business Angels Networks, (e.g. *Meesters van de Toekomst* [Masters of the Future]) in order to provide better access to seed capital for our participants.

Every four months, all participants present their progress to experienced business panels. In these sessions, our participants receive valuable feedback from independent panel members while providing valuable data on the process of successful entrepreneurship. Researchers from NIKOS, the Dutch Institute of Knowledge Intensive Entrepreneurship at the University of Twente, have now initiated several research projects, and the results will be published in renowned international journals.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the members of our business panel. The voluntary efforts of these professionals are a major contribution to entrepreneurship and economic growth within our region.

Although VentureLab Twente focuses on entrepreneurs in Overijssel and Gelderland, there is also interest from elsewhere. Because of our Soft Landings International Business Incubator Designation, which we received from the National Business Incubator Association, we have already welcomed two companies from India and Russia. This proves that we are able to attract international attention and that we can help foreign companies to establish themselves in our region, thereby contributing to economic growth. VentureLab Twente also attracts participants from other provinces in the Netherlands. Some participants have already registered their companies in Enschede, and others have established collaborations with the University of Twente or with local companies. We view this as a very positive development, because it replaces the current 'brain drain' with 'brain gain' and the promise of future employment in our region.

VentureLab Twente is realizing its promises. Please take the time to read the stories of the second group of VentureLab Entrepreneurs. You will be hearing more about them in the future!

Dr. Rob van Lambalgen





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‘Accelerated’ light from Twente

NeXT Scan develops technology to use the new generation of production lasers more efficiently. According to director Lars Penning, their solution enables manufacturers of high-quality consumption goods to produce faster at a lower cost. In September the company was linked to the department Applied Laser Technology at the University of Twente, the next step in refining the technology.

The genesis of this three-man company relates to a 20 year track record in the development of laser beam projection on large surfaces at very high speeds. “The technology is a so-called optical scanning solution that can process materials many times faster than equipment available today. This is due to an improved and patented method of laser beam guiding,” Lars explains. The use of NeXT Scan technology results in more throughput and accuracy which benefits the quality and manufacturing cost of for instance LED televisions, laptops and solar cells.

“We focus on business to business and can be found on the innovative side of manufacturing technology. Therefore market and application research was necessary to draft a first product specification. An interested lead user group now feeds detailed information back to us so we can improve and adapt our product. It works to our advantage that the lasers now being introduced to the market opens up a new way of material processing. For that reason we work together with the University of Twente. Sharing material research and scanning knowhow will benefit the development of innovative laser processing.”

NeXT Scan Technology expects to have a prototype ready by the start of 2011. “A big milestone, we can demonstrate the performance to our lead users and continue on the first prototype delivery for the early adopters. The past year we spent a lot of time setting up a strategy to address these customers. VentureLab has played an important role in our approach on how to bring this solution to the market.”

What happens once the company takes off? “The production will be outsourced, there are some excellent companies available. We will see to the final assembly check, marketing and customer support. The first base will be in Enschede, a logical choice due to presence of the Applied Laser Technology department and an ecosystem of high-tech companies.”



www.nextscantechnology.com



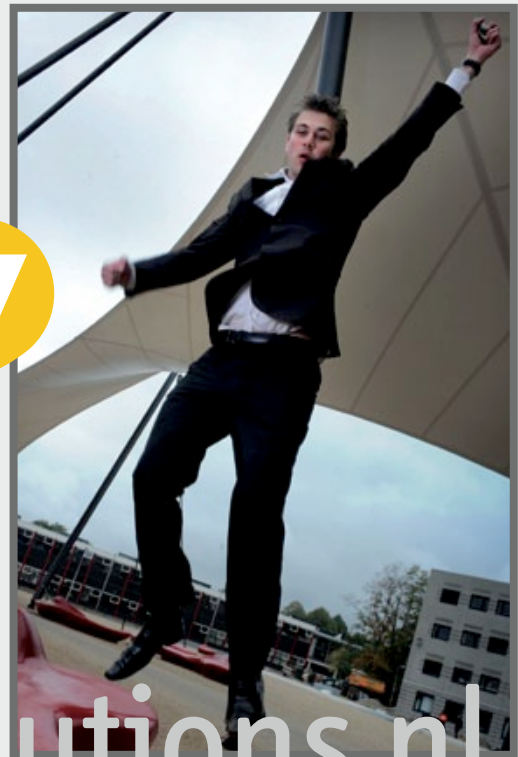
“We organized a meeting on social media as part of the marketing and communication strategy of companies. The announcement was spread through LinkedIn and Twitter. The newspapers got wind of it. The result? Sixty interested entrepreneurs in the room.” Menno Both, who founded the company Both Solutions together with his brother Reinoud, is beaming with pride. It worked. “Social media is a new kind of mouth-to-mouth advertising. We’re moving from mass communication to network communication.”

The brothers’ company helps small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) use social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. The idea behind it is clear: social media is becoming an increasingly important tool for recruiting clients and maintaining client contacts. “If you’re looking for a product or service, from a reliable supplier, rather than asking around as you used to, you now use your network, through social media, asking them where you can find the help you need. As an entrepreneur you know there are great opportunities there. You can generate the market there.”

“In doing so, Both Solutions offers more than just advice”, says Menno. “Advisors are plentiful. It’s driving many entrepreneurs crazy. We offer advice too, but we go further. We help select and maintain the right social media. We process information, filter and pick up signals. Our added value lies in the fact that we do this on location, keeping the lines of communication short. Someone called us ‘the new KPMG’ [professional services firms]. Not a bad ambition, I think.”

As the son of two entrepreneurs, Menno knew he would follow in his parents’ footsteps. After completing his communication sciences/new media study at the University of Twente the time was right. Only: what should be the focus of his entrepreneurial skills? “I spoke with someone who directed my attention to VentureLab. He called it a suitable programme for people who aren’t sure yet what they want to do.” He signed up. By himself, because his brother was still finishing his studies. How did it go?

“At the start I had mainly wild ideas. VentureLab teaches you how to focus. I heard one of the VentureLab speakers lecture on the role and growing importance of social media. Then it dawned on me. The feedback I received at VentureLab helped me in my exploratory journey to an increasingly solid business case.”



www.bothsolutions.nl

Making complex communication very simple



When accidents happen, communication is often the weakest link. Think, for instance, of the fireworks disaster in Enschede (the Netherlands) in 2000, and the New Orleans flood in 2005 caused by hurricane Katrina. And why is that? Because many disaster relief workers and others use their mobile phones to make calls during these situations, resulting in network overload. The Twente Institute for Wireless and Mobile Communications (WMC) has developed the technology that can provide reliable mobile communication in any situation.

“I greatly enjoy providing the customer with simple solutions for a complex problem”, says director Frank Brouwer at the start of the interview; an invitation to ask him to describe his product in simple terms. “Take a situation with a lot of police and disaster relief workers. They communicate with each other using the safety network C2000.

At the same time they use UMTS for mobile data. The police officer talking on his mobile has to compete with someone taking a picture and trying to send it with his mobile at the same time and place. Result: the network is overloaded; end of communication.”

Researcher Sonia Heemstra de Groot continues: “Our equipment automatically establishes the connection. If the network should become overloaded, it switches to satellites. Once UMTS regains capacity, it switches right back. You can also form local networks, and be ensured of a connection.” This is the market’s defining factor. This is the key to preventing communication problems surrounding public order and safety. But it is also of use in the world of transport and logistics and for organizers of large events. Expectations are high. Interested parties include the Dutch Police department, the Department of Justice and the Military, as well as international parties. Worldwide this is a market with a turnover of about five billion euros.

“But we were technicians. To appeal to the market we needed other skills”, Sonia knows. “One issue is the question of funding: we have the product, but this market makes purchases for the long-term. We can use some expertise to respond to this need”, Frank adds. This explains why they registered at VentureLab. The knowledge, expertise and networks there help them launch their product, while WMC, spin-off of the former Ericsson Enschede, can continue focusing on research and development - and turning this into business.



www.ti-wmc.nl

A portrait of Sabih Gerez, a man with a beard and glasses, smiling. He is wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a light blue and white striped shirt. The background is blurred, showing warm, golden light from what appears to be a modern building interior.

Faster hardware design

“Better get ready for a technical story”, says Sabih Gerez with a smile. Using his background as a system engineer and assistant professor he works on software that speeds up the development of hardware. Many companies can take advantage of this, as this simplifies the step from system design to circuit design, and also makes it cheaper. It all sounds rather abstract. “It is”, he agrees. Just like the name of his company: Bibix.

Explanations are in order. Guided by Gerez, a University of Twente graduate once designed a computer-aided tool that speeds up the design process. Recognition of the commercial potential of this tool came this year in the form of a STW Valorisation Grant. “Designing a hardware system is done in steps”, he says. “First the system engineers get to work. They know what the product should be able to do and simulate the model. But they work on a high abstraction level. When they are done, it is the turn of the circuit engineers, who go much more into detail, but also have to redo part of the work of the system engineers in their own language.”

Here the finding proves its worth: it ensures that this translation is done automatically. The design period is shortened, and the costs are reduced. Buyers, he expects, will soon be those companies that design hardware in which the processing of signals plays a large part. The possibilities for application are diverse: radio signals in telecom equipment, radar, image processing in digital copiers or surveillance cameras.

For that reason, he sees great opportunities and is determined to make optimal use of these opportunities.

“VentureLab has helped me. It has given me other ideas. Originally I thought of a consultancy company that works on an hourly basis. Here I learned to think in a more product and market oriented way. It is not about coming up with something yourself, it’s about making what the client wants. This was an important lesson for a technically oriented professional like me. Additionally, you find a community of people here who are in the same playing field, as well as an important network. That motivated me to not chase after assignments right away, but to research what VentureLab had to offer. And that was a lot, as you can see.”



www.bibix.nl

Online training on demand



Suppose you need a short-term training, to learn certain competences. Or you want to give an employee individual education, the sooner the better! Training ToGo, still in its founding stage, will soon cater to this need. “Maximum customization, on demand and affordable. All you need is a laptop with a webcam or an iPad 2.0”, says concept creator Micha van der Zee.

Micha already has his own company: MindClick, aimed at brand name creation, logo design and brand strategy. He also gives workshops and develops better teaching methods. That is where the idea for Training ToGo originated. “As a creative entrepreneur you sometimes need tailor-made education in the short term”, he says. “Imagine you’re a web designer or employ one who needs to learn more about search engine optimization. In such a case, Training ToGo provides a platform that lets you find the right coach online right away.”

The advantages go without saying. Following a training programme from your workplace saves you a great deal of time and costs. You do not have to travel, and the session can start right away. It happens on the spot, using internet and audiovisual technology and a simple payment system. “It is also interesting for trainers. You are available for a certain part of the day and log in. In this way, your service is on demand, letting you generate additional income in a flexible way.”

The new company starts with six trainers. In the following years it will expand to 32, across various knowledge themes. The primary target group is the Dutch creative industry: designers, inventors and artists. “In that sector the need for tailor-made supplementary training is great. In many cases people have developed themselves with a focus on creativity but later on have a need for additional training.”

Micha was once in the same category, which led him to VentureLab. “I wanted to develop myself further in business. It was a great experience. I learned to think in a more structured and commercial way; about the setup and expansion of a company. I hope to have the platform up and running within a year. Or faster, depending on the funding.”



www.trainingtogo.nl



Improved accessibility through speech recognition

You have to speak to Mister X right away. You call his company or organization, but get the message that all the lines are engaged. Frustrating, both for you and for Mister X. With advanced speech recognition technology this obstacle can be easily avoided. "It's a form of innovative service delivery", says Wiljan van Werkhoven, who set up Total Circle together with Wim Speijk.

The company now has a growing clientele. Because the benefits are abundantly clear, according to Wiljan. He mentions the medical sector as an example, where Total Circle is strongly represented. "There are many telephonists working in that sector. Thanks to our speech recognition technology some of them can be redeployed on other work. That's a quick return on investment. And the people in the organization can be reached more quickly."

Many telephone conversations are internal, he goes on to explain. But people who call switchboard operators from within their own offices are keeping them away from the outside line. “When you use speech recognition the callers can say who they are looking for. The system transfers the call automatically, so the telephonist can deal with another outside line. If you do not speak clearly enough, or the quality of the connection is poor, you are automatically transferred to the telephonist. It’s a great product, developed by the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research, TNO.” The service can be purchased as ‘cloud computing’ via the internet, but can also be built into the switchboard in physical form.

Total Circle is currently expanding its services in the direction of ‘unified communication’. “It’s all about communicating as effectively as possible with the customer, and with the customer’s customer. Microsoft and Google have developed capabilities for this, and we will soon be releasing a package with an optimal mix.”

In doing so, Wiljan and Wim are happy to be advised by VentureLab coach Jos Slijkhuis. “We’re learning valuable, practical things from him. He looks at things from a different perspective, and sees things that we don’t see. And we appreciate it that he was prepared to come to our office now and then. We couldn’t take part in all the training sessions. What is more, we had already started our business, so a lot of the information about the start-up phase was less relevant for us. For us it’s more about marketing, sales and product development.”



www.totalcircle.nl



It all begins with thinking outside the box

The development of a new type of self-cleaning textile by his company Agrawal Ecolabs. That's just one of the projects Pramod Agrawal devotes his time to. He is also involved in high-tech fibre and textile consultancy, works as a lecturer at Saxion University of Applied Sciences and holds a Temporary Entrepreneur Position (TOP) at the University of Twente. And all of this is bound up with his drive for innovation. "You have to be able to think outside the box; that's when things get moving", he says.

Pramod's academic career began at Nagpur University in India, where he gained a Bachelor's degree in pharmacy. He stopped with this field of study because at the time India did not have adequate patent legislation for pharmaceutical products. "I can't stand that. I don't want to create bulk, but innovation. That's why I switched to a Master's course in biotechnology at the University of Mumbai." Within that field his interest is mainly in textiles. While carrying out his doctoral research at the University of Twente he already had two patents for cotton processing to his name.

“I can see opportunities here”, he explains. “The sector in Europe is going through a transformation from labour-intensive to knowledge-intensive working. With my background in materials science, biotechnology and chemistry I’m well placed in the market.”

And Pramod has a smart strategy. Thanks to the variety of posts he holds he is, in his own words, at the centre of a vast network of knowledge and organizations. “That way I always stay well informed”, he laughs. He is developing new innovations for a manufacturer of sunblinds, and with his involvement in the field of knowledge and innovation he also contributes to the development of new high technology. “My real ambition is the commercialization and valorization of knowledge. I want to move from high tech consultancy to a concrete product. My focus is on new products, based on ‘smart’ textiles and improved, sustainable processes for the textile industry. I want to have achieved my aim in five years.”

It was with that prospect in view that Pramod, the son of a long-established Indian business dynasty, approached VentureLab. “If you want to develop a new product, you have to know what’s involved. You need a coach to learn things from and share things with, and who teaches you to think from different angles. Only then do you make progress.”



www.ecolabs.nl

Tryvertising: try before you buy



Tryshops. They already exist in other European countries, the United States and Asia. Consumers pay a modest admission fee and get to choose several free products, on the condition that they share their experience with the product later on. A clever way of separating potentially unsellable items from sure successes at an early stage. Wim Faassen wants to introduce this concept in the Netherlands. "After all, we like new and free products as well."

Wim Faassen already explored the market elsewhere in Europe. "I saw a store like this in Spain. People line up there each day. Imagine a store with supermarket products. Visitors pay a small amount and get to choose five products. After that they evaluate those products. This would lead to a wealth of reliable information. Just imagine the significance of such a shop. Every year 800 to 1000 new products are introduced to the market. Only about 20 percent of these survive. A trystore would be a kind of test platform for new products that can be tested by consumers. On the one hand producers save a lot of money; on the other they find out at an early stage whether something will sell or not."

For Wim that is already one of VentureLab's valuable aspects. During his management study at the University of Twente he was a partner and consultant of the student business Pip Advice. "Back then I already knew that I wanted to do innovative entrepreneurship. VentureLab has helped me focus my efforts. It is also an excellent programme for people who don't have a clear idea yet. Even now, VentureLab still gives me much conceptual support."

But how did he come up with this idea? Laughing: "Once you tune in your entrepreneurial antenna, opportunity comes knocking at every corner. I searched the internet and read about 'tryvertising' on Springwise.com. And that's exactly what it is: advertising by letting people try things out. If they are satisfied with the product they will spread the word. I'm now adapting this concept to the Dutch market."

Wim wants to start with an online trystore. In the long term he hopes to expand to ten stores across the Netherlands. "The concept must first prove itself. Later Germany may follow. I am in fact responding to a need: I don't develop products; I offer producers the chance to do valuable objective research. Conventional market research is a lot more costly."



www.trystore.nl



Not just
cold,
but *really*
cold...

It's a small cube of about 15 x 15 x 15 centimetres, with a single on/off button and two connections for cables, and it can cool to extremely low temperatures of around -200 degrees Celsius. Its applications are almost unlimited. "I can confidently say that this product is truly unique in the world", says Pieter-Paul Lerou, director of Kryoz Technologies.

It's a refrigerator, but one that can achieve exceptionally low temperatures, and is also small, durable and highly stable. "There are no moving parts, so there are no vibrations that can influence measurement results", Pieter explains. The technology has existed for some time, but had not yet had any commercial applications. "I developed and optimized a microcooler for my doctoral research. After that I had the idea of putting it on the market, because there is great demand for this technology from a variety of sectors."

Even more demand than Lerou's company will initially serve, in fact. For the time being he will be concentrating on the cooling of infrared sensors, amplifiers, X-ray equipment, magnetometers [sensors that can measure extreme small magnetic fields] and biosensors. "You need to focus, otherwise you don't have a clear view of your market. By making these choices you can continue with the product development. Even so, we are working on a wide range of applications. Now you can use the technology to cool amplifier chips more effectively, but also to carry out medical diagnoses using a magnetometer, or to locate microcracks in aeroplane wings."

As Pieter speaks, his passion for his work is obvious. He confirms this: "My heart lies somewhere between science and the market. I have built up a depth of knowledge about technology and research, but this concrete, practical approach also appeals to me intensely." After gaining his PhD he worked for a telecommunications company in Australia for a year, also in the field of extreme cooling. "During that time it became clearer and clearer to me how great the demand is. All that was needed was for someone to begin producing these devices commercially. I stepped into that gap in the market."

He did this with the help of VentureLab. Pieter laughs: "I'm a nerd. I didn't have a clue about business, market segmentation or positioning. The coaches and mentors here think along with you, and pose sharp, critical questions. You really need that."





Jan Dijkstra was once a VentureLab participant already. Due to a sudden and serious illness he decided to do things differently. With his new company Boost Wellness he wants to contribute to promoting healthy lifestyle in a way that creates new jobs.

Looking back, the period of illness was also a time of serious contemplation. "I was working in IT. It wasn't really my thing, but I did enjoy networking and business development. I'm really a people person." He put these characteristics to good use in his new business. Boost Wellness offers interested parties a personal franchise formula and in doing so represents the companies with Wellness International Network and Juice Plus+. "The latter sells products consisting of pure vegetables and fruit in children's sweets, capsules and shakes," Jan explains. "It's not a magic potion, but it raises your resistance. It restores your metabolism, your body starts functioning better. I noticed myself, as my results indicated a high vitality, even after punctures and radiation."

The idea came into existence naturally. “I thought: I’m going to work with my own health and that of others. Juice Plus+ has attractive marketing characteristics: no prior funding, no stock building. Everything is done through internet, because internet marketing is the new economy.” He even took his plan to social service provider UWV. “You can even use this to help people get back to work. A person who once again gets to take part in society will experience improved health.”

His next wish is to start up a preventative care centre in his place of residence Zwolle. “This should be a place that raises your awareness of lifestyle and the nutrition industry. I’m thinking about information, walk-in hours on prevention and activities for education, in collaboration with care provider Icare and GGD [public health care platform]. Sponsored by Juice Plus+ and the Wellness International Network. Because wellness is a future market, in which networking and the internet will play a large role.”

Jan is clearly enjoying himself. “This is totally my cup of tea. I am once again the captain of my own ship. It gives me so much energy.” Thanks, also, to VentureLab. “It traditionally prepares you for the challenges ahead. They also taught me a lot about new economy and web marketing. This allows me to work on health to the full – my own health and that of others.”



www.boostwellness.nl



Smartphone application for SMEs

A daily message to your clients, received on their smartphones. While larger companies have been using this medium for some time, SMEs have fallen behind, due to the supposed high costs. Now there is a low-cost solution, thanks to Page-A-Day, an application to send announcements and offers in a simple way to a growing circle of smartphone owners. "It looks like a gadget, but it's actually a new marketing tool," says Pierre Wolters of WitWorks.


It's almost too easy. One click on the application icon on the smartphone's display will open Page-A-Day. Through the application, people have access to content provided by SME entrepreneurs. "It's as if there's a portal in your phone, through which you receive information", Pierre explains. "I also call it a shop within a shop. There is a low threshold for information provision. The owner of the smartphone can also save this information or mail it to others, and the necessary application is available as a free download. Serious parties who want to introduce something to the market through iPhone now no longer have to create their own application."

Pierre stresses that this is not just another gadget. “This is a new way for entrepreneurs to contact their clients. You can compare it to social media, which has become a powerful force for mass communication as well. Smartphones provide another perspective in the mobile phone market. iPhone is used for much more than just making phone calls. There are opportunities galore in this field. Thanks to Page-A-Day SMEs are now no longer excluded from this market; the same goes for other target groups, I might add.”

The application has been developed by WitWorks, a company run jointly by Pierre and his brother Jack. “VentureLab has served me well. I used to work in the telecom industry, where I took quite a few training courses. But I had very little knowledge of e-marketing. And now look how far we’ve come, we actually developed an e-marketing tool...” If Page-A-Day catches on, they would like to continue in this field. “We have plenty of ideas. Ideally these would lead to a company with 25 to 50 employees, continually developing applications.” A very ambitious goal, he agrees.



www.witworks.nl



A personal method of finding your way

Maria Lijding, director of Smart Signs Solutions, proudly shows the photographs. Made on 28 September, when the Dutch queen, Beatrix opened the VUmc Alzheimer Centre in Amsterdam. She points to the message boards visible here and there. “We made those. It always gives you the information you need at that time, in that place. You no longer have to look for it.”

The Alzheimer Centre strives to be ‘an innovative quality organization’. For that reason an article on Smart Signs Solutions in the Financieele Dagblad newspaper caught the attention of the management. Smart message boards, fine-tuned to a person’s individual needs would fit perfectly in the new location. Doctors and nurses, using these message boards, can post right and current information for individual patients, on ‘doorsigns’ next to doors and on signs in the lounge. “Very personal, so the patient does not have to feel like a patient. He or she experiences a friendly and personal environment”, says Lijding.

Maria Lijding is visibly proud. This individualized signposting was preceded by years of research. VUmc is now reaping the benefits of these efforts, as is Emma Children's Hospital AMC in Amsterdam. "It is an enormous step, from innovation to the market", she says. "You see many possibilities, sometimes far too many. VentureLab has taught me to pace myself. You shouldn't always strive to be more innovative, but rather produce what the market demands. In other words, to find the match between demand and technology. Not every client wants all the trimmings; it's about balance and custom-made products."

In the meantime, Smart Signs Solutions continues to be innovative. "We are working on personal navigation through your mobile phone. You enter a large building, or airport, and through your phone's display you are guided to the place you want to go." This has not gone unnoticed: her company was nominated for the Accenture Innovation Award 2010. "Great, isn't it? But the greatest aspect of this technology is that we can use it to help people, help improve their quality of life."



www.smartsigns.nl

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Reflection on new business-to-business markets



For 28 years now, Leiden-based Koen Mioulet has worked as a business developer. He develops new markets, portfolios and propositions for high-tech and telecom companies. His own company Marketing4B2B has already helped a great deal of companies enter new markets or introduce new propositions. It was out of curiosity that he travelled to Twente on a regular basis to take part in VentureLab. "Call it a reflective moment. A way to take my distance from the everyday hustle and bustle, absorb information, get new ideas."

With so much knowledge and expertise, there is a chance you do absorb a lot of new information. Koen is also the founder of the Netherlands Organization for Business Development (VBDN), and has more than earned his key. He has developed markets and fulfilled other assignments for clients including TNO, Nederlandse Kabel Maatschappij and Enschede-based WMC. "It is a wonderful profession that keeps you busy. You keep gaining more in-depth knowledge on how to improve the service to your clients. This moved me to sign up for VentureLab: I don't have a product idea myself and I'm already an entrepreneur."

When asked what he has benefited from the programme, he gives a thoughtful answer: “It goes without saying that I don’t exactly belong to the target group. For that reason I didn’t use the programme to the full. For example training on team build-up or lectures on fundraising are not so relevant for me. That’s not criticism, just an observation. I would have liked to have found new propositions, which require *Market Making*; so far that hasn’t been the case.”

However: “This moment for reflection did have its value, if only by once again making clear that technicians seldom have a feel for the market. There are still those who think the prospects will present themselves if you have an appealing product. That’s not how it works. I once heard Roel Pieper speak during a VentureLab evening session, on how venturing and innovation require three ingredients: technology, funds and access to market. He added that you may compromise on the first two, but not on the third ingredient. This put things into perspective for me even further.”



www.marketing4b2b.com



Innovative simulation programme for the metal forming industry

Metal forming is a specialism in its own right. It calls for an understanding of the properties of metals, and often for complicated calculations, even for something as seemingly simple as the production of aluminium tins for cat food. Bert Koopman has set up his company Alko Engineering to meet this demand. "It's a specialism to be able to make the necessary calculations for forming processes. That is my core business."

In fact, explains Bert a little later, what it comes down to is the prediction of how the metal in question will behave in given circumstances, and whether the outcome is in line with the requirements. "I work with a type of simulation programme, which you can fill in with many different variables. The calculation is then carried out automatically. In this way I give my clients more insight into their own production processes."

To do so he makes use of an innovative calculation program that was developed at the University of Twente, which he further refined during his doctoral research. As a spinoff of this work he has now also developed a software package for manufacturers of moulds. This means he is operating in a niche market. "It's a specialism: there are not many people who can do this. It's almost as if the customers find me automatically. I've never had to do much in the way of acquisition. Recently I had a stand at a trade fair for the first time, with a demo of that software program. The commissions from that are flowing in now, because the program works extremely quickly. We have simplified the calculation technique, and made it more accessible."

Bert says 'we', even though Alko Engineering is a one-man business. "I subcontract a lot of work: I'd rather not take on any employees at the moment." Maybe later? For the time being he leaves it open whether this stage will actually come about. "I'm motivated by my enthusiasm for the products I develop: you see more and more applications and opportunities. In principle it's certainly possible that the business will take on a number of employees as it grows. That is where the value of VentureLab lies for me. The coaches don't have to think along with me about the technical aspects of my work, but they can give me help regarding the commercial opportunities. That helps me to focus my vision and decide on my strategy."



www.alko-engineering.nl



Sustainability in entrepreneurs' own language

How can you persuade entrepreneurs to choose sustainable options? Not by using the 'S'-word, according to Hans van Wijk. "If you talk about sustainability you sound too much like an environmental lobbyist. No, you have to speak to entrepreneurs in their own language, using their own arguments, by showing them that there are opportunities here to reduce costs, increase turnover and generate more profit. Because that's all possible."

He speaks with passion, quoting the headline of a newspaper interview with a director of Philips: "Make the world a better place and make a profit too." Together with former fellow student and now fellow consultant Lucien Dechesne he aims to "embed sustainability in companies' DNA. Other companies do that too, but they are often associated with the environmental movement. We speak to entrepreneurs in terms they understand."

There are examples in abundance, Hans points out. Take the hybrid car that will be launched by a well-known Swedish manufacturer, for example: “People are going to buy that car: it has a sexy image. It’s a really good proposition. If all car manufacturers did the same, then the whole fleet of cars on the road would be refreshed within ten to fifteen years: that’s a lot of turnover. I want to show entrepreneurs that by working sustainably they can achieve healthy profits. Then they can lead the way, and change tack in good time, before the raw materials start running out. It’s possible; there are examples enough. Sustainability is big business.”

That was not the original plan he brought to VentureLab. His idea was to find customers connected with the University of Twente’s in-house technology and expertise, as he did earlier as head of the Special Projects division at Siemens. “That didn’t work out”, he says bluntly, “but the training here is excellent, and you’re a part of a living network. I was talking about my new idea with Jaap van Tilburg, and straight away he told me the names of people I had to speak to. Now I’m in discussions with “Nyenrode Business Universiteit” and the University of Twente. As experienced managers we can support companies in their moves towards sustainable business models. Because if those models turn out to be profitable, entrepreneurs really get on board.”



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Disclaimer

This publication was produced in order to highlight the innovative developments in VentureLab Twente and to convey general information regarding entrepreneurship. Although this volume was prepared with the greatest of care, no responsibility can be accepted for inaccuracies. It is also important to remember that both law and practice are subject to continual change.

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