

chapter 21

SUCCESS ACCELERATION FOR BUSINESS PEOPLE

BUSINESS MAKERS

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COMPANIES ON THE MOVE, PEOPLE EMPOWERED

DOUBLE INTERVIEW

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LEADERSHIP

BART LEGIERSE

FROM THE COMFORT ZONE TO A SENSE OF LAST-MINUTE URGENCY – THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND RESILIENT LEADERSHIP

RESILIENCE

IN AN UNPREDICTABLE WORLD



DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE PAIN BECOMES GREATER THAN THE FEAR OF CHANGE.



DEAR READER,

Resilience only exists when there are challenges, without them, the word has no meaning. And today's challenges place heavy demands on entrepreneurs. Costs are rising, margins are under pressure, and yet many leaders fall back on familiar formulas. This is understandable: our brain equates safety with the familiar. We often prefer a situation we know to an unfamiliar one that might actually be better. But that is precisely how the comfort zone can smother you.

My advice? Don't wait until the pain becomes greater than the fear of change. For leaders, that also means living with a constant sense that time is almost up. Resilience is not an optional extra for leaders – it is the job. At the same time, the challenge is not to sink into a false sense of security. Success is wonderful, but it can also be deceptive.

My personal motto remains: let others be successful. After all, an organisation is only as successful as the sum of the qualities of its people. And people do not flourish through blind trust, but through empathy, perspective and self-awareness.

With resilient regards,
Bart Legierse

inhoud

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chapter 21

SUCCESS ACCELERATION FOR BUSINESS PEOPLE

Colophon

Chapter21 is the business magazine of Heylen Group **Publisher** Heylen Group, Diamantstraat 8, 2200 Herentals **Concept, creation** boostU **Editing, photography and Graphic Design** boostU, Heylen Group **Contact** boostU, Diamantstraat 8, 2200 Herentals.

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"THE FIGHTER MENTALITY TO GET THROUGH CRISES IS IN BMS'S DNA"

CEO PIETER JANSSENS



"RESILIENCE" IS THE COMMON THREAD RUNNING THROUGH THIS EDITION OF CHAPTER 21. THAT ANNOUNCEMENT IMMEDIATELY BROUGHT A SMILE TO PIETER JANSSENS' FACE. "YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE. OUR COMPANY WAS BORN OUT OF RESILIENCE," SAID THE BMS CEO. THE YOUNG, AMBITIOUS MANAGER WELCOMES US TO THE IMPRESSIVE DISTRIBUTION CENTRE IN RIEME (EVERGEM). THIS HUB HAS SERVED AS A DISTRIBUTION AND SERVICE CENTRE FOR THE CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SECTOR SINCE 2021 – RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC. "THOSE WHO LEARN TO SAIL IN STORMY WEATHER ARE ALWAYS BETTER EQUIPPED TO FACE BOTH MINOR AND MAJOR CRISES."

FIGHTER MENTALITY AS A CRISIS-PROOF FOUNDATION

The numbers don't lie: BMS is a growth company in a market that has been spiralling downwards. "Worldwide, for example, sales of television sets keep falling. At the same time, costs such as wages and transport have risen sharply," Pieter explains. In that challenging context, however, BMS is increasing its market share.

BMS emerged in 2021 as a spin-off within the omnichannel retail platform Connect+, known for Lanckriet among others. Thanks to years of experience within this network, BMS has a strong affinity with the logistics and distribution sector.

"For many companies, these are difficult times because they have always operated in economic prosperity and now suddenly have to adapt. At BMS, we started with limited resources, without mature systems or a full team. That starting position forced us to maximise our resilience."

According to Pieter, that fighter mentality is now reflected in everything the company does. "Anyone who starts here almost automatically becomes a fighter. Our culture demands it. With short lines of communication and direct involvement in daily operations, everyone understands the direction we need to push in."

FOUR CORE VALUES

That culture is built on four core values: personal, entrepreneurial, groundbreaking and out-of-the-box. 'Personal' refers to short communication lines and an approachable style, both internally and with customers. *'Entrepreneurial' is about the decisiveness we show when tackling challenges: not too much talk, but plenty of action,"*, Pieter explains.

'Groundbreaking' relates to international ambitions and continuously challenging the status quo. 'Out-of-the-box' refers to the innovative mindset expressed on the work floor through automation, AI and smart scheduling systems.

INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION

The core value 'groundbreaking' may be taken quite literally. The year 2025 will go down as a pivotal moment in BMS's international expansion. The Belgian company has acquired its Dutch sector peer Schuurman Consumer Electronics. For BMS, this is more than a growth move – it is a necessary step to remain relevant in a market that is increasingly organised into international clusters.

"Both customers and suppliers operate across borders: Benelux, France-Germany-Benelux, or other country combinations. If you want to stay at the negotiating table, you must also organise yourself internationally," Pieter explains.

The acquisition of Schuurman Consumer Electronics not only strengthens BMS's commercial strength, but also boosts operational efficiency. All goods from both BMS and Schuurman Consumer Electronics are now processed at the state-of-the-art distribution centre in Rieme (Evergem). The Dutch IT systems have also been fully integrated into the BMS environment. "Just think of the knowledge, data and relationships that will now become an integral part of BMS."

RIEME (EVERGEM) AS A GROWING BEATING HEART

The site in Rieme - covering more than 30,000 m^2 - is the beating heart of BMS. More than 1.2 million products are processed here every year, with a stated ambition to grow to between 2 and 3 million. The warehouse is equipped with smart software that automatically selects the most efficient transport method. "If a truck isn't filled, we switch to other carriers. Everything here revolves around speed and flexibility."

Moreover, the range of services offered in Rieme is expanding continuously. BMS has opened a full in-home repair service, made possible by the acquisition of Easy Repair in Deinze.

> **"ANYONE WHO STARTS HERE ALMOST AUTOMATICALLY BECOMES A FIGHTER. OUR CULTURE DEMANDS IT.**

"This enables us not only to process returned products, but also to repair them ourselves, both in-house and, in time, at the customer's home," Pieter explains. "With this expansion of services, BMS anticipates the 'right to repair' trend as well as the growing demand for circular solutions."



↑ Pieter Janssens
Pieter Janssens began his career at MediaMarkt and later joined the Connect+ Group, the omnichannel retail platform from which BMS emerged. Since 2024, Pieter has been CEO of BMS, the consumer electronics logistics provider headquartered in Rieme, Evergem, Belgium. Pieter values the warrior mentality at BMS, the challenge of a demanding sector, and the type of products the company handles.



"BORETTI BREATHES FIRE INTO OUTDOOR COOKING, WITH A STRONG FOCUS ON DESIGN, QUALITY, EXPERIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL GROWTH"

Theo Starmans (CEO) and **Joyce Burger** (CFO) on the strategic shift towards the outdoor segment

Anyone stepping into Boretti's headquarters in Amsterdam and wandering among the impressive barbecue sets will immediately feel the urge to invite friends and family to a garden party. "Barbecuing is so much more than simply cooking on a grill. At Boretti, we firmly believe in the social aspect. A barbecue should not necessarily be the centrepiece, but rather a tool that enhances conviviality through ease of use, quality and design," says CEO Theo Starmans, whose company has resilience in its DNA. Together with CFO Joyce Burger, he has been bringing a fresh 'smoke' to the business since early 2025 – not least by placing a sharper focus on the outdoor segment. As we talk to these two enthusiastic thirty-somethings, our mouths are already watering.

Boretti, pioneering and international tastemaker

Founded in 1995, Boretti first made its name with range cookers and kitchen appliances infused with unmistakable Italian flair. "The company grew by staying true to refined design and the associated sense of charm, style and quality," says Joyce. That hallmark is equally visible in its outdoor range. "A Boretti barbecue may – and should – stand out. It deliberately fulfils both a decorative and a social function," Theo adds.

Boretti products have found their way into gardens across the Benelux, with Belgium showing particularly strong growth. But the brand reaches far beyond: you can now spot Boretti barbecues in Dubai, Japan and, closer to home, in Sweden and Germany. "Sweden is a charcoal country par excellence, so it's a natural fit for Boretti. And in Germany, where gas barbecuing dominates, we see our culinary lifestyle – one of our core DNA elements – really resonating," says Theo.

The Boretti DNA is also reflected in Trattoria Boretti, a restaurant chain that grew out of the brand and is now continuing as a separate entity. There are already three locations: one in Amsterdam and two in Belgium, in Mechelen and Antwerp.

Outdoor, outdoor and more outdoor: a focused transformation

With a clear strategic focus, the product portfolio has undergone a fresh and purposeful update. "As a team, we examined every aspect of what a strong, coherent portfolio should contain, with a sharp focus on products that excel in design and quality," says Theo. This deliberate curation has reduced the portfolio to94 SKUs – keeping only the products that perform well in the market and truly embody the Boretti DNA.

BORETTI

Boretti barbecues are thriving in multiple countries, thanks in part to adaptations aligned with local cultures and regulations. Regardless of the market or the type of barbecue (charcoal, gas or kamado) the philosophy remains the same: “Our focus is on the experience, on strengthening social bonds. Barbecuing is no longer an activity reserved for tough guys, but something everyone takes part in: men, women, families, friends and colleagues alike,” the duo emphasises.

From Leonardo to built-in barbecue: innovation on the menu

While sharpening its focus, Boretti continues to innovate. One of the newest arrivals in the Boretti family is Leonardo, a line of gas barbecues inspired by the elegant curves of Italian cars. “With integrated knobs and a distinctive design, this line clearly breaks with the traditional, functional look of a gas barbecue,” Theo explains.

Boretti has also launched a built-in version of its Barilo 2.0 charcoal barbecue – one of the brand’s true icons. “The development of the Barilo Top responds to the growing trend of building outdoor kitchens,” adds Joyce.

Innovation extends to the existing portfolio as well. Renewals and upgrades take place continuously. “We look at market feedback, our own tests and analyses of completed and ongoing warranty cases. All that data contains valuable lessons that help us keep improving,” Theo says.

Transparent choices as a pillar of resilience

Resilience is more than a buzzword for Boretti – it runs through the transitions the company has undergone. “Every transition involves choices, and those choices are essential to staying agile in a context of economic uncertainty,” Theo explains.

Throughout these changes, the leadership team has made transparency a priority. “We believe trust and engagement are vital for a resilient organisation. By involving people in decisions and showing them where we are headed together, we not only build trust – we build an organisation better able to handle challenges,” Theo continues.

Alongside transparent communication, Boretti’s strong brand identity contributes to the company’s resilience. For more than 30 years, the Boretti name has travelled the world, creating recognition, pride and connection. “At the same time, brand recognition also creates high expectations and the pressure to live up to that reputation every single day,” Joyce notes.

To say that Boretti has an interesting future ahead would be an understatement. Their story, in any case, tastes at least as good as a perfectly grilled sirloin steak.



> “A TRANSITION, HE NOTES, ALWAYS INVOLVES MAKING CHOICES; CHOICES THAT ARE ESSENTIAL TO STAYING AGILE AS A COMPANY IN A CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY.



↑ **Theo Starmans**
Theo Starmans comes from the FMCG world and became responsible for Boretti’s outdoor segment in 2023. He has served as CEO since early 2025. For Theo, quality and design are paramount. He is driven by a commitment to delivering on every promise Boretti makes.



↑ **Joyce Burger**
Joyce Burger has worked at Boretti since 2018 and has witnessed the company’s evolution up close. She has been CFO since early 2025, working closely together with CEO Theo Starmans. For Joyce, the design and distinctive look are the defining elements of a Boretti barbecue.



“NOT FOR THE NEXT OWNER, BUT FOR THE NEXT GENERATION.

HOW HEYLEN GROUP MAKES COMPANIES RESILIENT

←
Samuel Vandewaeter, Senior Strategy Manager at Heylen Group, on the strategic use of digitalisation, data and AI to build future-proof businesses

In a world where organisations must navigate geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty and rapid technological disruption, one question is more urgent than ever: how do you remain resilient as a company? For Heylen Group, the answer is clear: prepare companies for the next generation, not for the next owner. This vision takes shape through support in strategy, data, digitalisation and artificial intelligence – always without compromising the company’s autonomy. We spoke to Samuel Vandewaeter, Senior Strategy Manager at Heylen Group since 2023. He makes it plain: technology at Heylen Group is not a buzzword but a lever for strategic value creation.

Buy, build & hold: the long term over quick exits

Heylen Group stands apart from classical private equity. Where others target an exit within five to seven years, the holding company founded by entrepreneur-investor Wim Heylen deliberately follows a buy, build & hold philosophy. “We want to guide companies towards sustainable growth – not with a view to a sale, but with a view to the future,” Samuel says. The group currently comprises around 40 companies across more than 15 countries, active in 20–25 sectors and employing over 3,400 people.

“WE WANT TO GUIDE COMPANIES TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE GROWTH – NOT WITH A VIEW TO A SALE, BUT WITH A VIEW TO THE FUTURE.

A cornerstone of the approach is the independence of each individual company. “We strongly believe in autonomous management teams. Our role as a holding company is temporary, supportive and focused on strengthening their impact.”

Support takes many forms: strategy definition, digitalisation, CSR, M&A, and – increasingly – the thoughtful use of data and artificial intelligence. “We are not a reporting holding company, but a supporting one. We don’t build dashboards for ourselves; we help companies generate the insights they need.”



The three layers of data

Within Heylen Group, three complementary layers of data form a coherent whole. Financial data is the most traditional layer, know for contexts including consolidation, analytics, reporting, but always approached with respect for each company's individuality. "We don't force companies into a straitjacket," Samuel says. "We always begin with the financial reality of the company itself."

Internal company data form the second layer: ERP, CRM, WMS, customer data and operational process information. "Here, it's about real-time insights – not a thermometer after the fact, but a radar looking forward. How many quotes go out? How many customer contacts take place? Those insights are worth their weight in gold."

External data, the third level, is about market data, competitor intelligence, public sources, purchased datasets. "External data helps us spot opportunities and navigate strategically – supermarket prices, logistics rates, European raw-material data. And not everything can be bought. Some databases you have to build yourself."

The library of digital building blocks

To make all that data actionable, Heylen Group has developed an internal library of digital building blocks that can be reused across companies. "Those blocks can be combined into larger digital 'robots' and AI agents that automate tasks, generate insights or optimise processes," Samuel explains.

Security and ease of use are crucial. "What we create must be safe, but above all consumable. Managers and employees must be able to use it immediately."

Artificial intelligence as radar and engine

For Heylen Group, artificial intelligence is not a passing trend, but a strategic instrument for achieving sustainable and meaningful progress across the organisation. Specifically, the group applies AI at three levels.

First, employees use AI tools as co-pilots in their daily work. This ranges from rewriting texts and reviewing contracts to developing code. "Here, the focus is on productivity gains at the individual level." Next, AI is embedded in broader processes such as M&A analysis or customer communication. "We link ERP data to previous customer interactions and use AI to help predict the next step in the customer journey. The key with AI is to let the intelligence outweigh the artificial."

> **"WE DON'T FORCE COMPANIES INTO A STRAITJACKET. WE ALWAYS BEGIN WITH THE FINANCIAL REALITY OF THE COMPANY ITSELF.**

At a third, more strategic level, Heylen Group is taking steps to deploy AI across the organisation. Together with boostU, the innovation agency linked to the group, it has set up its own AI Lab. The aim? To use AI as a strategic lever, not only internally, but also for customers." "AI will not replace your job," says Samuel. "But your competitors who become faster and better with AI might."

In a world where economic storms are intensifying, Heylen Group sees AI not just as a radar that identifies risks, but as an engine that drives action. "If the direction needs to change, we as a group can provide financial, legal or digital support to respond quickly," Samuel says. Disruption, Samuel argues, is also an opportunity: "You cannot overtake 15 cars in sunny weather, but you can when it's raining." (A. Senna)

Value creation in the value chain

For Samuel, the ultimate question is simple: are we creating real impact in the value chain? "A company's economic value must be solid: you have to do something that cannot simply be copied by a competitor or taken over by a customer."

That is why Heylen Group helps companies not only use data and AI, but also sharpen their strategy. "We translate long-term vision into quarterly targets – even weekly actions. When everyone knows where the company is heading, the whole organisation moves with focus." Digitalisation, data, visualisation, automation, AI – they can no longer be separated. "They flow into one cohesive whole. That is our strength as a holding company: helping companies build a digital backbone that makes them future-proof."

This support is tailored and pragmatic: "We are like a fleet of small boats, each with its own captain and its own course. But we provide the radar and, when needed, the extra fuel to cut through the waves."



Samuel Vandewaeter →



Samuel Vandewaeter has been Senior Strategy Manager at Heylen Group since 2023. He graduated as a civil engineer in mechanical engineering with a specialisation in robotics, and began his career at McKinsey & Company, where he worked on digital transformation and M&A projects within the financial sector.

At Heylen Group, he focuses on providing strategic guidance to the group's companies, with a strong emphasis on digitalisation, data, AI and sustainability. "What immediately appealed to me was the huge diversity of sectors, the entrepreneurial spirit and the freedom to make an impact based on your talents," he says enthusiastically. "There was no predefined role. It it was about the content, the connection and the shared vision."



ABB: A FEEL FOR THE LOCAL MARKET, BACKED BY GLOBAL STRENGTH

IN CONVERSATION WITH DANNY PATTIJN AND SIMON BOUCHIER OF ABB BELGIUM, SPECIALISED IN THE PRODUCTION OF ELECTRICAL CABINETS

Anyone driving along the R4 between Ghent and Zelzate cannot miss it: the imposing Ghent Logistic Campus, a 150,000 m² complex of warehouses divided into various units. One of the companies based here is ABB Industrial Solutions, which produces electrical cabinets for residential, industrial and public applications. "The site in Evergem was a real stroke of luck. We are close to Ghent Seaport, and here we have the space to take our production activities to a higher, more efficient level – all on one site. For example, the location offers enough space to install three – and eventually six – dedicated silos for granules," ABB explains. Chapter 21 was given an extensive tour of the ABB production hall, and it more than captured the imagination. Speaking are Danny Pattijn, Senior Operations Manager, and Simon Bouchier, Planning & Fulfilment Manager, who together oversee the operations of ABB's Belgian site.

From Vynckier to ABB

In the 1920s, Usine Belge de Matériel Vynckier Frères et Cie was founded in Ghent – the company that, in the 1930s, invented Bakelite, the world's first fully synthetic plastic. Vynckier continued to innovate and developed phenolic resin for insulating enclosures.



Distribution and metering cabinets appeared in the 2000s. "Just think of street cabinets or the Fix-o-Rail model – a distribution cabinet for single-family homes that is still the flagship of our range," Danny notes.

In 2018, Vynckier was acquired by ABB, the international technology leader headquartered in Switzerland. "Even after the acquisition, our Belgian branch has retained its own identity, with local expertise remaining central within the international organisation. The synergy between innovation and tradition is one of our greatest strengths," Simon says.

Ownership, local feel and international backing

How does the Belgian branch position itself within this global structure? "Essentially, we are a hub where local know-how and international technology come together. We contribute to ABB's international strategy through our flexibility and our ability to respond effectively to the needs of the Belgian market, while still benefiting from ABB's global innovation network," Danny explains.

ABB Industrial Solutions in Evergem is an essential link in ABB's international network, yet remains firmly rooted in the local market. Simon notes: "Our proximity to Ghent Seaport and the strong logistics capabilities of this campus make us not only efficient, but also highly accessible to local customers and partners." Danny adds: "We are proud to operate on Belgian soil under a global brand like ABB. Our facility is

more than a production site; it is a hub where local knowledge and international expertise reinforce each other."

Residential, industrial and public electrical cabinets

Thanks to the infrastructure at Ghent Logistic Campus, ABB Evergem can offer an extensive range of solutions for residential, industrial and public applications. The product portfolio includes innovative and sustainable electrical cabinets that comply with strict Belgian and European standards. Simon emphasises: "Our electrical cabinets are the result of decades of experience and continuous investment in technology. No cabinet leaves our site without meeting the highest expectations."

Outsourcing also plays an important role in ABB Evergem's operations. Through strategic collaborations with European partners, ABB maintains a strong focus on innovation and quality, while staying flexible and scalable. Danny explains: "Outsourcing certain tasks enables us to respond decisively to market demand without compromising ABB's standards."

Sustainability as a concrete part of operations

ABB places strong emphasis on sustainability, both in product development and in day-to-day operations. At the Evergem site, the company implements energy-efficient processes, renewable energy sources and optimised use of raw materials. Simon clarifies: "For us, sustainability is not an abstract idea but a concrete objective with tangible results."

"Our sustainability efforts are visible in every stage of the production process. In the end, our customers – and by extension the whole region – benefit, thanks to reliable products and a greener future," Danny concludes.



Danny Pattijn, *Senior Operations Manager*

Danny Pattijn began his career at Vynckier, later worked for GE, and has been with ABB since 2009, where he now serves as Operations Manager. "Moving forward is the only right direction" is a motto that fits Danny perfectly.



Simon Bouchier,
Planning & Fulfilment Manager

ABB is still Simon Bouchier's first employer, where he works at the Rieme site as P&F Manager. A motto that captures him? "Turning complexity into opportunity." Together with Danny Pattijn, Simon forms the duo responsible for the day-to-day operations at ABB's Rieme site.



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COMPANIES ON THE MOVE, PEOPLE EMPOWERED

Christophe Sintubin,
co-founder & Managing
Partner of Business Markers**

Chapter 21 had the pleasure of sitting down for coffee with Christophe Sintubin, co-founder and managing partner of Business Markers. This energetic leader clearly lives for helping organisations develop rock-solid yet simple strategies. He embodies the blend of technology, communication and business and one constant runs through his career: getting companies moving.



ONLY BORING FISH SWIM WITH THE FLOW.

From ‘student club’ to corporate strategies for multinationals

When we ask about his earliest work experiences, a broad smile instantly appears on Christophe Sintubin’s face. In the late 1990s, he worked as an e-commerce manager at the fledgling Planet Internet. Not just any employer, but – in his words – a genuine “student club”: a group of young people with the same drive, values and mission. Anything was allowed, everything seemed possible, and work often took place seven days a week. “I was even recruited in a café, just so you get the idea,” Christophe recalls.

That early period embodies the common thread running through his career: bridging business, IT and communication. From Procter & Gamble and Jaguar to 4FM, Porthus (Descartes), Fujitsu and Iris (Canon), Christophe consistently translated technological capabilities into tangible business impact. Along the way, he learned that marketing budgets are often used too rigidly and he remains an advocate for results-driven marketing rather than fixed annual budgets.

A key milestone was his role at Bpost, where he worked on customer experience and later the company’s 10-year strategic plan. “In that second role, there was lots of room for innovation and major strategic steps: from the two-way mailbox to medical assistance by postmen, and the shift towards parcels & logistics,” he says. Other inspiring chapters followed at Brussels Airport and major international technology firms.

The four pillars of Business Markers

In 2012, Christophe joined forces with Ides Ticket to create Business Markers, a cooperative company with more than 40 experienced experts. “These experts are not classic consultants,” Christophe explains. “They’re people who have stood in the mud with their boots – entrepreneurs, former C-level leaders and seasoned managers who know the ropes.”

Their services are built around four pillars: With ‘Actionable Strategy’, Business Markers aims to develop strategies that don’t end up in thick folders gathering dust, but are immediately translated into concrete actions. ‘Engaged People’ focuses on helping companies involve employees in decisions and build genuine support. “One way we do this is by mixing top-down and bottom-up approaches,” Christophe explains. ‘Valuable Customers’ aims to reinvent the dialogue between marketing and sales, enabling companies to focus on customer value with even greater precision.

The fourth and youngest pillar, ‘Executional Excellence’, is about the efficient rollout – and partly the operational implementation – of strategies. This includes digital strategies, information management, IT-infrastructure strategies, process management and automation through AI. Together, these pillars form an approach through which Business Markers, as a compact and flexible organisation, makes a meaningful impact at both large corporates and fast-growing companies.

“One of our services, which sits outside our core activity, we’ve placed in the spin-off Projexify,” Christophe clarifies. “It involves program and project management during major transformation programmes, mainly IT projects. We appoint an interim programme manager from Projexify who acts on the client’s behalf until the programme is completed.”

Simplicity adorns and simplicity works

“Bookshelves full of complex strategies are rarely useful,” Christophe says firmly. At Business Markers, simplicity is key. A cornerstone model is the Business Plan on 1 A4, based on OGSM (Objectives, Goals, Strategy, Measures). And that plan is never static: it is a living document, built on rolling three-year plans, annual updates and interim “balcony moments” to allow helicopter-view adjustments. “It is often more important to make choices than to keep searching for the 100% perfect choice,” Christophe says. Simplicity makes complex strategic decisions manageable and ensures organisations stay focused.

Smarketing

One theme close to Christophe’s heart is smarketing; the smart unification of sales and marketing. In many organisations, the two domains still operate too separately, even though they pursue the same goal.

> “IT IS OFTEN MORE IMPORTANT TO MAKE CHOICES THAN TO KEEP SEARCHING FOR THE 100% PERFECT CHOICE

According to Business Markers, the era of the traditional salesperson is over. Today’s customers expect a subject matter expert: someone who can combine technical insight with customer-focused advice. This thinking inspired Business Markers to introduce the imagery of the hourglass funnel: where the traditional funnel ends after purchase, this is where the real value actually begins. “Customers become ambassadors – and ambassadors attract new customers.” He refers to examples such as the Belgian Tesla community, which acts as a powerful, independent ambassador network. “Letting others speak for you: that is the power of today.”

Sharing is sweet and sharing is investing

Another theme Christophe and his team hold dear is knowledge sharing. Business Markers operates on a “pay it forward” principle: sharing expertise freely through teaching assignments, webinars and open-source models. “What we have in-house, we want to share unconditionally because that approach creates long-term value,” Christophe says. And our philosophy works.



Business Markers has supported projects at major multinationals such as Coca-Cola. “And in practice, we see that many clients come back to us for follow-up projects. That’s both a compliment and a validation of our vision.”

Christophe himself draws inspiration from venture capitalists and entrepreneurs such as Jürgen Ingels and the De Wever brothers (Dstny) – and also from books. One in particular gave him a significant boost: the story of Steve Jobs and Apple, a celebration of disruptive thinking and daring to go against the grain. His personal motto captures his philosophy beautifully: "Only boring fish swim with the flow."

CHRISTOPHE SINTUBIN

Christophe Sintubin is the founder and Managing Partner of Business Markers. His professional journey began in the late 1990s, following internships at Procter & Gamble and Jaguar. He then started as an e-commerce manager at Planet Internet, one of the early pioneers of the online world. In the years that followed, he held roles as marketing director at 4FM (now JoeFM), Aexis and Porthus (later Descartes), among others.

From 2009 onwards, Christophe increasingly focused on consultancy, specialising in Customer Experience Management and marketing strategies for complex services. Among other achievements, he helped shape the customer experience approach at Bpost and was responsible for global marketing programmes at Fujitsu and Iris (Canon).

Alongside his work at Business Markers, Christophe shares his expertise as a guest speaker, lecturer and supervisor at several colleges. He also supports companies and entrepreneurs in their growth paths and strategic decision-making.

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ELIDA BEAUTY



IN AN INDUSTRY WHERE TRENDS SHIFT AT LIGHTNING SPEED AND CONSUMERS ARE MORE EMPOWERED THAN EVER, ELIDA BEAUTY STANDS OUT FOR ITS DISTINCTIVE PHILOSOPHY. THIS INTERNATIONALLY ACTIVE COMPANY BRINGS NEW LIFE TO ICONIC BEAUTY BRANDS WITH A RICH HERITAGE. LED BY DANIEL VAN WUNNIK, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT LEAD, ELIDA BEAUTY NAVIGATES A DEMANDING LANDSCAPE DRIVEN BY INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP. "THE KEY QUESTION? WHAT DO CONSUMERS REALLY WANT?" DANIEL SAYS. WITH AN ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET AND A STRONG PARTNER STRATEGY, THIS "NEW-GENERATION" BEAUTY ORGANISATION IS WORKING TOWARDS A ROBUST, FUTURE-PROOF MARKET POSITION.

Beauty brands with a rich history preparing for a new generation

In conversation with Daniel Van Wunnik, Business Development Lead at Elida Beauty

From Unilever niche to independent innovator

Elida Beauty originated within Unilever as a business unit overseeing more than 20 beauty brands – often deeply rooted local brands with a long history. The major turning point came in 2023: following its acquisition by Yellow Wood Partners LLC, Elida Beauty gained full autonomy. That independence required adaptation, Daniel admits: "Under Unilever, we had a platform that opened doors fairly easily. As a fully independent Elida Beauty, we suddenly had to prove ourselves again to key buyers as a relatively small player."

The global network of more than 300 people, managed from London and Paris, focuses sharply on energy and entrepreneurship. Distribution takes place through partners in Europe, North America and beyond. Elida Beauty's core mission? Rebuilding brands. Daniel explains: "We take a rigorous approach to developing new innovations, conducting market research, analysing trends, categories and competitors, and performing thorough monitoring. Data plays a crucial role in all of this."

Classic brands for new generations

Elida Beauty's motto – "Preserving the legacy, embracing the future" – is put into practice by connecting the strong foundations of the past with the expectations of today's consumer. The company revitalises brands, many over 40 years old, by preserving their familiar quality while introducing new applications and experiences. "We look at where the brand is already present, its positioning and segment, what the product represents and how it originally became successful," says Daniel.

Throughout this process of renewal and re-segmentation, the consumer always remains central. A telling example is the relaunch of Timotei, once a leading haircare brand in the Benelux. Through close cooperation with local partners, innovation and new

> "Preserving the legacy, embracing the future



technologies, Elida Beauty succeeded in giving the brand fresh relevance. “To achieve this, people must be able to experience your products – not just the end consumer, but everyone in the chain who comes into contact with the product,” Daniel says. Live demonstrations, fragrance experiences and sampling all play a key role.

A second guiding theme is ‘democratising beauty’ – keeping iconic brands accessible to a wide audience and new generations. “We look at who is already buying the product, but more than ever at how we can bring the brand to the new generation. We try to pass on that legacy from grandparents to parents to children,” Daniel notes. This requires new fragrances, innovative packaging and fair value for money – elements young, empowered consumers judge critically.

Resilience, innovation and partnership strategy

The beauty sector has transformed rapidly over the past decade. Omnichannel distribution and e-commerce have grown strongly. New players – often small, niche start-ups offering ecological or artisanal products – have enriched the market. Major brands increasingly acquire such start-ups to complement their portfolio. Elida Beauty deliberately chooses to work with strong partners and networks that possess deep knowledge of their local markets.

The company uses a supplier code that defines the framework for these collaborations. “Partners play a decisive role, they give a brand the weight and perspective it needs in their markets,” Daniel emphasises. In the Benelux, Products and Brands Group aligns seamlessly with Elida Beauty’s vision: “With this distribution partner, we really feel that Elida Beauty is not just a number, but an extension of who we are, how we think and the culture we represent.”

> “After all, you want to build a brand whose products match what the market – and consumers – expect

What the future holds? Elida Beauty will continue investing in innovation, market research and long-term partnerships. The goal remains unchanged: to future-proof brands by keeping consumers at the centre and passing on their legacy to new generations. “Ultimately, you want to build a brand whose products match what the market – and consumers – expect,” Daniel concludes.

Daniel Van Wunnik



Daniel Van Wunnik is originally from the Netherlands, but has lived in the UK for almost 30 years. He spent a significant part of his career at Unilever, where he held various positions ranging from supply chain to business development. In 2023, he moved with the Elida Beauty business unit when it was acquired by the US investment firm Yellow Wood Partners LLC. Elida Beauty has a portfolio of more than 20 beauty brands, several of which are represented and distributed in the Benelux by Products and Brands Group.

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PETER DE KEYZER, FOUNDING PARTNER AND MANAGING PARTNER OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AGENCY GROWTH INC.

“I AM A SELF-PROCLAIMED PROGRESS OPTIMIST, THE BEST IS ALWAYS YET TO COME.”

Peter De Keyzer is considered one of Belgium’s sharpest economic voices. Throughout his varied career – and now as Managing Partner of the strategic communications agency Growth Inc – his views on growth, values and strategic communication remain unfailingly optimistic. In an interview with Chapter 21, he shares his insights on progress, the power of communication and the core values that make companies resilient in turbulent times.



Chapter 21: You have followed a diverse path: academia, banking, entrepreneurship. Is there one common thread that typifies you?
Peter De Keyzer: “I call myself a progress optimist. Throughout my career, I’ve always looked for the engines of progress – whether innovation, entrepreneurship or adaptability. I firmly believe that companies are true agents of change, pushing society forward with new products and services. Personally, I never sit still, because sticking to the status quo leads to decline. We have no choice but to grow continuously. That applies to individuals, companies and countries alike.”

Do you have a core value you adhere to unconditionally?
“Core values matter, but they must not be set in stone. The world is changing at lightning speed. Twenty years ago, few companies talked about climate in their value set; today, almost all do. But the underlying ‘why’ – why a company does what it does – remains fundamental. For me, it’s about believing in people’s potential, being entrepreneurial and contributing to progress again and again. Values guide us, but they must be able to respond to new realities.”

Who or what inspires you the most?
“I draw inspiration from different sources at different times in my life, but someone like Elon Musk fascinates me. Despite the controversy surrounding him, I admire his relentless drive to tackle big problems, his energy and his courage. In Europe, we could benefit from showing more of that entrepreneurial spirit and ambition.”

Do you have a favourite quote?
“‘The best is yet to come’. It’s even on my WhatsApp profile. That sentence sums up my belief in a better future, regardless of setbacks. Our ancestors paved the way for us, and I believe we have the duty and should have the respect to pass on that optimism.”

Growth Inc. is a strategic communications agency. How do communi-



cation and strategy relate to each other?
“Communication is not automatically strategic. ‘We build cars’ is communication; ‘We build cars that make the world a better place’ is strategic communication. It is not just about what you do, but why you do it. People don’t follow products; they connect with your purpose. More than ever, employees and consumers want to hear the bigger story.”

How has strategic communication evolved in recent years?
“Where you once could monologue, today every consumer is an opinion maker. If your message is poorly thought through or insufficiently aligned with your stakeholders, it can cause serious reputational damage. Look at companies in the United States caught in cultural battles, such as Bud Light. One wrong message or rebranding can unleash a social media storm and trigger boycotts.”

Growth Inc. uses authenticity, ownership and ambition as its core values. How do these reinforce each other?
“Authenticity means being transparent and always telling the truth. People who tell the truth don’t need a good memory. Ownership is about taking responsibility, not simply ticking off tasks, but approaching everything as if it were your own business. Ambition drives us to do better every day, for our clients and for ourselves. These values complement each other: authenticity and ownership build trust; ambition ensures progress. In our client work, we insist on complete honesty and open communication. We don’t shy away from difficult topics.”

What does 'resilience' mean to you?
“For me, resilience is adaptability – the ability to remain calm and maintain perspective in uncertain situations, and not avoid difficult decisions. During the pandemic, companies had to reinvent themselves and radiate calm. By recreating such scenarios, we prepare clients for the unexpected. Every crisis is an opportunity to show who you really are. In moments of crisis, your true nature emerges.”

In times of uncertainty, many companies cut communication budgets. How do you explain this reflex?
“It’s a classic mistake: in tough times, communication is seen as a ‘nice to have’ and gets cut first. But

THE BEST IS YET TO COME

today, everything is communication. If you don’t communicate, others will do it for you. If you say nothing, that silence communicates something too. Customers don’t just buy a product, they buy the story behind it. Communication should remain a priority to maintain trust and clarity.”

What advice do you give organisations wanting to strengthen their resilience?
“An organisation does not ‘have’ employees – it is its employees. Structures aren’t resilient; people are. Managers must provide comfort and confidence, especially in uncertain times. Prepare employees for scenarios so they’re not paralysed when setbacks occur. Scenario planning, creativity, calmness and acknowledging problems all enhance resilience. Reflect on stumbling blocks and recognise that every obstacle is an opportunity to grow.”

Crisis communication: is there one golden rule for companies already in crisis?
"Transparency is crucial. Always say what you know and what you plan to do. Saying nothing is the worst option. Invite stakeholders in, be accessible, be honest. You can see the difference in practice. Companies that are open in a crisis situation end up stronger than those that shut themselves off. Take the salmonella contamination cases at Barry Callebaut and Ferrero Rocher. The first chose to keep the plant open, communicate continuously and inform the public truthfully. In the court of public opinion, that openness made them stronger.”

Do you have a dream you still want to realise?
“My biggest dream is simple: that my children are happy. Aside from that, I’d love to do a coast-to-coast road trip across the United States one day.”



Peter De Keyzer
Peter De Keyzer studied Economics at the University of Antwerp, worked for two years as a teaching assistant at the Faculty of Economics, and grew into a well-known opinion leader during his time as chief economist at several major banks. In 2016, together with a co-partner, he founded Growth Inc, a strategic communications agency headquartered in Antwerp. Peter describes himself as a progress optimist, someone who not only wants to help companies and organisations improve every day, but who also aspires to make the country a better place for everyone.

PLATFORM BASKET, ITALIAN KNOW-HOW AT HEIGHT

In conversation with Carloalberto Molesini, Managing & Sales Director of Platform Basket srl.



BEING INVITED FOR COFFEE BY THE MANUFACTURER OF A 54-METRE AERIAL PLATFORM – ARGUABLY THE TALLEST IN THE WORLD – IS AN OPPORTUNITY WE GLADLY SEIZE. PLATFORM BASKET IS AN ITALIAN MANUFACTURER OF AERIAL WORK PLATFORMS (AWPS), RAILWAY COMPONENTS AND MINI CRANES. "REACHING THAT KIND OF HEIGHT IS ONLY POSSIBLE THANKS TO OUR KNOW-HOW AND OUR FOCUS ON R&D. AT FIRST SIGHT, AN AWP LOOKS LIKE A STRAIGHTFORWARD MACHINE, BUT ITS DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION INVOLVE A GREAT DEAL OF TECHNOLOGY." SPEAKING IS MANAGING DIRECTOR CARLOALBERTO MOLESINI, A MAN WITH A WARM TEMPERAMENT AND UNMISTAKABLE ITALIAN FLAIR – BUT ABOVE ALL SOMEONE WITH BOTH A VISION AND A PLAN.

From parts supplier to total solutions provider

Platform Basket originated in 2005 from the relaunch of a components manufacturer. At the helm stood Carloalberto Molesini, who brought more than 20 years of experience in the crane industry. "We started with 15 people in an organisation without any real structure. My task? Rebuild the company and develop a product range that would allow us to break through internationally," Carloalberto recalls.

The new management soon decided to focus sharply on the niche of aerial work platforms. "We saw untapped potential because this market was not yet being served by the major industry players."

A technological achievement

Anyone who thinks an AWP is simple to assemble is mistaken, says Carloalberto. "At first glance, our spider lifts and mast lifts may look like basic tools, but each one is packed with technology. You only acquire that kind of expertise through years of experience and development."

Platform Basket prides itself on its fully in-house development and production process – from design, welding and assembly to final testing. Only the paintwork is outsourced. "Keeping everything in-house is more complex than outsourcing, but it gives us greater control and more flexibility in a fast-evolving market." Today, around 200 employees work for Platform Basket, including 17 engineers dedicated to innovation.

R&D plays a central role: "Technology is evolving at lightning speed. If you want to remain competitive, you must innovate continuously." One of the sector's biggest shifts is electrification: "Norway led the way here. Market demand for all-electric AWPs prompted us to develop a complete range of hybrid and electric models. Today, almost all our mid-size boom lifts are available in hybrid or fully electric versions."

The tallest aerial platform in the world

A major strength of Platform Basket is its broad portfolio, ranging from 13 to 54 metres working height. The



↑
Carloalberto Molesini
Carloalberto Molesini is an Italian manager with nearly 45 years of business experience. He spent 20 years in the crane industry before taking the helm of Platform Basket at the age of 44 – transforming the company from a components manufacturer into one of the market leaders in the aerial work platform segment. For Carloalberto, strong human relationships are the highest good, both in life and in business.

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54-metre platform – the tallest on the market, according to Carloalberto – is a feat of Italian engineering. “We are extremely proud that our technical expertise allowed us to build a machine of this height. With its strong resale value, this model will make a substantial contribution to our business.”

AWPs find their way to arborists (tree care), the construction sector and rental companies. In the United States, tree care is the hottest market: “In Europe, it represents roughly half of our sales; in the US, it is the majority. Additionally, the rental sector accounts for a large share.

Railway components and mini cranes

Diversification is a deliberate strategy at Platform Basket. In addition to more than 85% of turnover coming from AWPs, the company also supplies railway components and equipment (mainly for the UK market). “The railway segment represents 10-15% of our revenue and helps us spread risk. Having an active plan B is essential, especially in uncertain economic times.” Under the Elma brand, the company also produces mini cranes, which share much of the same underlying technology as aerial platforms.

International expansion and new markets

From its 25,000 m² site in Poviglio, Platform Basket exports to around 30 countries across Europe, North America and Oceania (Australia). “Around 30–35% of our sales come from the US and Canada, roughly 50% from Europe, and the remainder from other markets. We are now focusing on India and the Middle East. Saudi Arabia in particular is showing great interest in our tallest models.” Platform Basket relies heavily on trade fairs and personal contact to reach new customers. The company also has its own offices in Canada and Hong Kong for sales and service.

Abroad, one factor is crucial: Having strong local partners. In Belgium, Platform Basket has worked exclusively with Hermans Heftrucks for more than 15 years. “It’s a long-term relationship based on open communication. That creates a win-win for both parties," Carloalberto confirms.

Service and corporate philosophy

When asked how Platform Basket views its relationship with customers, Carloalberto does not hesitate: “Our philosophy is clear: the customer relationship truly begins after the sale. Product follow-up is essential, and service is a crucial part of our success. Thanks to our digital tools, we can provide fast support worldwide.”

Finally, strong human relationships and teamwork form the basis of the company culture. “Companies are made of people. If you understand the strength of your team and respect every opinion, 95% of the work is already done,” Carloalberto concludes.







A CONVERSATION WITH SAT DHARM SINGH

Managing director of Yogi Tea

"Yogi Tea is more than a cup of tea, it is the expression of a holistic philosophy"



A conversation about tea, flavours and distribution? With Sat Dharm Singh, Managing Director of Yogi Tea, the discussion quickly expands into yoga, regenerative agriculture and the need for more awareness in the world. “Yogi Tea was founded in the heart of yoga culture and that is no coincidence. For us, both tea and yoga serve a higher purpose: nurturing the balance between body and mind,” says the inspired business leader. We are immediately on the edge of our seats.

BALANCE BETWEEN BODY AND MIND

Yogi Tea was founded in Germany within the yoga movement. In the basement of a Hamburg restaurant in the 1970s, yoga practitioners experimented with spice blends. These mixtures became the basis of what would soon grow into an internationally known and recognised brand.

“Like yoga, we take a holistic approach to people’s wellbeing. Our philosophy centres on the balance between body and mind and is rooted in the Indian tradition of Ayurveda,” says Sat Dharm Singh, a second-generation Managing Director of the company. Yogi Tea pays special attention to its recipes and the origins of its ingredients.

Headquartered in Germany, the brand is now present in around 30 countries, including regions in North Africa, the Middle East and all of Europe. The company employs roughly 70 people in Germany and another 140 at its production site in Italy. “Thanks to state-of-the-art processing machinery, we can produce and package the right blends quickly and efficiently in Italy.”

TASTE AND FUNCTION – A SACRED DUO

Yogi Tea offers more than 60 product references. The common thread? “Every blend is a carefully crafted combination of taste and function. A cup of tea should not only serve a purpose, it should also be a moment of pleasure and taste. In the market, teas with health benefits do not always taste good.”

There are more flavours and functions than you could count on one hand. Yogi Tea’s assortment includes strong herbal infusions, a green-tea line, segments built around energy, balance and harmony, as well as blends designed for specific moments of the day – morning, evening – or supporting particular routines. “Think digestion, throat comfort or rest,” Sat Dharm notes.

Through this diversity, Yogi Tea responds to a wide variety of occasions and seasonal needs. “Our mission is to give tea a full place in people’s daily routines," Sat Dharm explains.

RAISING CONSUMER AWARENESS

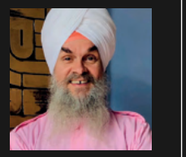
Another key mission for Yogi Tea is raising awareness of ingredient origins. The company strives for strong, long-term relationships with hundreds of farmers around the world. “We choose farmers who embrace our philosophy, and in return we offer fair prices for ingredients like cardamom, along with long-term collaboration.”

Yogi Tea also aims to highlight the importance of regenerative agriculture and the impact of a changing climate. “Alongside logistical challenges and the ongoing search for staff, we are also experiencing the effects of climate change. We feel it is our responsibility to make consumers aware of the impact of drought or excessive rainfall in our sourcing regions. We are all part of a changing world. What that means? The cup of tea you drink today may taste different tomorrow.”

This awareness mission is also carried forward by the Yogi Foundation, an international philanthropic initiative that encourages people to reflect on how we treat our environment and natural resources.

Yogi Tea products are distributed through a network of local distributors. In Belgium and the Netherlands, the brand works with Products and Brands Group, supported by its own sales managers. “This Benelux distribution partner has strong brands in its portfolio, its own logistics services and an in-house sales force that conveys Yogi Tea’s core values,” Sat Dharm concludes.

Sat Dharm Singh →



Sat Dharm Singh studied Environmental Sciences, a path that led him to Amsterdam, where he worked for several environmental non-profit organisations. Yoga culture eventually brought him to a finance role at Yogi Tea in 1999 – the company he would later go on to lead. Together with his 70-person team, Sat Dharm manages operations from Hamburg, Germany.





FROM THE COMFORT ZONE TO A SENSE OF LAST-MINUTE URGENCY – THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND RESILIENT LEADERSHIP

BART LEGIERSE (CEO HEYLEN GROUP) ON LEADERSHIP IN CHALLENGING TIMES

The global economy is cooling, and companies increasingly find themselves caught in a tension: rising costs versus shrinking margins. How should leaders respond? For Bart Legierse, CEO of Heylen Group, the key lies in resilience, both mental and organisational, combined with a permanent "sense of last-minute urgency" mindset. "The greatest danger in turbulent times is lingering too long in the comfort zone."

How do you view the challenges faced by many companies and, by extension, the global economy?

Bart Legierse: "The economic reality has clearly cooled. We are seeing companies approach potential acquirers not out of success but out of necessity. This stems from an inflationary cost structure combined with a deflationary margin structure: costs keep rising while margins come under pressure. Companies get squeezed. Those who continue working with yesterday's recipes will get stuck. Peter Drucker put it perfectly: 'The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence itself, but to act with yesterday's knowledge.' "

Yet many companies fall back on familiar methods. Why is that?

Bart: "That reflex is quite logical. It is scientifically proven that the vegetative part of our brain finds safety in the familiar. Even if the familiar is not a good situation, it feels safer than an unknown that might be better. But that comfort zone will eventually smother you. At Heylen Group, we aim to innovate proactively. We never want to wait until the pain of reality becomes greater than the fear of change – because then it may already be too late."

You often speak of a 'sense of last-minute urgency' as a positive characteristic in leaders. What do you mean by that?

Bart: "Every leader should have a sense of urgency. Elon Musk once described the CEO role brilliantly: 'Being a CEO is like staring into the abyss while eating glass.' Everything that goes well in a company is best left alone. Everything that goes wrong, but can be solved by others, is also best left alone. Only when something goes wrong and no one else can fix it does it land on your plate. That's the glass. And at the same time, you must provide direction without being 100% sure it's the right one. That's the abyss."

In your opinion, should every CEO also be a crisis manager?

Bart: "Not every CEO is naturally a crisis manager, but every leader must have the potential and the skills to manage a crisis when necessary. Leadership is developable – like a sport. If you practise it often, even at a detailed level, you improve. Micromanagement is often written off as a waste of time, but it can be very valuable in that development. The key is knowing what to micromanage, and when to let go."

How has your own leadership role evolved over the years?

Bart: "I started by leading departments at People21. Later, I led people who were themselves responsible for departments. At Heylen Group, it shifted again: now I am responsible for people who, in turn, give responsibility to others. That indirectness – the 'scaling trap' – is complex. You can no longer coach through concrete examples. You must articulate a

INTERVIEW BART LEGIERSE

vision that carries the entire organisation. The search for truth plays a crucial role in this."

What do you mean by 'the search for truth'?

Bart: "Let me illustrate it with an example. During an Amazon works council, customer-service waiting times were discussed. Internal data showed relatively good performance. Jeff Bezos immediately put it to the test by calling customer service on the spot. He wanted to check whether the reassuring statistics matched the customer's actual experience. It's not about control for control's sake, it's about uncovering the truth so the organisation can benefit."

How do you maintain the balance between control and trust?

Bart: "Giving autonomy is more complex than people assume. It means accepting short-term pain in exchange for long-term value. Giving autonomy does not mean letting go and hoping for the best. You provide trust by tailoring a role to someone's abilities and needs – with or without a degree of control. Control is not inherently negative; some people need it to function well. The starting point must always be this: assume the best in people."

How do you view resilience at the organisational level?

Bart: "Every organisation faces a constant balancing act: being robust enough to withstand setbacks while flexible enough to adapt to a rapidly changing world. An organisation is only as strong as the combined quality and resilience of its people. Unfortunately, many leaders suffer from 'problem agnostics': they fail to see what is going wrong because they cling to familiar, safe routines. For me, resilience starts with leadership. The CEO must set the direction, while allowing the organisation enough space to breathe."

What advice would you give to leaders looking to strengthen employees' mental resilience?

Bart: "You don't get stress from hard work; you get stress from situations you could influence but don't act on. Leaders should involve people in their decisions. There are no unmotivated people – only people motivated to do something other than what you want. For me, leadership revolves around three core competencies: empathy (always balanced with discipline), perspective, and self-awareness."



"EVERY ORGANISATION FACES A CONSTANT BALANCING ACT: BEING ROBUST ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND SETBACKS WHILE FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO ADAPT TO A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD.

What advice would you give young leaders?

Bart: "Don't let success lull you to sleep. Andy Grove (former Intel CEO) put it perfectly: 'Success breeds complacency. Complacency breeds failure. Only the paranoid survive.' Success must never lead to complacency. Boats don't sink because of the water around them, but because of the water that gets in. Keep the ballast out and focus on what truly matters."

"YOU DON'T GET STRESS FROM HARD WORK; YOU GET STRESS FROM SITUATIONS YOU COULD INFLUENCE BUT DON'T ACT ON.

Bart Legierse →



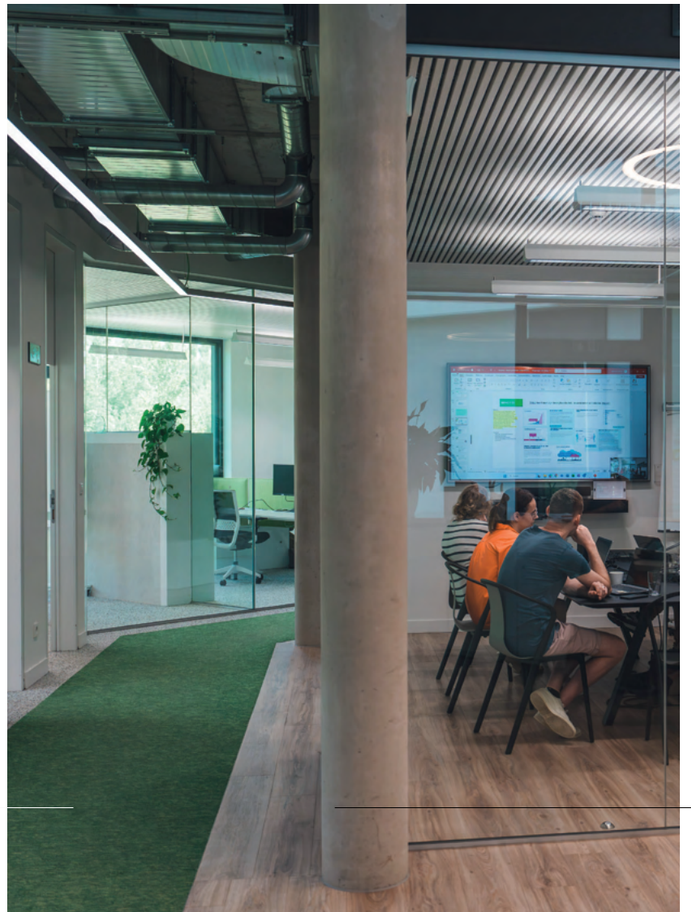
Bart Legierse (1988) grew up in the Netherlands and has been CEO of Heylen Group since September 2024. Bart completed sports training and physiotherapy studies, later supplemented with business qualifications. In 2012, he became a shareholder in the temporary employment agency Stipt, which, over time, was strengthened by the staffing labels Quality and DDD, as well as the property label Stay21. Together, they operate under the People21 umbrella.

Bart says he is driven by people, and "helping others succeed" is his life motto. He enjoys exploring the concept of leadership and believes that a company's success is the sum of the qualities of its people.



“ SUSTAINABILITY AS ECONOMIC, ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL BALANCE

Robin Bruninx, Chairman of the Board, Founder of Encon



The concept of sustainability has become inseparable from modern society and business. Many organisations juggle figures, labels and ‘green’ initiatives – but what does sustainability actually mean? That question is tailor-made for Robin Bruninx, founder of Encon, a company that has made sustainability its core business. “We started in an era when sustainability wasn’t yet on corporate agendas.” With Encon, Robin has built a full-service consultancy that manages the entire process of sustainability projects.

From missionary work to push-and-pull dynamics

In Encon’s early years, working on sustainability often felt like missionary work. Robin Bruninx recalls how he had to persuade companies with hard numbers and short payback periods. “We demonstrated, for example, that upgrading lighting could reduce energy use by up to 80% while doubling the light output and the investment paid for itself within two to three years. That was the only way to convince managers at a time when nobody had sustainability on the agenda.” In those days, sustainability was translated into tangible economic benefits, with social value added as a bonus.


ENCON


ENCON

Today, economic benefits remain an important driver – but the context and awareness about the topic has evolved dramatically. Companies now face a clear push-and-pull dynamic: legislation, banks and major customers push them to take action, while opportunities pull in the form of lower costs, stronger brand positioning and employer reputation. “Sustainability has become a licence to operate,” Robin says. “Those who ignore it lose competitiveness. Those who use it intelligently build resilience and growth.”

Economic, ecological and social balance

Encon positions itself with a straightforward message: sustainability succeeds only when it is economically viable. “A company is not a philanthropic organisation,” Robin stresses. “Profit is the basic condition for investing in environmental and social improvements.” From that starting point, Encon defines sustainability as a balance between three pillars: economy, ecology and impact. When these elements reinforce each other, a virtuous cycle emerges: economic gains fund sustainable investments, which in turn generate both economic and social value.

This model makes sustainability concrete, measurable and attractive. An investment in solar panels or energy efficiency, for instance, lowers costs while enhancing the company’s image and improving talent attraction. “If you get it right, the circle closes. Economic benefits fuel environmental and social improvements, which in turn strengthen economic outcomes. That is what sustainable growth looks like in practice," Robin explains.

Encon, full-service sustainability consultancy

Encon positions itself as a guide that accompanies companies from A to Z on their sustainability journey. It combines technical engineering, financial modelling and strategic advice to make projects profitable and future-proof. Its work ranges from feasibility studies and energy measurements to contractor tendering and site supervision. Encon acts as a global project manager: Robin and his team design solutions, compare suppliers, arrange permits and supervise implementation from A to Z.

In practice, this results in concrete technical optimisations: relighting, wind turbines, battery systems and solar power, as well as large-scale real estate projects involving sustainability labels and certifications. This combination makes Encon a unique consultancy: independent, multidisciplinary and always on the client’s side.

Encon maintains a strategic partnership with industry peer Heylen Energy. Together, they develop and manage large-scale energy and property projects where profitability goes hand in hand with social impact, ensuring that both investors and tenants can grow in a future-proof way.

> “IF YOU GET IT RIGHT, THE CIRCLE CLOSES. ECONOMIC BENEFITS FUEL ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPROVEMENTS, WHICH IN TURN STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC OUTCOMES. THAT IS WHAT SUSTAINABLE GROWTH LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE









Robin Bruninx
Robin Bruninx is the founder and chairman of the board of Encon, a pioneer in renewable energy and energy efficiency. He established the company in the early 2000s. With a background in engineering and a clear conviction – that companies do not have to choose between what is good for the world and what is good for their business – he grew Encon from a small engineering firm into a full-service consultancy with more than 100 employees. An in-house Academy supports employees in developing a growth mindset and guides them through new technologies and market evolutions.

LIDL BELUX, REALESTATE AS AN ENGINE IN A DYNAMICRETAIL MARKET

Evan Lesage, Director Real Estate at Lidl Belux, on real estate strategy and the brand-new distribution centre in Herentals

The retail market in Belgium and Luxembourg is evolving rapidly, shaped by intense competition, shifting consumer expectations and complex spatial planning challenges. To strengthen its position, Lidl Belux is investing heavily in a flexible real estate strategy and sustainable logistics solutions. A key milestone in this ambition is the new distribution centre in Herentals, an impressive step forward in the discounter's future plans. Chapter 21 had an inspiring conversation with Evan Lesage, Director Real Estate at Lidl Belux, who shares insights into the strategic choices being made.

A CHALLENGING INDUSTRY IN CONSTANT MOTION

Food retail is one of the most dynamic sectors in the Benelux, marked by intense international competition and increasingly demanding consumers. Just think of expectations in terms of opening hours and speed of service. Evan Lesage, who has been with Lidl Belux for almost 20 years, experiences this dynamic every day. "Every day brings new challenges – from permits to dealing with densely built-up areas. You have to be creative, respond quickly to changes, and still guarantee quality for the customer."

The Belgian food retail market is seeing a growing influx of foreign players, while demand for physical stores remains high. Evan sees opportunities particularly in strong local integration and a uniform store concept, with Lidl offering the same price and product range in every branch.

Lidl Belux currently operates 302 stores in Belgium and 13 in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The ambition is to grow these numbers to 380 stores in Belgium and 24 in Luxembourg.

REAL ESTATE, A FULL STRATEGIC PILLAR AT LIDL

At Lidl Belux, real estate is a fully fledged strategic pillar and essential to the retailer's growth. Evan: "Real estate has been part of strategic decision-making from the very beginning. Physical stores remain a crucial factor in food retail." Lidl's portfolio includes a mix of standard stores (traditional façades with adjacent parking), mixed-use developments, and innovative 'stores on stilts', where the building is constructed vertically due to limited space.



The supermarket chain always tailors its approach to the local context and spatial possibilities. "A great example of a mixed-use project is our site in the Brussels municipality of Jette. We built 140 student rooms above the store," Evan explains. He expects such multi-use projects to become increasingly common, especially in densely populated Flanders.

Lidl's guiding principle remains "quality at the right price" – not only for customers but also for logistics, distribution and real estate partners. Partners are carefully selected based on shared values and vision. At Lidl, real estate is not merely supportive – it is a key driver of expansion and resilience.

NEW DISTRIBUTION CENTRE IN HERENTALS

Lidl Belux currently operates five distribution centres in strategic locations: Wevelgem, Sint-Niklaas, La Louvière, Genk and March-en-Famenne. A sixth distribution centre in Herentals will become operational in the first quarter of 2027 to serve the Antwerp and Kempen regions even more efficiently. The site covers an area of 107,000 m^2 and the building, at least one-fourth of which consists of refrigerated areas, is 34,400 m^2. Located in the bustling Wolfstee & Klein Gent industrial zone along the E313 motorway, this distribution centre is a key project within Lidl's long-term strategy. The site was deliberately chosen for its excellent accessibility. "We are investing in modern logistics, efficiency and sustainability. This centre not only means economies of scale for Lidl, but also brings local jobs and boosts the regional economy. It will create around 200 direct jobs – a number that may grow in the coming years."

The centre is being developed in partnership with Heylen Warehouses and Molenwater Group as an industrial collaboration. With a strong focus on sustainable building materials and energy-efficient systems, the Herentals distribution centre fits seamlessly with Lidl's mission to make a positive contribution to society.



Evan Lesage
Evan Lesage graduated as a commercial engineer from EHSAL / HUBrussel, completed a Master-after-Master programme in Marseille, and has been with Lidl Belux since 2006. He began his Lidl career as an expansion manager and went on to hold various leadership roles in both real estate and operations. Today, he is responsible for real estate, the procurement department and prevention policy. Evan says his personal value framework – centred on results, modesty, people orientation and sustainability – is fully reflected within Lidl.



Agility and economic truth: the modern entrepreneurial DNA

How ABN AMRO Commercial Finance and Finterface strengthen businesses through digitalisation and partnership

Entrepreneurship means navigating between uncertainty and opportunity. Lukas Anker, Managing Director of ABN AMRO Commercial Finance, and Frank Husken, Managing Director of Finterface, share their perspective on what defines a successful entrepreneur in a volatile society. In a double interview with Chapter 21, they discuss flexibility, digitalisation and simplification. "It's not hard to make something complex, it's hard to make it simple," says Lukas. Their shared story demonstrates how data-driven finance gives entrepreneurs greater control and resilience at a time when adaptability is essential for survival.

Adaptability, exploitation and exploration

Successful entrepreneurs, according to Lukas Anker and Frank Husken, combine extraordinary adaptability with the ability to focus on both the short and long term. Lukas refers to the concept of "double-handedness", derived from the English term ambidexterity. "A company succeeds when it excels in both exploitation and exploration. Without balance, you lose the investment capacity needed for the future." Frank added: "It's crucial to show adaptability in the short term – adjusting details quickly – while continuing to look ahead." They agree that today's turbulent environment forces entrepreneurs to think in scenarios. Lukas explains: "We've become accustomed to calling everything a crisis. But if you switch effectively between exploitation and exploration, the external impact is reduced."

> **"A company succeeds when it excels in both exploitation and exploration. Without balance, you lose the investment capacity needed for the future.**



Their view on the biggest stumbling block for entrepreneurs? According to both men, companies often fail to test early enough whether new opportunities align with their core values. Lukas says, “The biggest risk is seeing an opportunity but not performing the right assessment. The key question is whether the opportunity fits with who you want to be as a company.” For Frank, risk is always a snapshot: “A risk is a factor that can destabilise a company – but this differs from one organisation to another. There is no such thing as the risk.”

> “BUT IF YOU SWITCH EFFECTIVELY BETWEEN EXPLOITATION AND EXPLORATION, THE EXTERNAL IMPACT IS REDUCED.

The power of data and digitisation

The collaboration between ABN AMRO Commercial Finance and Finterface arose from a need for greater digitalisation and transparency. “We are the first major bank in Europe to perform inventory management fully digitally, together with Finterface as our specialist partner,” Lucas notes. Frank reflects on their joint growth path: “The partnership evolved from initial pilots in digitalisation to full portfolio contracts. Throughout that process, Finterface delivers what we call economic truth: a platform that enables customers, ABN AMRO and ourselves to assess risks, determine the real state of affairs at any given moment, and calculate flexible loan amounts and their evolution.” These calculations are crucial for companies with significant inventories and fluctuating financial positions.

The partnership not only streamlines complex data flows but also enables flexible, tailored and risk-oriented financing. “Thanks to Finterface, ABN AMRO can finance up to 80% of fast-turnover stock – whereas before it was only up to 50%,” Lukas illustrates. This model strengthens entrepreneurs’ liquidity management, encourages data-driven decision-making, improves risk profiles and enables higher financing volumes.

A proactive approach as the holy grail

Client processes typically begin with identifying the company profile and structuring the financing request. “We want to evolve towards a model that anticipates scenarios rather than responds to them. Through Finterface, the supply chain and the underlying goods can be visualised in real time,” according to Lukas. Frank describes the workflow: “After a technical connection and data retrieval, we present an economic truth that strengthens the dialogue between all parties. Transparency is essential: 85% of the information is standardised, but the remaining 15% makes the difference”.

What data shapes that economic truth? “In financing, many factors go beyond the value of the stock alone. When was the valuation made? Is it pre-sale or pre-financing? Has the stock already been produced? How old is the trading company? These are the questions we aim to answer conclusively,” Frank explains.

Both experts conclude that entrepreneurship is ultimately about constant testing, trusting partners and daring to change course. "We cannot see into the future, but entrepreneurs can prepare for it," Lukas concludes. “Digital tools and strong partnerships make the difference in resilience. Entrepreneurs who embrace them are ready for the uncertainties of tomorrow.”

finterface.tech

abnamrocomfin.com

Lukas Anker →
Lukas Anker first trained in the social sector before studying Business Administration at Erasmus University Rotterdam, where he developed a strong affinity for the commercial side of organisations. He joined ABN AMRO Commercial Finance in 2022 and also serves as Chairman of FAAN, the industry federation for factoring companies in the Netherlands. According to Frank, Lukas is a strong communicator with a clear vision on products, digitalisation and process simplification.



Frank Husken
Frank Husken →trained as a physicist but soon developed a passion for numbers, risk and modelling. He held several management positions before founding Finventory in 2017, which has operated under the name Finterface since 2025. Finterface provides a platform that analyses data for financing purposes.



BOOSTU AI LAB: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN HUMAN AND ENTREPRENEURIAL LANGUAGE

HOW BOOSTU AND FOUNDER NICK VAN WALLEGHEM ARE TAKING THEIR AGENCY MODEL TO THE NEXT LEVEL



While AI still feels like an abstract buzzword to many, Nick Van Walleghem is building concrete services around it. As founder of boostU – a digital performance agency that has since expanded into web development, recruitment marketing and, most recently, an AI Lab –he is not a spectator of the technological revolution, but a builder of it. Speaking to Chapter 21, Nick explains candidly how he is restructuring his company in a world where artificial intelligence is no longer replacing tools, but entire roles. “Can you still run a business without AI? Absolutely. But those who deploy AI strategically will outpace those who don’t.”

Three business units, one vision of the future

BoostU is no longer a traditional marketing agency. Alongside the original performance marketing team, two additional tracks have emerged: an in-house web studio and enplooi, the recruitment marketing branch. But with the rise of AI, something else began to shift; not only within the team, but in the very rationale behind many companies.

Nick is frank: “We see roles where output is produced directly through large language models – such as copywriting or graphic design – coming under pressure. But the evolution doesn’t stop there. Even consulting professions, from agencies to lawyers, are already feeling a fundamental shift.”

This realisation led to the creation of boostU AI Lab. Like boostU’s other services, the new business unit aims to support companies in finding the most effective marketing and communication mix. With AI Lab, boostU focuses primarily on building digital AI assistants that automate repetitive, time-intensive tasks and integrate seamlessly into existing systems – allowing companies to scale through technology.

AI Lab: what does it actually mean for entrepreneurs?

BoostU AI Lab is not a standalone



Nick Van Walleghem
Founder BoostU AI LAb

start-up, but a dedicated unit with its own R&D, product development and specialists who build AI solutions for clients and for boostU's own internal processes. Its services consist of several concrete pillars. First, repetitive business processes are automated. "Think of streamlining prospecting, administration, customer-file follow-up or reporting in management dashboards through customised AI agents," Nick explains. This immediately saves companies valuable time and reduces the risk of human error.

In addition, AI solutions are embedded into operational structures. BoostU AI Lab connects with existing business software and ensures that AI operates inside the organisation rather than alongside it: from automated lead qualification to data analysis and real-time dashboards, fully integrated into existing workflows.

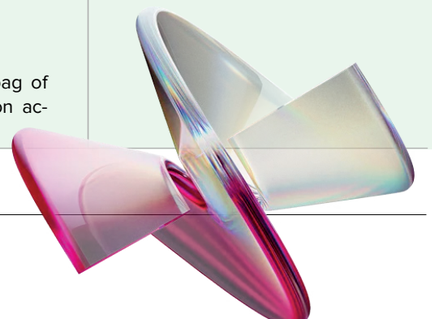
BoostU AI Lab is also investing in smart recruitment. "This includes automatic screening of CVs and cover letters, matching candidates to vacancies and AI-assisted follow-up, making the HR process faster and more qualitative," says Nick.

Finally, AI Lab delivers clear, accessible dashboards that allow entrepreneurs to gain faster decision-making power through data insights, without needing to be data scientists themselves.

AI as a growth accelerator
Nick doesn't view AI as a bag of tricks, but as a value-creation accelerator. "AI becomes truly powerful when combined with sector knowledge or business expertise. You don't just build something, you understand what a company needs, and you know how to achieve it faster and better with AI."

This vision also translates internally, for example within enplooi: automated screening and interpretation of CVs and cover letters, and intelligent matching. The right candidate is found much faster, allowing recruiters to focus on human contact and strategy.

From experiment to methodology
BoostU aims to share its AI expertise, not monopolise it. The company hosts AI breakfasts, open tables and in-house trainings. Everyone is encouraged to experiment, learn and build. "AI is not just for developers. Prompting, understanding context, thinking in terms of value creation: these are the skills of the future," Nick concludes.



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Human capital and human potential as keys to resilience

Whoever talks about resilience is ultimately talking about people – and when you talk about people, you talk about human capital. But according to Melissa Le Piane, organisations must look beyond what employees can do today: they must also recognise and develop potential. In her role as Human Capital Officer at Heylen Group, she acts as the link translating HR missions both at holding level and across the group companies. Speaking to Chapter 21, this energetic leader explains why intuition and connection are not vague concepts, but essential strategies for making employees and organisations more resilient.

MELISSA LE PIANE
Human Capital Officer
at Heylen Group

Intuition and connection as foundations

Melissa Le Piane immediately clarifies her vision: leadership and resilience do not come from complex models, but from simple, human interaction. “Leadership is not rocket science,” she says. According to her, resilient leaders demonstrate competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, courage, authenticity, integrity and decisiveness. These qualities are universal: “Not everyone needs to lead a team. But in every role, you must show leadership towards yourself, your responsibilities and your contribution.”" Self-care and self-development are indispensable: “Investing in yourself is not always easy, but it is crucial in an environment full of uncertainties.”

In her HR approach, Melissa places great emphasis on intuition and connection. During recruitment, she does not focus primarily on the CV but seeks to understand who the person is. How do they achieve certain results? Does her intuitive sense align with what the candidate presents? That’s how it works for her. “I prefer to absorb the context first without asking too many questions, and then follow my intuition.”

Resilience requires customisation and humanity

Because the group companies have a high degree of autonomy and entrepreneurial freedom, HR operates uniquely within Heylen Group. At holding level, Melissa supports both internal HR managers and companies without an HR department. Her helicopter view and ability to respond quickly to varied needs allow for a high level of customisation. “It is important to speak with all stakeholders, understand each company’s DNA and approach every situation with a blank sheet. Someone may be an excellent CEO, but not necessarily the right CEO for a particular company. Sometimes a disruptive profile is exactly what is needed when a business wants to change direction," she explains.

A major topic within Heylen Group is creating a safe working environment. “It sounds obvious, but it takes courage from everyone to say what needs to be said,” Melissa notes. This openness mirrors the leadership style of CEO Bart Legierse and investor Wim Heylen, who emphasise proximity, connection and room for ownership. Melissa: “We organise HR and leadership events and invest heavily in connection – even across physical distances.” According to Melissa, a safe culture is the foundation for developing not only current human capital but also untapped future potential. “That is exactly what makes organisations resilient in the face of crises and change.”

HR as a catalyst for growth

Heylen Group differentiates itself by looking at the person behind the role and by consistently investing in growth and resilience – both individually and collectively. Employees at holding level typically combine strong IQ and EQ with an entrepreneurial, open mindset. In her role, Melissa deals with strategic and operational issues and supports growth trajectories – from shaping HR policy to coaching through restructurings and preparing for delicate conversations. “We create structure, but also leave space for informal interaction – because connection is always key,” she concludes.

> **“Investing in yourself is not always easy, but it is crucial in an environment full of uncertainties.**

Melissa Le Piane has HR running through her veins. She worked for many years in HR roles in a fast-growing IT environment and has been Human Capital Officer at Heylen Group since 2025. For her, resilience is never about numbers alone: the true health of an organisation is reflected in its people and its culture. A self-critical, open attitude is essential: “Self-knowledge is the beginning of all wisdom.” By investing in humanity, connection and the untapped potential of employees, Heylen Group continues to strengthen its own resilience every day.





EURO FRESH FOODS (BELGIUM) AND KONINGS-ZUIVEL (NETHERLANDS) ON THEIR MERGER AS ENTREPRENEURIAL DISTRIBUTION PARTNERS

“OUR STRENGTH? DELIVERING THE BEST DEAL FOR BOTH THE RETAIL CUSTOMER AND THE PRODUCER – EVERY SINGLE DAY.”



SINCE THE STRATEGIC MERGER BETWEEN KONINGS-ZUIVEL AND EURO FRESH FOODS, BOTH SUBSIDIARIES OF HEYLEN GROUP, A RENEWED MOMENTUM HAS BEEN FLOWING THROUGH THE DAIRY AND FMCG SECTOR IN THE BENELUX AND EUROPE. TWO COMPANIES WITH AN ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET AND A STRONG POSITION IN THE DISTRIBUTION LANDSCAPE HAVE COMBINED THEIR EXPERTISE – AND THAT ENERGY IS VISIBLE ALL THE WAY TO SUPERMARKET SHELVES. ONE YEAR AFTER THE ACQUISITION, CHAPTER 21 SAT DOWN WITH KRISTOF VAN LOMMEL (CEO OF EURO FRESH FOODS AND GROUP CEO), BOUDEWIJN MEURS (CEO OF KONINGS-ZUIVEL) AND OTTO MILTENBURG (CO-CEO AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AT KONINGS-ZUIVEL) FOR AN OPEN CONVERSATION ABOUT GROWTH, PARTNERSHIP AND SUPPLY-CHAIN OPTIMISATION.

From pioneering spirit to international footprint

The history of Konings-Zuivel dates back to the 1980s, when a Dutch entrepreneur discovered the potential of desserts in convenient portion packs while on holiday in Germany. That pioneering spirit, coupled with a strong focus on innovation and trade, led to the first imports into the Netherlands. In 2019, the company made a decisive leap: moving from a farmhouse in Bergambacht to a state-of-the-art facility in Bleiswijk. The relocation enabled further professionalisation, efficiency and scale. Today, Konings-Zuivel counts more than 25 employees, generates over €130 million in annual turnover and is firmly established in the European dairy distribution landscape. Euro Fresh Foods, led by Kristof Van Lommel, built a solid reputation in Belgium and the Benelux for producer sourcing, distribution and value-for-money propositions. The company focuses primarily on private labels, innovative functional dairy, plant-based alternatives and a carefully selected set of A-brands. Headquartered in Molenstede, Euro Fresh Foods employs 15 people and – together with Konings-Zuivel – drives a combined annual turnover of approximately €175 million.



↑
Kristof Van Lommel

Kristof studied Communication Management and quickly built a career in the world of (chilled) food and logistics, growing from commercial roles into senior management. Today he serves as Group CEO of Euro Fresh Foods and Konings-Zuivel. He strongly believes that unwavering focus on value for money, market intelligence, innovation and internationalisation is key in this industry.

The acquisition of Konings-Zuivel in October 2024 under the Heylen Group umbrella was fuelled by a shared vision: international expansion and the pursuit of commercial and operational synergies. The combined portfolio now includes more than 800 SKUs, ranging from cottage cheese, quark and iced coffee to export ranges such as milk drinks and spreads from well-known European A-brands.

“INSTEAD OF SENDING 10 TRUCKS FOR 10 PRODUCERS, WE USE ONE OR TWO TRUCKS TO COLLECT GOODS FROM MULTIPLE LOCATIONS.

Optimisation: top-level sport in distribution and the customer journey

The positioning of Euro Fresh Foods and Konings-Zuivel goes far beyond simply delivering products. “We are the link between supermarkets and producers,” Kristof explains. “Our added value lies in full-service follow-through – from market analysis and product development to the moment a product hits the shelf.”

A customer journey that, importantly, does not start in the factory. It begins with data: market intelligence, consumer insight, trend analysis and the careful selection of the most suitable producers. Through a joint venture with a specialist logistics planning agency, both companies design the optimal supply chain for every product. “What we do every day is high-level logistics,” says Otto. “Instead of sending 10 trucks for 10 producers, we use one or two trucks to collect goods from multiple locations.” The result? Maximum efficiency, fewer empty kilometres, lower costs – and ultimately a better deal for the retailer.

Meanwhile, internationalisation and fluctuating supply-demand dynamics require constant agility. Because of market transparency, the increasing focus on delivery reliability and the growing complexity of the supply chain (think sustainability requirements or ingredient traceability), partnerships and flexibility are crucial. Euro Fresh Foods and Konings-Zuivel respond with data-driven strategies and continuous in-store monitoring to detect new opportunities. “A recent example is the rise of organic and flavoured cottage cheese in the Netherlands and Belgium,” Kristof adds.

Compatibility in products and in DNA

What makes this Belgian-Dutch merger unique is not only the product compatibility across dairy, cheese, plant-based alternatives and protein-rich products, but especially the alignment in culture and entrepreneurial mindset. Both companies grew from an underdog position and share a relentless focus on delivering real value as a distribution partner. “There’s no room for individualism, it’s about becoming stronger together,” Boudewijn says. “We share knowledge, systems, insights and networks.”

While each company retains its identity and customer relationships, the merger is strongly felt behind the scenes at the operational level. Compatibility is demonstrated by constantly learning from each other and exploiting each other's strengths: Konings-Zuivel contributes technical expertise and deep market knowledge; Euro Fresh Foods excels in logistics optimisation and supply chain innovation. This combination of flexibility and entrepreneurial DNA increases resilience and opens the door to expanding their international footprint as one integrated group.

Together towards sustainable growth and innovation

Euro Fresh Foods and Konings-Zuivel are committed to strengthening their position as a growth platform for sustainable development, innovation and economies of scale. The coming years will focus on: further international expansion, deeper data-driven collaboration with retailers and producers, and the development of new products and concepts. “Our strength? Delivering the best deal every day, for every customer, producer and chain partner,” Kristof concludes.



← **Otto Miltenburg**

Otto studied International Business and gained experience in both manufacturing and retail settings. He joined Konings-Zuivel in 2015 as Sales Manager and, from 2017 onwards, helped drive the company’s expansion as co-owner, holding ultimate responsibility until its sale to Heylen Group. Following the acquisition, Otto focuses on Business Development and leads the Dutch distribution partner as co-CEO alongside Boudewijn.



↑
Boudewijn Meurs

Boudewijn studied Law and built his career across various retail and FMCG environments, including commercial roles at Lidl and Cargill. As CEO of Konings-Zuivel, he aims to run the business with an entrepreneurial mindset, combining structure with agility.

eurofreshfoods.be

koningszuivel.nl



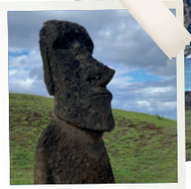
THE GLOBETROTTER

Businesswoman, interior-design lover, travel enthusiast, foodie… lady boss Ann De Krock is all of that and so much more. An inspiring, modern woman who defies any label – a true woman of the world, making her the perfect guide to take us on a journey across the globe.









1 ▼ Hawaii — Island Hopping

Hawaii is a unique mix of volcanic islands and coral atolls. After a long six-hour flight, you'll land in Honolulu on the island of Oahu – home to the world-famous, palm-lined shores of Waikiki Beach. A must for every visitor is a moving history lesson at Pearl Harbor naval base. Next stop: Big Island. Put a scenic flight over the active Kilauea volcano at the top of your wish list, and don't forget to pick up a colourful Hawaiian shirt while you're there. Continue to Maui, celebrated for its stunning golf courses – you'll find them across all the Hawaiian islands – and the legendary Road to Hana. Next stop: Lanai, nicknamed Pineapple Island (formerly home to Dole's plantations). Best explored in a 4x4, this rugged isle rewards you with spectacular viewpoints.

WITNESS Across the islands, Hawaii boasts some 70 golf courses, from challenging championship layouts to scenic resort courses. Fun fact: Bill and Melinda Gates' wedding ceremony in 1994 took place at hole 12 of the Lanai golf course, famed for its breathtaking ocean cliffs.

2 ▼ Easter Island — Mystery & Moai

Rapa Nui – or Easter Island – conjures one iconic image: the majestic Moai. These mysterious monolithic statues, carved from the volcanic slopes of Rano Raraku, stand scattered across the island like silent guardians. Some remain unfinished in the quarry, as if the sculptors might return from lunch at any moment. Local legend once claimed that the statues "walked" to their final positions and in a sense, that's true: they were manoeuvred upright with ropes in a waddling motion.

TIP Explore the island with a local guide who will not only introduce you to the Moai, but also lead you to hidden bays for a magical sunset.



4 ▼ San Fermín, Pamplona — Bull Run

Every year, from 6 to 14 July, Pamplona descends into joyful chaos as the streets fill with adrenaline, costumes and… bulls. During the world-famous San Fermín festival, locals and daredevils from around the globe perform breakneck feats as they race ahead of six black fighting bulls and four brown steers. The run starts at 8 a.m. every day from 7 July and lasts no more than three minutes. Fancy joining in yourself? No ticket required, just take your place in the crowd.



3 ▼ Hiroshima, Japan — Once there was a 'little boy'

Hiroshima is forever tied to the historic date of 6 August 1945. At 8.45 a.m., the first uranium bomb, Little Boy, was dropped over the city. What happened next to the city and its people is powerfully told at the Peace Memorial Park & Museum, an absolute must-visit. From Hiroshima, take a ferry to the small island of Miyajima, home of the iconic red Torii gate of Itsukushima Shrine – one of the few structures that survived the bomb.

TIP Go in spring, when cherry blossoms transform the memorial park, and indeed all of Japan, into a breathtaking soft-pink dreamscape.





5 ▼ Venice — Carnevale

Venice in February? Pure magic during Carnevale. The city transforms into a fairytale world of masks, ball gowns and centuries-old Venetian traditions. Wander through narrow alleyways, dance on the Bridge of Sighs, and toast with a sparkling Bellini… la dolce vita at its finest. A highlight of the opening festivities is the Flight of the Angel: each year, a chosen woman descends from the top of the Campanile, dressed as an angel, gliding towards St Mark's Square.

TIP For a truly unforgettable experience, rent a costume and dance the night away at one of the many masquerade balls. Book early – tickets sell out fast!



RESO TIPS

▼ Geranium [Copenhagen] ❀❀❀

Three Michelin stars and a culinary imagination that sends your taste buds into overdrive. Experimental yet remarkably elegant.

▼ DiverXO & StreetXO [Madrid]

David Muñoz's kitchens serve wild, creative and boundary-pushing Spanish-Asian fusion. DiverXO is the luxurious sibling; StreetXO its bold, street-food-inspired sister. Unforgettable!

BEYOND BUILDINGS

DE HOLISTISCHE TOEKOMST VAN LOGISTIEK

De logistieke wereld verandert sneller dan ooit. Automatisering, energie, circulariteit en digitalisering komen samen — en vragen om een nieuwe visie op logistiek vastgoed.

Heylen Warehouses, Heylen Energy en Smart 21 bundelden hun kennis en inzichten in de **whitepaper** “Beyond Buildings – de holistische toekomst van logistiek”, met de waardevolle bijdrage van **Prof. Dr.-Ing. Johannes Fottner** *(hoogleraar technische logistiek aan de Technische Universität München – TUM).* Een inspirerend document over hoe logistieke hubs evolueren naar intelligente, energiepositieve ecosystemen.



❝ De rol van de mens in de logistiek blijft variabel en contextafhankelijk: soms controlerend, soms aanvullend op technologie. Het accepteren van deze dynamiek is cruciaal voor een succesvolle samenwerking tussen mens en machine.

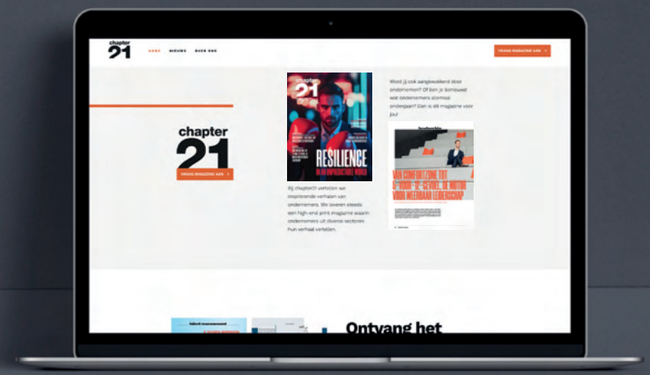
Prof. Dr.-Ing. Johannes Fottner

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