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SPECIAL WESTERN EUROPE

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How to excel in a 'simple' product

IMPRINT

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Cash flow problems are one of the biggest threats to solvency that small and medium-sized companies face. When a company’s capital is tied up in stock or assets that will not be realized until a point in the distant future, it can threaten the company’s ability to cover immediate day-to-day outgoings or vital investment. Auxiga Group International makes it possible for companies to put up these assets as collateral against bank loans that protect their solvency until a profit can be realized.

“Our customers are predominantly small and medium-sized businesses that require regular loans to keep their day-to-day business dealings afloat,” describes President Arben Bora. “A typical customer sector is agriculture, in which there is a significant delay between investment and return. Farmers can never predict with complete confidence how large the harvest will be or how high the market price for their produce will be when it is finally time to sell. We provide the means to tide them over until then.”

A good example is the wine industry. A barrel of wine that is laid down today will not be ready to sell for at least five years. For the winegrower, it represents an asset that he cannot yet realize to fund his ongoing activities. Auxiga is usually called in by the bank in such cases to audit the asset, in this case the quantity of wine, against which the bank will issue a loan. It is also Auxiga’s job to monitor the asset continuously throughout the lifetime of the loan. “It doesn’t matter what the asset is,” explains Mr. Bora. “What is important is that the asset remains in the possession of the loan recipient. That is why we visit customers

More than just bean counters: Auxiga provides a much-needed service to ensure solvency for small businesses

Taking stock of cash flow

Our customers are predominantly small and medium-sized businesses that require regular loans to keep their day-to-day business dealings afloat.
regularly, and thereby get to know them and their businesses very well.” It is this expertise that has allowed Auxiga to grow strongly in recent years.

The company was originally founded as Warrant Group in Belgium in 1919. It set up a subsidiary in France called Auxiga. However, this company grew faster than the Belgian parent, which is why the group headquarters are now in Paris. Today, the company is organized as a group of five companies, of which Auxiga Group International is the parent. In addition to Warrant in Belgium and Auxiga in France, the group also includes Sofigarant, which was acquired in 2014, and Auxicontrol, which was set up in 2008 to monitor stocks in the automotive industry. The most recent addition to the group was the acquisition of Eurogage this year.

Today, Auxiga Group International employs 170 people across its five subsidiaries. Most are active in France, with just 15 employees covering the Belgian market. “We are a service company and need to be close to our customers to carry out our work,” notes Mr. Bora.

“Our company hierarchy is very decentralized and involves almost continuous customer contact to guarantee the best service.”

Auxiga’s core activity is asset pledge and asset monitoring. Here, it is not the value of the asset that is assessed but the quantity. Nevertheless, Auxiga does act in an advisory capacity on the basis of its experience. “When we visit clients to check on assets, it is mainly a question of taking inventory,” outlines Mr. Bora. “However, in the future our target is to be more than just bean counters. We have operated in this sector for such a long time that we have the expertise to provide advice that goes beyond the numbers. We know certain industry sectors very well indeed.”

Auxiga generates 80% of its turnover in just eight industry sectors. These cover commerce and distribution, retail, wine and spirits, the food industry (specifically ham and cheese), and the automotive sector. “Our customers are often active in sectors with a seasonal component,” says Mr. Bora. “For example, chocolate manufacturers generate most of their turnover at the peak periods of Easter and Christmas although they manufacture steadily throughout the year. An exception is automotive manufacturers on whose behalf we carry out floor checks.” Many of Auxiga’s customers make regular use of its service, and some have been clients for over 30 years. These are usually short-term projects that last for six months, after which another six-month contract is signed.

Over the years, Auxiga’s customer base has expanded beyond banks to include other credit institutes such as leasing companies, private equity companies and investment funds. Its focus nevertheless remains on the French-speaking parts of Europe, currently France, Belgium and Luxembourg. “We operate in a specialist niche that is not particularly widely known,” says Mr. Bora. “That is something we want to change in the future.”

Other plans for the future of the group include expanding its floor check activities geographically. “Many of the car manufacturers we work with have dealers across Europe,” Mr. Bora adds. “Our goal is to provide the same service for all of their affiliated dealers, whichever country they operate in.” Another target is to increase the customer portfolio. Auxiga currently has around 2,300 customers. The overwhelming majority are SMEs with a turnover of between one and five million EUR. “We want to expand our activities to much larger companies in the future and will be targeting companies with annual turnover in the region of 50 million EUR,” Mr. Bora concludes.
Vaping the way to a smoke-free future

The rise of e-cigarettes or ‘vaping’ is to be welcomed as studies have shown that the risks of consuming nicotine by inhaling vapours produced by an e-cigarette are much lower than those associated with inhaling the smoke produced by burning tobacco. It was the desire to wean his two sons off smoking that encouraged Didier Martzel to begin his research into e-cigarettes in 2005 and register his first patent for a ‘cigarette substitute’ during that year. Three years were necessary to set up Gaïatrend’s foundation, followed by the launch of its first e-liquid brand named Alfaliquid in 2010, under the aegis of his eldest son, Olivier.

“My father was determined to stop me and my brother from smoking,” recalls Managing Director Olivier Martzel. “In that, and in the development of the business, he has been doubly successful.” Didier Martzel was lucky that his background in electronics left him ideally positioned to find an alternative to a habit that kills one in two of those who take it up. “Everyone agrees that smoking is harmful and that nicotine is addictive,” says Mr. Martzel. “What e-cigarettes do is allow people to enjoy the nicotine hit safely while giving them a way to reduce their dependence. Moreover, our e-liquids contain only four ingredients, three out of the four are pharma-grade (vegetable glycerine, propylene-glycol and nicotine), and will remain so all along the production process, while the aromatic components are certified as food-grade flavourings.

The person responsible for developing all of the flavours in the portfolio is Mr. Martzel’s younger brother Xavier. His background is in chemistry, with additional training as an aroma specialist. A key point is that Xavier does not mix flavours as most of the manufacturers in the market usually do, but conceives the aromas directly by assembling molecular components, which enables a higher safety level for consumers. Furthermore, Gaïatrend guarantees that its e-liquids do not contain diacetyl, parabens or Ambrox.

In 2018, Gaïatrend obtained the HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) as well as the AFNOR e-liquid Certification. All the processes implemented enabled the company to be selected by an independent medical Committee as the official e-liquid supplier for two major clinical studies on vaping currently in progress in France and in Switzerland.

Vaping Alfaliquid e-liquids is a much safer alternative to deliver nicotine than smoking. “It is the smoke that is inhaled when burning tobacco that is dangerous,” insists Mr. Martzel. “E-cigarettes provide a similar experience to smoking but with much reduced risk to health.” Studies have backed this claim up and e-cigarettes are seen as an approved way of helping smokers quit. “One
A good way of measuring the effect of smoking on the body is to measure the amount of carbon monoxide in the blood,” explains Mr. Martzel. “Smokers typically have higher concentrations of carbon monoxide in their blood. Carbon monoxide attaches to red blood cells and impedes their ability to transport oxygen around the body. However, the rate of carbon monoxide is substantially lowered after just a week of abstinence from smoking. By switching to e-cigarettes, this benefit can be permanent.”

The advantage of vaping as a way of quitting smoking over other forms of nicotine delivery is that the act of vaping mimics quite closely that of smoking. Vaping, however, has much more to offer. “We have more than 100 different flavours in the portfolio,” says Mr. Martzel. “Although most new vapers start with tobacco or fresh/mint flavours, our Alfaliquid e-liquids offer an extremely wide range of flavours to choose from. From pungent to fruity, from single flavours to more complex recipes, there is something to suit every taste.” Gaïatrend’s e-liquids are targeted at adult smokers. “There are not the same restrictions on the sale of e-liquids for vaping as there are for tobacco products, as long as the customer is an adult, however we position our products for sale in specialized shops that can provide the necessary help and advice to new vapers as well as returning customers,” says Mr. Martzel.

Since its start, the company has recorded a yearly double-digit growth. As first mover in the French e-liquids market, the Alfaliquid brand enjoys a leadership position. Its products are now also sold in 25 other countries, although foreign sales only account for 10% of turnover. “There is a great deal of potential still to be exploited in foreign markets. The European vaping business is still in its early stages but has the potential to become a multibillion-euro market in just a few years’ time,” foresees Mr. Martzel. After several months of research and development, Gaïatrend has just launched a brand new vaping device named Alfapod, a prefilled pod system with the Feelm technology. Feelm is a revolutionary technology which combines a Metal Film with a Ceramic Conductor, for an optimized vaping experience. “This is the next big step for us,” concludes Mr. Martzel.
Interview with Eric Remisz, Managing Director, and Stéphane Bonnardin, Deputy Managing Director of Maguin SAS

Casting the net wider

Although sugar consumption still remains at a high level worldwide, the recent changes to regulations in the sugar market have put it in crisis. Within this context, industrial sugar production machinery specialist Maguin SAS in France is currently looking to reposition itself in new markets. With 175 years of experience in steel construction, it has much to offer new customers.

Over the course of the past 175 years, Maguin has amassed an unparalleled store of experience in the design, manufacture, delivery, assembly, installation and handover of industrial plant and equipment of all sizes. Traditionally active in the sugar, fertilizers and environmental sectors, it is now casting its net more widely and looking to win customers in new markets. “Maguin has an outstanding reputation for quality in its traditional areas of expertise,” says Managing Director Eric Remisz. “Our key advantage is that we are fully vertically integrated and can offer a turnkey service with delivery and installation anywhere in the world. However, outside our traditional markets, we are not as well known as we could be.” According to Maguin’s new strategy, that is about to change. “We have identified opportunities in the food industry, in methanation for the waste processing industry, onshore and offshore wind power, oil and gas exploration and production, paper and wood production, quarrying, steel production and the cement industry. This may sound like a hotchpotch of different sectors but they are all bound by a common thread – our strong core competence in industrial production. These are eminently transferable skills.”

Maguin is already well down the path to diversification. It is currently preparing a tender for a methanation plant in partnership with three companies specialized in this area. “Our partners are involved in the development while we bring our expertise in construction to the table,” explains Deputy Managing Director Stéphane Bonnardin. “Our partners know the customers and can advise on financing. In this way, we are able to offer them a full service with a single point of contact.” Potential customers for this particular product are farmers, many of whom are interested in energy generation from biomass as a complementary activity. The project is also attractive to industrial customers or municipal planners as a way of disposing of waste products in an ecological manner.

“We have wide-ranging expertise in the construction of large-scale industrial plant and are now looking to transfer these skills to other industry sectors.”

A large-scale fermentation drum being built at Maguin’s production site in Charmes and destined for a public waste treatment plant.

Similar opportunities points out Mr. Remisz, whose own previous experience was in the energy sector. “We want to establish ourselves with good reference projects in these areas,” he says. “That is why we only bid for projects that offer us an opportunity to show what we are capable of doing. We want to position ourselves at the upper end of the market and offer superior quality and technology.”
Skills and personality for success

The need for good people is higher than ever before. They are the basis for the success of a company. For this reason, human resources has become an important part of the strategy of every successful business. Intys HR S.A. based in Brussels is an HR specialist focusing on operational consulting and people development.

Intys HR has a unique approach, translating HR into business benefits: “The value of an employee not only depends on his competences and skills, but also on his personality,” points out CEO Jonathan Beckers. “That is why we have developed our own method for choosing the right people according to their interpersonal skills. We also let our talents grow, get inspired and help them make the right choices for the future.”

Intys HR was founded by Michel Van Hemele and Eugenie Nijhuis in 2010 to offer an HR solution for middle management. The name was chosen in relation to Inti, the god of the sun of the Inca empire.

It stands as a symbol for light and warmth, which enable development. “Our aim is to create a favourable and nurturing environment, enabling personal development and leading to combined personal and corporate success,” explains Mr. Beckers. “Ongoing development is very important for us. Our staff is constantly reflecting and is curious about taking on new approaches.”

In its operational consulting division, the company offers highly experienced consultants who are able to solve complex HR problems. In a hands-on approach, they are staffed into the company for three to nine months as HR officers, managers or business partners, working on HR projects, talent acquisition and talent management. The people development division provides individual development, collective development and strategic development for its own staff as well as for clients, such as training sessions, assessment centers and career development programs. “Our HR specialists always have a direct contact person at Intys HR who monitors their career and provides assistance and support,” says the CEO. “All our people are passionate about what they do and are dedicated to delivering good results. That is what really differentiates us from our competitors. Each person is unique and has special skills. We try to focus on individualities and specificities of people to unlock their potential and their talents, and support our clients in the best possible way.”

With this strategy, Intys HR has been very successful throughout Belgium and abroad, and wants to grow further in the future.
Silicones as problem solvers

Dow combines one of the broadest technology sets in the industry with asset integration, focused innovation and global scale to achieve profitable growth and become the most innovative, customer-centric, inclusive and sustainable materials science company. Dow’s portfolio of performance materials, industrial intermediates and plastics businesses delivers a broad range of differentiated science-based products and solutions for its customers in high-growth segments, such as packaging, infrastructure and consumer care. The group’s subsidiary Dow Silicones Belgium SPRL specializes in silicones. The multipurpose material is used in adhesives, detergents, sealants, high-performance building applications and cosmetic emulsions.

Dow Silicones Belgium is part of Dow Consumer Solutions, which is one of the six DOW business units in the EMEAI region – with a total of 38 production facilities. Headquartered in the USA, Dow is one of the world’s largest chemical companies manufacturing a broad range of products. Dow operates 113 manufacturing sites in 31 countries and employs approximately 37,000 people. Dow supplies customers in diverse markets such as automotive, construction, consumer products, electronics, energy, infrastructure, packaging and water.

“Our plant in Belgium has existed since 1970,” says Frank van der Meer, Site Leader Seneffe. “Until 2016, it had been jointly owned by Dow and the American technology company Corning when it was taken over completely by Dow. Today, we are a 100% subsidiary of Dow, with the group’s European head office in Horgen, Switzerland.”

The Dow plant in Seneffe in Wallonia employs approximately 450 people and produces different silicones for three major market segments: home and personal care, including additives for detergents and dishwasher tabs; adhesive and pressure sensitive applications, like bar code labels, luggage badges and baking paper, and high-performance building applications. “The latter primarily comprises sealing silicones such as for windows,” explains Mr. van der Meer. “These silicones have to meet the highest requirements...
and withstand a broad spectrum of diverse weather conditions. Dow silicones have been used in 13 of the world’s 20 highest skyscrapers. While offering a wide choice of standard silicones, Dow is always available to innovate together with our customers and develop individually customized solutions. Customer-driven innovation, ‘seek together,’ is our strength,” states Mr. van der Meer. “Recently, we designed a material that can be used in a 3D printed, customized shoe sole to achieve the perfect fit for any individual.” As part of Dow, Dow Silicones Belgium ships its products to customers across Europe as well as to the USA and Asia. “We are a globally operating company,” says Mr. van der Meer. “We also benefit from synergies within the bigger group. Until the acquisition by Dow three years ago, our focus had been on silicones. Now, with the integration into Dow, we have gained access to the carbon chemistry set, which gives us completely new opportunities. We are now developing new hybrid product solutions combining silicones and carbon chemicals.” Dow has a strong focus on research and development. In Belgium alone, the company has about 150 people involved in R&D activities. “Constant product innovation is part of our DNA,” states Mr. van der Meer. Dow also plays a leading role in production automation and digital sales. “We use robots and drones in manufacturing as far as possible, especially in potentially hazardous areas, to enhance staff safety, and we have our own online digital platform where customers can order directly: https://consumer.dow.com/en-us.html.”

For every ton of CO₂ emitted in manufacturing our products, 9 t can be saved thanks to the use of this solution.

Committed to generating sustainable energy, Dow Silicones Belgium has its own wind turbines and photovoltaic panels.

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Dow’s commitment to sustainable development and environmental protection is also visible in its dedication to meeting the sustainability needs of its customers and employees. Recently in the Seneffe location, a new inspirationstudio has been opened. This investment is in line with the Dow strategic elements of customer centricity and innovation. The location in Seneffe now has the unique possibility to facilitate a co-creation cycle. The new inspirationstudio can showcase Dow’s innovation capabilities and ‘seek together’ with its customers to co-create new innovative solutions that bring value to both Dow and its customers.
Interview with Lokman Sever, CEO of Noordco Group

Diverse activities, shared values

At first glance, aviation and the real estate sectors do not seem to have anything in common. The reality is that the synergies are probably few and far between, but nevertheless, the Belgian Noordco Group operates successfully in both sectors. The company’s secret to combining such an unlikely pairing? The common vision and values that Noordco applies to both areas of its business.

A public company, Noordco’s business is split into two divisions. Its real estate sector, established over 30 years ago, incorporates five separate entities: Noordco SA, ITC, LPBI, Immobiliere Lisa and Immomial SA, which together, own 80 properties across Belgium, with a total of 50 tenants. Real estate business activities span residential real estate, corporate real estate, new real estate properties, trustee, rental management and valuation. The company, an independent group with a stable financial background, prides itself on its professionalism and its extensive knowledge and experience of the business.

The second sector in which Noordco operates is aviation. Espace Voyages is an IATA-accredited travel agency, which cooperates with an extensive network of over 150 leading airlines, 65,000 hotels, insurance companies and other travel industry suppliers, which enables Espace Voyages to offer its clients top prices and optimum solutions to their travel challenges.

The company is designated an official travel agent for over 84 international airlines. In this sector too, its staff are highly professional and experienced.

Important is that, in everything we do, we add value to every life that we touch.

Espace Voyages owns a number of branches in Belgium, but also operates a franchise operation in Belgium, Luxembourg, Amsterdam and Kinshasa.

Lokman Sever, CEO of Noordco Group: His mission is for his company to add value to every life it touches

The company operates on an ethos of respect: its employees are treated with the same respect which they afford their customers.
What links Noordco’s two businesses is the company’s vision, mission and values, which have ensured significant success in both of its operating sectors. These focus on people, community and quality of life “Our vision, and the target we want to achieve by our 35th anniversary in 2025 is to grow four-fold on four continents,” says CEO Lokman Sever. “Important for us is that, in everything we do, our entrepreneurial spirit and reliable teams enable us to add value to every life that we touch.” The company’s mission – to contribute to rising standards of living by using our talents and energy to develop solutions that add value to people’s lives in every region in which we operate – reinforces this theme across both the aviation and the real estate businesses. On a day-to-day basis, Noordco lives these ideals through its values of fairness, working from the heart, reputation, and people orientation; the values apply not only to its clients, but also to its own employees who are treated with the same level of respect with which they themselves treat the firm’s customers. Nowhere is this attitude more apparent than in the Espace Voyages agency, which specializes in air travel to Africa and South America. Many of its customers are Africans living in Europe, who wish to travel to their home country, as well as business people. Mr. Sever is fascinated by the continent and its people. “I love the African culture and mentality – an appealing mix of naivety and sincerity,” he says. The business concept is unusual and tailored to the specific needs of the customers. Flights to Africa are, in general, relatively expensive, and the agency not only sources the cheapest possible options, but also allows customers to pay in monthly installments. For example, in September 2019, a passenger books a flight for June 2020, and can then spread the installments over several months. “Espace Voyages was a pioneer in this respect,” Mr. Sever underlines. Bucking the trend towards online bookings, Espace Voyages owns a number of offices in Belgium, and also has a franchising operation covering Belgium, Luxembourg, Amsterdam and Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The company is aiming to expand its franchised network, and its great reputation means there is no shortage of business people looking to become franchise partners. Mr. Severs believes he understands the factors which form the foundation for success in any business. “Most importantly, you have to love what you do,” he says. “You also have to have courage, and be honest and straightforward. I believe this combination is the recipe for success, which for me doesn’t mean earning a lot of money, but being happy in my work and having a clear conscience in every respect.”
Interview with Ab Benay, CEO and Owner of Cresta International B.V.

On trend in consumer electronics

In the dynamic world of consumer electronics, demand is often driven by emerging trends in other sectors. Products designed to support independent health care are a prime example, as are devices that support the smart home concept. Successful manufacturers recognize that their product range has to move with the times. Dutch company Cresta International B.V., which has been in the consumer electronics business for over 40 years, continually achieves this. Its health care and smart home devices now play a central role in its broad portfolio of small electronics.

“Health care products are currently our most important product category, and the one I personally like best.”

Cresta designs and develops consumer electronics in the low and middle price sector in four core categories. Besides health care devices such as blood pressure, temperature, and sugar level monitoring, the firm also produces thermotherapy products – heated blankets, massage machines, and heated belts, for example – and clocks and weather stations. New for 2019 is a complete range of smart home products, which includes the hardware and software for controlling lighting, heating and home security. “Our smart home products have been developed together with a partner in Hong Kong, and are exclusive to Cresta,” underlines Mr. Benay. Around 50% of Cresta’s portfolio is made up of own-brand products – C-care thermotherapy and health care products, and C-smart weather, time, and smart home appliances.

In addition, Cresta also distributes Wellcare thermotherapy and health care products, and Swiss Voice telecom solutions for the elderly. The production of Cresta’s own-brand products is outsourced to manufacturers in China.

Cresta’s headquarters and distribution facilities are located in Almere, and its products are sold by major online and chain store retailers across Benelux and France. Its export market generates around 35% of the company’s turnover. In France and Belgium, Cresta works with distributors who take care of the markets in those countries. “In the coming years, our focus will be to increase our international activities,” reveals the CEO. “The first priority will be to develop the Spanish and German markets, but in the longer term, our goal is to target the whole of Europe. Some of our clients are active in several countries, which will help enormously. Our strategy is to appoint one distributor per country; that way, we can provide optimum
support so that those distributors can serve our market well through their own stocks and deliveries. Their target is to deliver within 24 hours.” In total, in a relatively niche market – there are around five similar players – Cresta currently boasts a one-third market share.

One of Cresta’s key strengths is its policy of stable pricing. “We have a clear policy of not offering discounted prices,” Mr. Benay emphasizes. “Our clients know this, and follow the same policy themselves with our products. This strategy is another reason that we want to work with just one distributor in each country as far as possible. It makes this pricing policy much easier to implement.”

Cresta was founded in 1976, and has a longstanding reputation for good, reliable service and high-quality, innovative products. “In five years’ time, we will have a great distribution network covering more than half of the European countries,” predicts Mr. Benay. “We have over 200 products in our portfolio which means we can study the market in each country and offer exactly what customers want.”
Like the ripples of a pond

What’s not to love about sushi? – It looks amazing and tastes as good as it looks. It also taps into several current lifestyle and healthy eating trends, which means that sushi is having something of a moment right now. One of the fastest growing businesses in the sushi market is SushiPoint B.V. in the Netherlands. Just eight years after its launch, the company already has 27 outlets in the centre and west of the country and expects to reach 50 shops in the next three to four years. Its recipe for success is a tried-and-tested combination of quality, taste, stunning presentation and an instinct for what consumers want.

SushiPoint finds itself in the enviable position of making something quite difficult look easy. It is currently making a huge splash in the takeaway food market. Chief Financial Officer Bas van Wijngaarden cannot resist giving the company a congratulatory clap on the shoulder. “I don’t think it is bragging too much to mention at this point that we were named ‘best valued Out of Home Formula’ in a consumer poll in 2017,” he smiles. “Last year, we were voted into third place by customers.”

SushiPoint’s slogan is ‘SushiPoint makes you smile!’ and it puts all its effort into achieving that goal. The company specializes in the takeaway sushi market. Customers order food for collection at the shop or home delivery. Everything is made completely fresh to order. “We do not have any sit-down restaurants but focus entirely on the eat-at-home market,” explains Mr. van Wijngaarden. “We have our own website with an ordering platform and we also have a SushiPoint mobile app. Customers can also order through Thuisbezorgd.nl, the largest online ordering platform in the Dutch market for home-delivered food, and we deliver with our own delivery staff.”

We do not have any sit-down restaurants but focus entirely on the eat at home market.

The emphasis on absolute freshness throughout is key. The shops are quite open-plan so that customers coming into one of the stores to pick up their order can see into the kitchens and are able to see the level of hygiene that is adhered to. This level of transparency is also why the Dutch consumer association awarded SushiPoint a score of 9.6 out of 10 for its high standards of hygiene. “The products and the level of artistry involved is phenomenal,” insists Mr. van Wijngaarden. “We
make an incredibly wide range of different sushi with the traditional Japanese delicacy adapted to European tastes.”

Sushi has an inherently healthy reputation. Japanese people are among the longest-living in the world, and much of their amazing longevity is ascribed to their diet. Sushi is the most accessible form of the Japanese way of eating for Western palates and the endlessly variable rolls of sticky sushi rice and fillings can be adapted to the needs of a variety of diets up to and including veganism. Another key selling point of sushi is the tasting platter nature of the experience. “Each piece of sushi is no more than a couple of mouthfuls and our pre-selected menus are very convenient and popular for two or more people to share,” says Mr. van Wijngaarden. “Generally, customers order a menu together with a side dish.” For larger groups or parties, SushiPoint can put together spectacular platters with as many as 450 pieces of sushi. These have a wow factor that few other takeaway food outlets can match.

SushiPoint currently employs 900 people or the equivalent of 450 full-time staff. “We currently have 27 shops in the central and western parts of the country,” says Mr. van Wijngaarden. “We will be adding a further seven shops this year with the target of reaching 50 in the next three to four years. So far, growth has been organic and we have taken our time with each new shop. It takes up to six months to train staff to make sushi to our standards. That training takes place in the nearest SushiPoint shop to the new store which is why the spread of our stores is like the ripples from a stone thrown in a pond.” Opening day for a new store is a major event with plenty of local publicity. “We give away a lot of food on the first day,” grins Mr. van Wijngaarden. “But this pays off handsomely afterwards. While it is the novelty that gets people through the door initially, it is the quality of our food and service that keeps them coming back afterwards.” SushiPoint uses freebies a lot as a customer loyalty tool. “We always pack a little something extra with the order,” says Mr. van Wijngaarden. “We have found that customers would rather have something for free than a discount. That is how we make them smile.”

As the concentric ripples of the SushiPoint pond expand ever wider, the company can envisage spreading to other countries in the long term. “That won’t happen for another five years at least,” says Mr. Wijngaarden. “First, we want to expand and consolidate our presence in the Dutch market before taking our successful model international.”

Freshly prepared to order, SushiPoint’s successful business model has seen it expand to 27 outlets in just eight years.
Asian gateway, Asian hospitality

Hong Kong: For the European manufacturing sector in particular, an important business destination, but a long and potentially very tiring journey. Cathay Pacific Airways Limited takes the stress out of travel between Europe and Hong Kong, with comfortable, relaxing flights, convenient departure times, and renowned Asian hospitality.

Cathay Pacific flies between Hong Kong and twelve European locations. Marco van Naarden is the Country Lead and Head of Sales for Benelux. “We fly direct to Hong Kong from Amsterdam every day, and four times a week from Brussels,” he says. “That is very convenient for people who do business in Hong Kong, and also offers a pivotal gateway to China and other parts of Asia.” The British/Hong Kong-owned company operates the latest generation of Airbus planes on its Amsterdam and Brussels routes, offering passengers a very high level of comfort; the planes are 50% quieter, their larger windows let in more natural light, and the superior onboard pressure and general climate reduces the effects of jet lag. Business class customers can take advantage of flat bed seating, while the hugely popular premium economy class, accommodated in a dedicated cabin, provides wide seating and extensive leg space. The time schedule is also optimal. Travellers leave Brussels or Amsterdam in the afternoon and arrive in Hong Kong in the early morning, allowing a full day’s work. On the return journey, passengers leave Hong Kong around midnight and arrive at their European destination in the morning, refreshed and fit for the new working day. With a range of booking channels and dedicated airport check-in, Cathay Pacific is very focused on providing a superior customer experience. Travellers have access to relaxing airport lounges; in Hong Kong, the company has its own lounges, with restaurants, bars and showers so passengers can face their journey totally refreshed. What really sets Cathay Pacific apart though, is its service. “On board, we offer typical Asian hospitality – an experience in itself,” Mr. van Naarden underlines. “It is characterized by natural, genuine friendliness and elegant service, which puts clients completely at their ease. Cathay Pacific is a growing business with a fantastic reputation. We offer business travellers and tourists unique levels of service on convenient and relaxing flights to the fabulous metropole of Hong Kong.”
How to excel in a ‘simple’ product

Many industrial sectors, from mechanical engineering firms to DIY stores, depend on screws and bolts – as either vendor parts or articles for sale. They come in thousands of different sizes, geometries and qualities for just as many different applications. It is a sector, therefore, requiring significant competence – such as that offered by EMMEVI Srl, an Italian business with four decades of technological expertise in all types of fastening products.

EMMEVI specializes in the design and production of screws and bolts for many industrial applications. Founded in 1980, the company is located in Gallarate, a city in the Greater Milan metropolitan area in Lombardy in northern Italy, close to Milan-Malpensa International Airport. “Over the decades, we have gained profound experience and competence in manufacturing customer-specific fastening products,” says Managing Partner Bortolo Maddalena who created the company almost 40 years ago. “With this expertise and technological know-how in all sectors of screws and bolts, we are considered a good and reliable reference point today for a widely varying, demanding customer base. Thanks to the professionalism of our employees and the high flexibility and product availability of a large, modern and well-stocked warehouse, together with our highly efficient network of suppliers, we are able to supply our customers and partners with a very wide range of quality products. We are able to guarantee the maximum in supplies for both standard products and for mechanical parts according to the customer’s individual design; we guarantee the quality of our products based on continuous control of the raw materials used, of the thermal and surface treatments and of the geometric and dimensional precision. Thanks to our innovative machines and our expertise, we produce and supply high-quality products with micro-tolerances, even in small series, according to the individual requirements of our customers. This would not be possible in the same way for a big industrial group. Finally, yet most importantly, we provide excellent customer service, before and after the sale.”

EMMEVI has 6,000 m² of production and storage space and employs 23 people. Last year, the company turned over five million EUR. “We offer over 5,000 individual products and process a wide range of materials including stainless steel, brass, aluminium, copper and different alloys, and non-metals such as nylon and PVC – whatever is required by the customer,” explains Mr. Maddalena. “Our main clients are well-known textile and plastic manufacturers, over 90% of which are situated in northern Italy. In the recent past, we have supplied an increasing number of customers in Germany and France. Our present export ratio is 5% and is continuing to grow.”
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