

'We still have a lot of growth potential'



Forty years of Van der Windt

It began in 1969 with simple cucumber boxes. Forty years later Van der Windt is a leading supplier of packaging solutions. An interview with Commercial Director Peter van Leeuwen, who still sees plenty of opportunity for growth.

In 1969 when John van der Windt started his company in an old auction building he realised immediately that supplying only (cucumber) boxes would not be enough. So it was not long before the plastic lettuce bag was added to the product range. This was followed by the conical sleeve for packaging flowers, plants and herbs which, either printed or plain, is now indispensable. This innovation went, and is still going, all over the world via the Dutch exporters.

The company was also the first to offer an anti-condensation film for packaging sliced vegetables. Innovation quickly became of paramount importance. The activities expanded at lightning speed, both geographically and in products. This was possible because it was not long before Van der Windt began making acquisitions. Nine years after its establishment Van der Windt acquired German manufacturer Schrader and renamed it Wentus Kunststoff. After 20 years John van der Windt sold the company

to Buhrmann Tetterode (later absorbed into KNPBT) which, in 1996, was sold to the Irish Clondalkin Group. Under the Clondalkin umbrella Van der Windt and Wentus, present themselves as the Van der Windt Wentus Packaging Group. Wentus is responsible for the manufacturing and Van der Windt Verpakking BV is responsible for the commercial activities.

The fruit & vegetables sector is and will remain important

Expanding from the cucumber box to the current, impressive and extremely wide range has taken 40 years. Yet the company's initial market – the fruit & vegetables sector is still very important. 'It's our oldest market, and it still generates 30% of our revenue,' says Peter van Leeuwen. He talks enthusiastically about the company and in particular about the innovations Van der Windt has brought to the market in the past and more recently. Innovations like the packaging for

Tommies Snack - cherry tomatoes that are packaged in a standard packaging from one of the company's other product groups. 'The new combination turns a commodity into a speciality', says Van Leeuwen, who emphasises that the fruit & vegetables product group is still growing.

Flowers, plants and fresh herbs

The invention of the conical sleeve brought the flowers and plants market into the picture for Van der Windt. Sales in this segment, part of the ornamental horticulture business unit and combined with Olsthoorn Verpakkingen which was acquired in 2008, amount to 37 million euro. With so many exporters and Flora Holland just around the corner it is a market that cannot be missed. Agriculture and horticulture is important and Van der Windt has a range of specialised packaging for this market. The flower bulb sector is also served with plastic crates.

The third business unit is retail & services.

'We serve the traditional retail trade via wholesalers, but companies like Ahold are supplied directly', explains Van Leeuwen. 'The fastest growing area in the service segment is food service. Cardboard drinks cups, for example, form a gigantic growth market. Our customers include Sara Lee Douwe-Egberts'.

Van der Windt is also attracting considerable attention with its garbage bag product group; recently a new generation of garbage bags was introduced under the name Powersterko®. Bags that, because they are made of new and improved raw materials, are thinner and therefore cheaper while having equal, if not better, carrying and tearing strength.

The fourth business unit is industry, which focuses on the food and non-food industry and achieves revenue of 31 million euro. Van der Windt's broad range of products for this market varies from



topseal films to dispatch envelopes and from filling material to closures.

'We have total concepts for all our markets', says Van Leeuwen. 'And for the past three years an increasingly important role has been played by 'Bio-Based', an activity that covers every market and includes products such as garbage bags and carrier bags made from cornstarch, film, bags and sleeves made of PLA and dishes and trays made of sugar cane.'

Close to the customer

The good mix of customers and markets makes Van der Windt less sensitive to the economic tide. So the mood within the company is anything but one of crisis. In fact, the 2009-2011 business plan is based on growth. Van Leeuwen: 'We are definitely going to make further strides, especially in the food sector. Our greatest strength is our expertise and our ability to come up with good solutions.

We are very active when it comes to sourcing.'

Asked what is the key factor for the success Van Leeuwen answers: 'Being close to the customer. That was and is the key factor for our success and will remain so. With the new website, via which internet ordering is also possible, we want to make things even easier for the customer. And through our pro-active approach to the customer we want to offer solutions. A good example is our 'Catch the Savings' programme whereby customers can hand over purchasing and logistics to us so they can concentrate on their core business.

'But good plans cannot be carried out without good people'. Van Leeuwen emphasises that the company's growth is primarily thanks to the dedication and loyalty of its staff. More information www.vanderwindt.com