

In the end it's all about people.

Imagine walking into a clothing store and using an app on your phone, you can choose what you want to try. A signal is sent from your phone to the warehouse and a few moments later you receive a notification that your items are ready in fitting room three. There you can view and order matching accessories via the mirror. The jacket that fits you is just too tight, no problem, just tap on the mirror and the other size will promptly appear. It's like music for the future, straight from a science-fiction movie.

But that's not the case, this kind of system is based on RFID technology, a kind of digital version of the well-known barcode. This technology is already being implemented in various sectors. Mieloo & Alexander realised this system for Bonprix, part of the Otto Group in Hamburg. Mieloo & Alexander, a Dutch ICT service provider, is at the forefront of this market. With Marktlink's sales support, they were looking for an investor for the next step in growth and further internationalisation.

Joseph Owusu and Sander Merckx started Mieloo & Alexander Business Integrators around 2000. The company specialises in designing systems and solutions that use RFID; radio-frequency identification and RFID technology are already used in many sectors for automated and highly accurate stock management. The technology ensures that business processes are optimized and can run much more efficiently. For example, they reduce the risk that a retailer has to sell 'no' because this technique always gives signals when new items have to be delivered, so retailers always keep good selling items in stock.

The technology is on the rise, and in addition to applications in retail, it also has many opportunities in sectors such as logistics, manufacturing and healthcare, but also in asset management. International organisations use Mieloo & Alexander's systems to track the location of their means of transport (trolleys, crates, etc.). This results in less loss of these resources, which leads to major savings.

"Sander and I got to know each other as colleagues, both in paid employment. We were already working on implementing IT technologies to create more business efficiency. Like many entrepreneurs, we felt strongly that we could do better ourselves. So we took the plunge, obtained work and proceeded from there. At the time, we saw a great deal of potential in RFID technology."

It was a flying start for Mieloo & Alexander. *"Fortunately, the millennium bug's doomsday scenarios turned out to be nothing more than scenarios. We believed in ourselves and in this service, you could almost call us a kind of evangelist. We were going crazy and had plenty of work,"* explains Joseph.

Tech in times of crisis

"The knife of the crisis cut both ways for us. On the one hand, the solutions developed by Mieloo & Alexander are the ones you cut back on in a period of crisis, it is of course a considerable investment. But on the other hand, the solutions provide the same result, but with fewer people. Especially in Western Europe, where labour costs are very high, this is a big advantage. Our relatively low overheads also allowed us to keep going and we came out of the crisis well."

Looking to the future

"Providers of our type of service are scarce. While we expect it to grow by 10 to 15% on the demand side of the market, this is certainly not the case on the supply side. We can jump into that gap. Contrary to our competitors, we don't think from the technology point of view, but from the business point of view. It may be cliché to say, but we speak the language of the entrepreneur. Extensive experience and a track record in building and realising complex international solutions ensure that we can curb the market."

"But that doesn't detract from the fact that we, Sander and I, knew that we had to professionalise in order to continue to do this, to continue to grow. We are now a Benelux organisation, but we want to continue to enter the international market. We don't want to miss the boat and go along with the market."

To facilitate this growth, a partner had to be found, according to Joseph and Sander. In the first instance, in their opinion, this had to be a strategic partner. Finding a strategist who is suitable for the same market proved to be a challenge, as there were no major players in adjacent sectors.

"It was therefore obvious to find an investor," says Joseph. The duo called in the sales support of Marktlink and the search process was started. "We want not only a makeover strategy, but also a buy-in strategy, in order to achieve economies of scale and internationalisation."

A suitable candidate

The buyer was found in Capital A, the former ABN AMRO Participations, which became independent last year. Capital A acquired a majority interest in Mieloo & Alexander. The direct result of the transaction is the opening of a branch office in Germany. "In order to be able to serve local people, you have to have a local presence. Now we have opened an office there and hired German people. It is our ambition to open one or two branches a year in Europe and beyond in the coming years, Capital A actively supports this ambition."

Part of the management also acquired shares during the acquisition. "We actively worked on setting up a construction that would allow dedicated management to participate. They decided to buy these shares during the transaction and there is still a package available for the future."

"Marktlink supported us intensively. Our sector is completely different from what they do, but our deal team was able to absorb the amount of information quickly and to understand our business in a relatively short period of time. They put a lot of energy into it. After all, it's not financial work, but real people's work. The decision was always made by us as entrepreneurs, and even though we sometimes had tough discussions, in the end we were very lucky with our deal team and managed to close a nice transaction with which we are very satisfied."