

4. Buzzispace



The Rise of Ecofelt



BuzziSpace’s story begins at the parent company, TecnoSpace, from which it grew. TecnoSpace is active in partitioning systems and gyproc works for offices and it asked design(er) consultant Sas Adriaenssens to take a closer look at all the products. Adriaenssens immediately came up with the idea of creating ecological, flexible, acoustic and beautiful walls using newly-developed ecovilt (ecological felt) made from recycled PET bottles.

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“TecnoSpace had already been active for a long time in partitioning systems that were primarily made from aluminum, glass or wood. And there’s nothing wrong with that in itself, because they too are very ecological and can be recycled. But I was asked to thrash out the marketing image in combination with the design and range of products. I had to discover where the company was failing to make use of added value”, explains Sas Adriaenssens who above all saw the flexibility of both the company and its products as a big bonus. The partitioning systems are already flexible, but what was more important is that the company had to play along in the changing notions of architecture. “Offices became open spaces, austere and minimalist, with polycarbonate floors, etc. but all with less pleasant acoustic side-effects as a result.”

How could TecnoSpace react to changing office trends with its range of products? It may have been the basis of Sas Adriaenssens’ analysis, but the greatest potential lay in the same principles on which the company was built: flexibility of the partitioning systems, ecological – both recoverable and recyclable. All this, combined with acoustic requirements and an eye for design, that’s where the unused potential lay.

“I started looking for a material that had already booked the results required with regard to acoustic absorption and I ended up in the road construction sector. After all, for low-

noise asphalt, cloths are used which have been woven using fibres from recycled PET bottles.” This gave her a crucial impulse. Two criteria were already going in the right direction, acoustic absorption and ecological friendliness, because of the recycled PET fibre. “But that doesn’t give you a usable product, let alone that it leads to goodlooking results. We looked long and hard for a process to yield finer fibres that would make a material you could then do something with. By grinding longer, the fibres did effectively become smaller and we started felting”, she says. Normally, you knead by hand in combination with water and soap and that’s how you end up with felt. But at industrial level, we use the process of needle felting, whereby you create pores and it’s the pores that provide acoustic absorption.”

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Ecovilt turned out to be a dream material to work with, but then you still don’t have any interior products that are usable. “If you use the ecovilt as a freestanding wall, it needs a solid and smooth base and then it can be a perfect alternative to a partition wall. We were able to change the colours, which resulted in a funky colour pallet. We had to find the right balance between coloured and transparent fibres.” The patented basic product was commercialised in a limited number of products in a separate division called BuzziSpace.

“We really believed in the innovation of ecovilt”, says Steve Symons, managing director of TecnoSpace that gave BuzziSpace the necessary space to manoeuvre. “The felt can be used for so many applications that we put Sas, a home designer, to work to create alternative products within the area in which TecnoSpace is active. Let’s say ecologically sound alternatives, even though we immediately knew that investing in the basic material offered far more potential.” It was at the end of 2006 that BuzziSpace came out as a

new company where every link in the chain had to be as ecological as possible because in the meantime Sas Adriaenssens kept streamlining the process better and better.

“The products are not only made from PET bottles which are not biodegradable themselves; the inside structure of the panels consists of biodegradable board material with a honeycomb structure. We then apply the felt to the hard base with a minimum amount of water-based glue, but above all by sewing it on by hand”, she says. The first products - sound-damping folding screens such as BuzziBoard, BuzziZone and the BuzziScreen – were enthusiastically received and immediately won prizes, but BuzziSpace still kept brooding on new applications, new colours, new possibilities.

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As the BuzziBoard – the magnetic notice board that can be hung up on both sides of a glass wall without requiring additional fastening - showed, ecovilt could lead to new functional combinations. “It always has to benefit flexibility. After all, sustainability can also be found in the flat-pack transport, because the less space it takes, the more efficient it is. Its possible use must also be able to evolve along with the end user’s wishes. An office evolves and then it’s great if you can quickly move the walls around.” A Design@Work-award at the 2008 Interieurbiënnale crowned this vision and later the BuzziScreen also bore a Henry Van de Velde Label, a prestigious award which proved that the company and product were mature enough to distinguish themselves.

In the meantime, BuzziSpace has evolved from the office market to a company that wants to offer far more ecological design, albeit always starting with the same material. Steve Symons: “Sas Adriaenssens guided the entire innovation and designed a good number of great products herself, but



BuzziZone © BuzziSpace



we also want to give other designers the opportunity to get to work with the material. At the moment we are working with Alain Gilles and also Anthony Duffeleer to elaborate new ideas.” The fact that Sas Adriaenssens also won the Odam Ecodesign Award in the category ‘Product on the market’ at the beginning of 2010 was just the ultimate crowning of her ecological design philosophy and a time for her now to let Buzzispace grow further. “Just like you have to let go of your kids, I will be interested to see what happens next.”

Steve Symons continues to have faith in the future, because pioneering takes guts, perseverance and resources, but there always has to be a point of Return on investment that beckons, otherwise it’s best not to start on it at all. “We departed from a certain way of thinking and pumped in a lot of money to perfect everything, although we did build on the network we already had with TecnoSpace. For the first few years Buzzispace did not yield much, but luckily in the meantime we are reaping the fruits.” His business plan even mentions that Buzzispace has to and will become bigger than the parent company TecnoSpace, which says a lot about his faith in the ecological division.

“We have to watch over the ecological principle and remain loyal to our principle. That is why we want to keep the transport movements for getting the product to the client to a minimum to keep the environmental impact as low as possible. That requires logistical thinking that we’re just about finished with and we are trying to develop a network of agents and distributors that is as efficient as possible. Buzzispace’s success is not just due to the ecovilt, it’s about the whole picture we paint. If you look at the product closely, you can see the PET fibres and that connection with the material has to remain visible on a larger scale too. Involvement in what we do is crucial.”

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Christophe De Schauvre for REcentre
Interviewee / Sas Adriaenssens, Home designer and Steve Symons,
Managing director of TecnoSpace

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Sector • Furniture industry
Year of foundation • 2006
Number of employees • N/A
Turnover • N/A