

12. Futureproofed

The Future Model of the next Industrial Revolution

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Serge de Gheldere
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Futureproofed is a consultancy specialised in ‘Climate change solutions’. After all, sustainability requires knowledge and vision and this is what Futureproofed wants to contribute to. “To measure is to know”, says Serge de Gheldere, CEO of Futureproofed who won his spurs as a climate ambassador for Al Gore. “We help companies or organisations to reduce their carbon footprint. The responsibility to reduce the emission of CO2 is one we all share if we want to protect the planet.” Futureproofed wants to play a leading role, act as a catalyst.

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“Our motto is Choose your future”, says Serge de Gheldere who with Futureproofed organises an ecological vision based on a positive, ‘cool’ model. “The future is anything but bright. If we don’t reduce our emission of CO2 by a factor of 10, global warming will enter a dangerous phase in 2050. That’s not my conclusion, it’s what the figures say. The absorption capacity of the ecosystems is being tested to such a degree that we have to intensify our efforts and take measures.”

The diagnosis is not positive, but that does not mean that the remedy has to be negative. De Gheldere points out that our generation should see the entire climate issue as an opportunity, after all it is time for a new Industrial Revolution. “This is a unique, historic moment. We still have 5 to 10 years to turn this crisis around and make society better and more sustainable too”, he says with a lot of ambition. And he feels support for this body from an increasing number of companies and organisations. “What I really believe in myself is what is described in the book Natural Capitalism: Creating The Next Industrial Revolution - that you can download for free by the way.

The first chapter describes the gigantic potential for setting this new course.”

An ecological vision implies an ethical vision, but it must also have an economic point of departure. “It’s all about making society better. It’s good to make a profit. If that profit is on all fronts. That’s what this new capitalism is all about: making progress in our society. As people we have to benefit, but nature has to as well.” In the spirit of this Natural Capitalism, this means that organisations that refuse to see their environmental impact can be imputed bad management and in the end they will miss the boat. “We can all chart our ecological accounts, at individual level and at the level of your organisations. What Futureproofed draws attention to is that the ecological and financial accounts go hand in hand.”

The eco consultants always start from the same point: bringing together every possible bit of information to get a picture of your ecological impact. “It’s like a doctor making a diagnosis”, he says. Normally they use the Bilan Carbone methodologie, an existing analysis tool and fixed standard, developed by the French Agency for Environmental and Energy Management. In turn, Futureproofed has completely reformed this method and supplemented it with other standards and its own database. “It concerns direct corporate data such as energy consumption or the number of flights, transport data of the figures of the fleet of cars. But the indirect impact on the environmental is also taken into consideration, because if you analyse a car factory, it’s not just about the CO2 emitted whilst making cars, but the environmental impact of each of those cars that later drives around also counts. In this way you chart many parameters.”

The information is then visualized and that’s the key element. No dry reports, but visual points of departure, frameworks to take strategic and operational decisions. Bubble graphs that you can read and understand without a degree in statistics. “You immediately get a picture of your organisation and the biggest polluting factor. We

always work with the same measurement models that we elaborate into a visual solution matrix. What can you do quickly; what needs more time to achieve; what costs a lot of money or effort compared to interventions that are easy.”

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This distinctive approach sheds new light on eco consultancy because Futureproofed does not stop at optional initiatives but wants to set a change in mentality in motion. An example: just because your company only uses soya ink and always makes copies on both sides, that doesn't mean that you work in an eco-friendly way. Sometimes relatively simple interventions can have a greater impact. “It is an impossible task to live entirely ecologically. On that we can agree. But what you can do and that's my approach: choose your battles”, Serge de Gheldere explains his vision enthusiastically. “If you do something, choose the thing that will make a big difference. Place the right emphasis. Do it rationally. If we offer solutions – because CO2 reduction is not optional – we will try to speak in a language that companies understand, so also in terms of return on investment.”

An organisation in which a great number of scheduled flights are used to get to meetings can invest in good equipment for video-conferencing. That not only leads to a considerable reduction in the emission of CO2 but in time the costs saved and work-efficiency will also yield a lot in light of the investment. This is the return on investment that is also calculated and shown in the Futureproofed reports.



Big Blue © Futureproofed



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Big Blue © Futureproofed

The fact that ecological efficiency also has to be part of corporate social responsibility, is gaining increasing acceptance amongst companies and organisations. Since the beginning of Futureproofed, 11 years ago, this has really become visible. “We don’t actively look for clients and do not invest time in convincing CEOs. No, we go to clients who have seen for themselves that they cannot afford to miss the boat. This is the time that we all have to look for the right leverage to counter climate change; at the level of consumers, organisations and society.”

Our motto is choose your future.

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Futureproofed’s role is not to convince clients to insulate, but to graft an entire model for the future onto a sustainable business model. A very good example is the Big Blue model that was developed for Van Marcke, the well-known distributor of both bathrooms, heating and cooling systems. “Big Blue is an information, sales and expertise centre where all the knowledge and players in the field of energy-saving solutions for heat and water are brought together. Why? Because Van Marcke wants to convert its commitment to sustainability into a centre where the consumer can go to find out what is available and how they can integrate into their own lives. At the same time ties are also strengthened with the installer, because Big Blue wants to teach the installer all the tools they need to carry it out. It is not inconceivable that a consumer who absolutely wants to install a solar boiler, can come up against an installer who lacks the know-how or familiarity with it. I don’t want to knock those people, but that should not be a reason why green initiatives fall through. That’s why everyone can go to Big Blue for an introduction to the sustainable range of sanitary products.”

The biggest common denominator in Futureproofed’s consultancy assignments is to initiate the ecological

vision in society in a cool way with small steps. After all, we all have to reduce our emission of CO2 and individual responsibility is the lowest common multiple. "Everyone interprets it in a different way. Clients such as Colruyt tend to analyse and indicate focus points, because they already work very intensively on their CO2 impact, whilst at the European Parliament we have a very different assignment to fulfil." It just goes to prove the maturity of eco consultancy in which Futureproofed is setting the new standard.

Christophe De Schauvre for REcentre

Interviewee / Serge de Gheldere, CEO

Futureproofed
Vaartkom 35, 2nd floor
3000 Leuven
Belgium

www.futureproofed.com

Sector • Consultancy

Year of foundation • 1999

Number of employees • 7

Turnover (2009) •
300.000 EUR