

18. Jalema



Going for Gold



Family company Jalema has four complete product lines with the Cradle to Cradle Silver certificate, but the producer of professional archive systems and office supplies aims higher. Durability and pragmatism go hand in hand on the road to that goal, says technical deputy manager Geert Leenen. “As a company, you need to find out how to make big steps that are feasible in the organisation.”

With 153 Cradle to Cradle certified products Jalema clearly plays the durability card.



In 1947 the Westendorff family took over Jalema, founded in the Twenties. The production of box files, plastic files and office supplies was the base of the current enterprise that achieved success at the end of the Fifties with the development of a system where archive files are suspended at one suspension point only. Hospitals and the graphic sector start using it and Jalema, located in Reuver, grows. Over the next years, making profit in a socially responsible way became more important. Mentally disabled people have been part of the team since the end of last century; 5% of the profit share of permanent staff is doubled by Jalema and has been going for 2 decades to Jalema's social fund that supports charities. Now, more than 50 years after the Westendorffs took over at the helm, the company leads the way again. With 153 Cradle to Cradle certified products Jalema clearly plays the durability card. With the public authorities, that must purchase sustainable since January 2010 and with other customers in their wake.

“Cradle to Cradle is one type of durability, there are several. The advantage of C2C certification is that virtually all aspects within a company are tackled for sustainability, from environment to energy, from people to the further chain.” Technical deputy director Geert Leenen - with Jalema since 2005 - notes that employees have started looking at the environment differently since

Cradle to Cradle was introduced by the company. “Our production manager has found a supplier who delivers high quality plant-based cleaning products. In the past we didn't think about such things.” But before the coveted C2C-Silver could decorate the Jalema products a lot of effort was needed. “After establishing our objective, which is to make as many as possible existing and new products according to Cradle to Cradle criteria, the true work really started. Training courses provide insight in the philosophy, but don't teach you how to put them into practice in a production process.”

An EPEA quick scan of the raw materials of Jalema folders immediately leads to new challenges. There is insufficient information available about the materials used in them to reach a conclusion, reports EPEA. Jalema tries to obtain the necessary information from suppliers. “If you have a good relationship with them, that's not a problem.” The subsequent advice from EPEA says that not all materials meet the C2C-criteria. “You could compare it with asbestos. It's good that it is forbidden, but asbestos has certain characteristics that other materials lacked at the time. That's what we faced too.” Discussions about alternatives with suppliers followed. Most of them reacted positive. However one cooperation stopped. “In our search for new possibilities we have also talked with entrepreneurs in the C2C-circuit. Those who were no competitors were usually very open.”

200.000 euro of C2C-investments later a number of processes is revamped, the Silver is framed and the Jalema supply to the authorities grows. “It is still developing in the sustainability area. The advantage of being a leader is that you can participate in discussions at that level.” Durable management is seriously worked at inside the factory walls. Leenen summarises: “The ink we use is non-toxic, 80 to 90 percent of the industrially used folders is recycled into archive boxes, 2 of the 3 elements of the JalemaClip, where documents are bundled, are re-used and we do not dump or burn anything from the production process”. The Cradle to Cradle certification is also

strongly promoted. In a market where a price difference of 3 cents defines whether a product is sold at a cost-effective price, it is very necessary. "Sustainable is still associated with expensive. Customers are interested, but do not immediately shout out "hurrah" as soon as you implement durable changes. The sales personnel need to be very persuasive. They were actually just as sceptical in the beginning. They asked themselves out loud whether customers would want to buy that 'old rubbish' such as re-used clip elements."

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In an attempt to achieve further sustainability, the management considered at one time to market the JalemaClip without colorants. But in colourless condition the clip seems to be one whole, which means customers need additional explanation about use. Too much expense for a product of a couple of cents. The desired switch to led-lighting is however not feasible for very different reasons: the light quality seems not to be good enough. And today, the energy objective gives Leenen a few Cradle to Cradle headaches. "I thought that the use of both good green power was completely sorted, but it seems to still be a point of contention. The next steps on the way from Silver to Gold are much more difficult than the previous steps. That applies to us as one company, but also to the rest of the chain."

With distributors in 45 countries and Jalema branches in Belgium, France and the United States the management has its hands full with that chain. The socially responsible company philosophy ('and strategy, because that's what you have to turn it into') is regularly on the agenda at international management consultation. "Belgium is reasonably in line with The Netherlands. But in the United States,



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the country of the Cradle to Cradle certification institute MBDC, they haven't even heard of sustainability in the office supply sector. There is still a long way to go there.”

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And it is a long way to go for all companies that start with a socially responsible enterprise, sustainability and Cradle to Cradle. After every step forward new challenges appear at the horizon. If you are aware of that, you don't get discouraged that easily. Grab possible opportunities, is the message of Geert Leenen, even if change might be difficult in the beginning. “When we had chosen Cradle to Cradle, we wondered how we should implement it concretely. To make the path clearer, we first studied the theory behind it. It seems to be about chemistry mostly, something we know little about. The quick scan we then had carried out with the financial support of Industriebank Liof was very important. You get the chance to dissect something. You should immediately grab a chance like that. Then you need to exactly keep in mind what you want to achieve and work towards it. Jalema knows that already: we go for Cradle to Cradle gold.”

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Gwen Teo for REcentre
Interviewee / Geert Leenen, Technical deputy-director

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Sector • Information management

Year of foundation • 2009

Number of employees • 80

Turnover (2009) • 15 million EUR