

23. Océ
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Sustainable
Thinking is in
the DNA



2012: Ensuring that our factories worldwide use green energy. 2015: Introducing a more sustainable printing medium than recycled paper. Those who examine the green objectives of printer manufacturer Océ will notice right away that its ambitions remain extremely high, despite these turbulent times.

The underlying message is that technology and sustainability go hand in hand.



It can always be better. Océ Corporate sustainability officer Hay van Knippenberg and Corporate communication manager Sandra David (or green lady as she is known among colleagues) say that the underlying message is that technology and sustainability go hand in hand. In an industry struggling with pollution challenges, the multinational has proved during the past few decades that investing in this philosophy pays off. Those visiting the main office in Venlo, will at first only notice the long line of carpool parking spaces. However, a glance into the showroom will immediately clarify how high Océ's standards are vis-à-vis the competition. Shiny images roll out of a large printer thanks to the CrystalPoint technology, a sophisticated printing system where coloured toner balls are sprayed onto paper as gel after being heated. Because the print lies on the paper (instead of being printed in it), toner and paper can be perfectly separated for recycling after use. In addition, printing can be carried out on uncoated and recycled paper, which is a major step ahead because the glossy effect on this type of paper couldn't be achieved with older techniques. To prevent wasting paper, the printer processes several sheet sizes. Océ has invested 150 million euro since the mid-nineties in the development of CrystalPoint, which was first marketed in 2008 and has now been registered with a hundred patents.

It comes as no surprise that 7 to 8 per cent of the company's turnover is spent on research and development, Van Knippenberg explains. "This doesn't mean that the

market is always ready for everything we come up with", he laughs. "When we started revising printers and photocopiers 15 years ago, many customers didn't want them." Today, an increasing part of the business world is following the government's sustainability norms and choosing revised machines as part of corporate social responsibility as well as this being financially attractive in times of crisis. "The mentality of the market is changing, this can't be forced, but you should be first in line when the moment comes."

This is exactly what Océ is doing. From its establishment in 1877, the Limburg-based printing giant has been combining the hard business mentality of making money while incorporating aspects of corporate social responsibility. For example, the switch from analogue to digital printing didn't lead to all 'old fashioned' printers with the red-and-white logo being dismissed for good. On the contrary, machines were designed in such a way that parts of analogue printers fitted into digital ones. The favourable result was that they lasted 10 to 15 years in the rapidly changing digital world. These days machines and parts are revised in 4 locations and are being given second and third lives. "You can quickly enter the market if you take these types of matters into account in the development of products. This applies in the broadest sense of the word. Machines must be demountable, so gluing parts isn't a good idea, the service department must be able to replace things without too much bother and if a machine can't be wholly reused, sensors or other small parts probably are suitable."

Océ's vision is regularly valued with awards for -among others- 'recycling scheme of the year' in England (Green IT award) and a nomination for the Dutch sustainable innovation prize 'het Ei van Columbus'. In spite of this, it's not all roses. The group suffered from the crisis in 2009 with a yearly profit loss, leading to a considerable amount of jobs cut. Still, the printer manufacturer managed to more or less continue its sustainability scheme. The annual sustainability report for stakeholders indicates that one objective was even achieved sooner than planned, namely the

processing of more than 20 per cent of reused parts into products. On the other hand, the sale of recycled Océ paper didn't do as well: it dropped by 3 per cent.

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According to communication manager David open and transparent communication is indispensable. Like Van Knippenberg she is a member of the Océ sustainability forum that advises the Management Board on aiming for the mission to 'advise customers to have their documents managed eco-efficiently by offering innovative printing and document management products and services and by doing business in a socially responsible way', explains David. "Not only in good, but also in tough times. People expect this from us, customers, distributors and employees." The multinational also asks the input of stakeholders. Originally, these were mainly customers, but when this turned out to be too unilateral, all stakeholders were involved. "One of our current challenges is the question of how to promote sustainability to others. While organising one's own business used to be the most important factor, things go a step further now and the entire chain is examined. Océ is part of EICC, a business coalition in the electronics industry employing a socially responsible business code. Suppliers need to declare that they meet the corresponding criteria. We're noticing that parties are becoming increasingly aware of their and our responsibility. For instance, a customer once asked whether the clothing of our employees was produced in an eco-friendly manner. We then focus on these types of issues."

Sustainability also occupies Océ employees. Carpool arrangements can be made via intranet and employees can ride company bicycles between the local sites and sustainable ideas are presented and carried out during the company's Sustainability Week. This can vary from raising



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ColorWave © Océ



money, to literally spending on greenery for charity, to putting the air conditioning in the Océ office in Texas two degrees higher. Van Knippenberg: "It doesn't really matter how big the company is, a lot can be achieved on a large and a small scale. I already used low-energy light bulbs at home, separated waste and turned the lights off when leaving a room. I don't need convincing, it's about those who aren't that interested in sustainability. This doesn't mean that we immediately have a solution for everything. We try to work with lease contracts as much as possible, making revising machines and parts more manageable. Yet there are customers who don't opt for this, which will soon be a spearhead for the sales department. It's about aiming to do better, time and time again. This way of thinking is in Océ's DNA".

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Gwen Teo for REcentre

Interviewee / Sandra David, Corporate communications manager & Hay van Knippenberg, Corporate sustainability officer

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Sector • Printing industry

Year of foundation • 1877

Number of employees •
22.000 (worldwide)

Turnover (2009) •
2,6 billion EUR

It was announced that Canon would take over Océ at the end of 2009. At the time of the interview, the takeover was not yet fully arranged and Océ was a company quoted on the stock market.