

26. TDS Office Design



The smart Office

recentre



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Jean-Michel Denis
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Founded in 1946 by a group of Liège businessmen, today TDS Office design is the largest Belgian manufacturer of office furniture. With a manufacturing unit occupying some 18.000 m² in the outskirts of the city of Liege, the company has a staff of 135 people, and over the years it has worked its way up to become one of the top 5 companies in this sector on the European market, with a turnover of 25 million euro. Its customer base extends from self-employed individuals to the largest companies, like Electrabel and FN, and institutions like the SNCB, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Defence, NATO, the police and the commune administrations, as well as export; it is more anchored in the private sector, concerning banks, insurance companies and other third sector companies.

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For 20 years, since the appearance in the 1990s of environmental criteria in specifications, the idea of sustainable development has been gradually integrated into the company's activities. Hemmed in by an urban district, the company first replaced its line of paints whose solvents evaporate in the atmosphere with an automatic line of painting by powdering. The wood that enters into the composition of desks, tops and work surfaces comes from sustainably managed forests which have PEFC certification. ISO 14001 certified since 1998, TDS Office Design has not stopped strengthening its company profile since then with its attention to its ecological footprint. To comply as well as possible with current specifications, documents such as the Environmental Product Declaration and the Environmental Product Profile will accompany each product from now on: the documents contain information on the materials used, their origins

and certifications, the percentage of recycled materials that they contain, the factory certifications and manufacturing processes, the packaging and the recyclability of the products, the different certificates of compliance coming from sub-contractors, as well as standards, labels, and the CO2 balance sheet.

“Today”, explains Jean-Michel Denis, designer at TDS Office Design, “at the time specifications are submitted, 30% of the points are assigned to the environment, among the other criteria, which are the price and the quality. It has become absolutely essential, which suits us very well because we jumped on the bandwagon ahead of time. To correspond to specifications that are more and more demanding, our research unit includes fifteen people”. Considered a strategic tool by TDS, design makes it possible to incorporate economic as well as ecological factors, which often go hand in hand, into the conception of furniture. “Twenty years ago, an office of our Aristos range had no fewer than 49 components. At the present time, our Tedes range has 27 pieces, the new T-Line range has 18 pieces. In addition these elements have been optimised in such a way as to generate less waste.” The use of laser machines, instead of and in place of the punches of yesteryear, to cut the sheets of metal, which are folded, soldered and then painted, allows non-negligible savings in raw materials through the imbrication of different components in the same metal sheet. “The return on investment is far from being direct, however, with the acquisition of this type of material, which will be amortised only at the end of ten to fifteen years.”

Further to the establishment of the company's carbon balance sheet, TDS Office design became aware that the items that were most costly, but also the area where it is possible to act to obtain results quickly, are fixed energy expenses such as those of large landscaped offices. “In Belgium, in Brussels, the cost of a work station, which includes the rental or the amortisation of a building, the energy charges, IT and furniture, is assessed at 12.500

euros per person and per year,” Jean-Michel Denis summarises. “For 100 employees, there are sometimes twenty work stations that are free. The idea we had was to compress this office equipment, and to reduce the rental areas and the energy loads by turning to an intelligent office: this is our completely new concept of the SmartOffice. We called upon a Walloon company active in home automation, which had developed an automated system that is innovative because it has everything in one”: scanning a staff badge activates the adjustment of the height of the desk, a lighting module which adapts to the contribution of natural light, and the telephone line and the individual computer session are adapted. When people leave the office, the end of day scenario sets itself up with the activation of alarms, safety lighting, etc. The first real estate project equipped with this concept should rise out of the ground in 2012-2013, on the site of the new administrative unit of the commune of Seraing. Aware that such a system demands a different company organisation and a significant change in people’s way of thinking, TDS Office Design places great hopes in the development of this concept, which unites savings, ecology and improvement of the users’ comfort. “The well-being of employees is also part of sustainable development”, asserts Jean-Michel Denis. “When the size of the employees is not taken into account, people are sometimes forced to buy more furniture six months later! Being fulfilled in one’s work means doing the best one can while respecting others. And ecology means respecting others...”

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Aside from this new landmark project, other advances aiming at reducing the company’s ecological footprint have also been put in place, both regarding production and downstream from it. Since deliveries of furniture are



T-Line designed by Jean-Michel Denis for TDS Office Design © Alain Vandecraen



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Sustainable Success Stories

made in a tight flow from the factory to the customers, the trips are calculated to reduce the distances to the maximum extent possible. The products are delivered assembled or semi-assembled, and the packaging is reduced to its simplest expression: simple reusable covers protect the pieces of furniture during their transport! Thinking about the end of its products, TDS has developed a network of partners for dismantling the product depending on the different components. Tops of compressed wood are ground, the metallic parts recycled at the rate of 97%, the plastic components are sorted depending on their nature and sent to the appropriate recycling centres.

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While the management is envisaging new transformations further to the carbon balance sheet, such as the installation of solar panels, better insulation, and the incorporation of a system for recovering rainwater, an eco-team of ten people selected from within the company on a voluntary basis, mixing white collar and blue collar staff, is working on raising everyone's awareness of small gestures such as car pooling, or better management of paper... "So many new measures," concludes Jean-Michel Denis, "which again require convincing people, to make their way of thinking change: today people too often look at ecological measures as costs. It is necessary to acquire the reflex of seeing what this can bring."

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Isabelle Masson for REcentre
Geinterviewd / Jean-Michel Denis, Designer

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www.tds-office.com

Sector • Designing office
furniture

Year of foundation • 1946

Number of employees • 135

Turnover (2009) •
25 million EUR