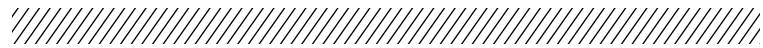


44. Van Marcke Big Blue



The Blue Seahorse



The sanitary group Van Marcke has invested 1.25 million euro in Big Blue to centralise all products and information around energy-friendly water and heating installations. As information and sale centre Big Blue targets both professionals and consumers. That way, Van Marcke wishes to commit not only to rationalise water and energy use but also to reduce CO2 emissions. “No less than 31 percent of the total CO2 emission in Belgium can be attributed to residential houses and we all have to do something about that,” is the basic philosophy.

Big Blue is a unique expertise and sale centre whereby the well known sanitary distributor Van Marcke demonstrates sustainable commitment.

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Let us raise an interesting question: Do you know if you have an energy saving heating installation? Did you say thermostatic taps? Yes, great. And a condensation boiler? Very good. But did you know that an average circulation pump – essential in each installation – uses approximately 80 kWh and costs you approximately 150 euro a year? A circulation pump that costs the double in purchase price (about 450 euro) should reduce that use to 12 euro a year. The architect or installer can give you more information on the matter.

The relative simplicity of this case demonstrates one thing at least and that is that regarding (residential) energy household there still is a lot of progress needed with the appropriate knowledge and the appropriate products. That is the role of Big Blue. Big Blue is a unique expertise and sale centre whereby the well known sanitary distributor Van Marcke demonstrates sustainable commitment. “We are convinced that we play the part of a pioneer in sustainable energy, not because it is fashionable, but because it is our deepest conviction,” Bart Deltour sums up the Big Blue message. “In 2000 Van Marcke already had a stand at the Batibouw trade



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fair focusing on our environment. That was never seen at the time. Sustainability has since convinced a critical broad public and is a widely held vision. However, the knowledge of the methods often is fragmented.” Knowledge fragmented depending on the type of installation and divided over many producers.

The reason for Van Marcke – as a distributor of sanitary installations – to wager on rationalising energy and water use coincides with the enterprising vision of Caroline Van Marcke, who together with her brother Peter is at the helm of the family company. “Every three years we organise a congress for some 1500 people and in 2008 it was on the theme Change of Climate, Climate of Change,” says Agnès Pringiers, PR Manager for the Van Marcke Group. “The congress was opened by Serge de Gheldere who gave a lecture as the climate ambassador of Al Gore. His lecture not only was convincing, it also was the sign for Caroline Van Marcke to graft the enterprise climate on this message.” In cooperation with Serge de Ghelderes sustainable design consultancy company FutureProofed this crystallised into Big Blue.

Because Van Marcke distributes so many brands, the greatest common denominator of Big Blue precisely is the sustainability performance.

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In a former industrial warehouse behind the Van Marcke showroom in Zaventem Big Blue opened its doors on 14 November 2009. A milestone for the family company but also for the sector. It is exceptional that a commercial company takes such initiative. “The building mainly wants to give the good example itself and is completely CO2 neutral,” explains Bart Deltour. “The industrial building was renovated according to passive house standards and all necessary electricity is sourced from renewable energy; in our case solar energy. We also use collected rainwater for all sanitary applications.”

Where can you currently get to see various installations from condensation boilers to heat pumps and a water saving shower head to toilet systems with rainwater recycling? Maybe at a construction trade fair, but Big Blue was cleverer. You are provided with explanations in the various modules on the various systems irrespective of the manufacturer. “The methods and performance prevail over brand politics,” is the motto. “Because Van Marcke distributes so many brands, the greatest common denominator of Big Blue precisely is the sustainability performance.”

In total no less than 26 different suppliers participated in the educative showroom concept.

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The Big Blue venue is a separate division of Van Marcke where all sustainable methods and products for professionals and individuals are bundled. Is it a philosophy? "Big Blue mainly is a knowledge centre and of course the 1.500 m² building in Zaventem is the flagship. You can learn here about products or installations which represent an essential difference in your energy and water use in an interactive way and starting from 9 universal questions. It is also here that info sessions are organised but – and this shows that Big Blue spreads the word – there also are Big Blue Points in the inspiration stores in Kortrijk, Ghent and Antwerp. Big Blue is accessible for everyone, even if you don't get to Zaventem."

The fact that Van Marcke has been a reputed distributor of sanitary installations for years strengthens the value of Big Blue as central point. In total no less than 26 different suppliers participated in the educative showroom concept. Still, you can be assured that the impact of this centre now reaches further. "In the beginning the suppliers of course did not fully understand what our intention was. Now everybody understands that we show the most progressive, but directly implementable installations here which can make a real difference in your energy or water

bill and therefore to the environment too. The fact we like to welcome installers and other commissioners here for info sessions reinforces the intermediary part, but individuals can come here too to submit their building or renovation plans to a sustainability scan. Information is free, but advice is charged although there are different gradations for that.”

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Christophe de Schauvre for REcentre

Interviewee /

Bart Deltour, Responsable Van Marcke College

Agnès Pringiers, PR Manager Van Marcke Group of Companies

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www.bigblue.be

Sector • Information and sale
centre

Year of foundation • 2009

Number of employees • 1570

Turnover (2010) •
388 million EUR