



# Packaging machine builder operates in an international niche

## Online collaboration

Joan.nu is Joanknecht & Van Zelst's way of online collaboration; where clients can exchange information with their adviser online and therewith can prepare company solutions. Based on the information from the far-reaching automated administration – for which Exact Online, amongst others, is used as a platform – up-to-date information is generated at any moment. This information is the basis for practical advice, which allows clients to achieve output improvements.

**If there was a prize for tenacity, Egbert Nillesen would certainly stand a chance. As General Manager of machine assembler Abracad Technoworks in Nijssel, he made an unequivocal choice and is sticking to the path that he chose, assisted, to an increasing extent, by the Joan.nu platform.**

Egbert Nillesen's enthusiasm is contagious. The story of 'his' company, Abracad Technoworks, is a lovely story. In 2006, after many commercial jobs and positions with technical companies – at home and abroad – Egbert Nillesen wanted to purchase a company. He shared his ambition with Oscar Reuvers from Joanknecht & Van Zelst. Oscar helped him in his search for a suitable company. This company had to comply with three prerequisites:

- It had to have something to do with technology
- It had to operate in a niche, and
- It had to be active on an international scale.

On 1 July 2007, Egbert purchased Abracad from the former owner, after negotiations that lasted almost a year. Abracad (Abrahams CAD Tekenbureau) produced packaging machines for the foodstuffs industry. Intricate, customised design and manufacture, equipment which is often unique for a specific application, such as cleaned fruit in a bag, a ready-to-eat salad in a container. Egbert thus complied with two of the prerequisites amply (niche and technology), but Abracad Technoworks was not yet that international.

#### **System integrators**

Egbert already probed cautiously during the acquisition phase: 'An interesting partner was located in Moscow, a so-called system integrator. These companies install complete production lines and utilise components

from third parties therein. The integrator takes care of all responsibilities: installation, service and maintenance. We supply "plug and play" installations as required.' In 2008, Egbert examined the export possibilities more emphatically. He searched for – and found – system integrators in Italy and Switzerland, and later also in Poland. The turnover of the small company – ten people at that time – grew to 1.9 million in 2007. Things were looking good, until autumn 2008.

#### **Went in deep**

In 2009, the Economic Crisis was already felt in many areas and something else also occurred, something which represents the bogeyman to many entrepreneurs: the largest client took off, and along with it, a large share of business. Regardless of how hard the company worked, the turnover remained disastrous. 'We had to discharge several employees and still only booked five hundred thousand in turnover. We wagered everything, we went in deep, also on the private side. Despite this, I kept on believing in our company, our product, our unique quality,' says Egbert.

The quality was incorporated, in part, in the innovative character of the installations. Clients sometimes gave orders for machines that still needed to be invented. Abracad recognised the importance of this for its clients and went to work in an innovative manner, through a successful appeal to the Research and Development (Promotion) Act



(Wet bevordering speur- en ontwikkelingswerk, WBSO); research and development. By utilising the WBSO, the wage costs for that part of the activities were still pushed.

#### **Upward trend**

Doing business through system integrators seemed like the magic touch. At the end of 2009, Egbert saw the number of requests for machines increase carefully, particularly from the system integrator side. This gave him the feeling that the crisis was nearing its end, and thus gave him wings. 'I started to sell and market with a great deal of enthusiasm. I attended exhibitions in foreign countries and continued to seek contact with system integrators at these events / locations. You add value to their business and that offers a good base for fruitful collaboration.' This approach worked, because in 2010 the figures indicated a shift: an upward trend was noticeable again. In 2013, Egbert expected to grow to the turnover level of 2007. This growth was actually already secured at the time of this interview in March. This could be attributed, in part, to new foreign initiatives and market development. Egbert thus gained firm ground in the Middle East, by way of a local system integrator. Machines were developed and installed in the United States and Asia, in conjunction with a Dutch partner.

#### **The numbers tell the tale**

Egbert Nillesen is now able to indicate, quite accurately, what the current situation is in terms of turnover, profit and costs.

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This was not always the case, and he is the first to admit this. 'When I was busy acquiring orders, I had no idea of the exact volume of work, or if we were even able to carry it out, nor did I know if we would earn money, break even, or if we would suffer a loss. In the long-run, this was naturally not a sustainable situation. After all I want to know what my situation is and what the exact costs are of a certain project. Heins Bouwmans from Joanknecht & Van Zelst, who also remained very loyal during the bad times, guided me to the right solution.'

At Abracad Technoworks, we are still working in a CAD drafting program (3D Inventor, since 2008) which is linked to a stand-alone database for project management. The invoices are prepared and processed in Exact Online. All of this is going to change. We opted

for the Production module of Exact Online, which brings integration between project management, hourly administration and financial administration. The employees register the hours on a screen in the production hall. The module also aids in the preparation of multidimensional planning, where orders intermingle and self-employed professionals from outside are utilised. Controls are in place for the purchase orders of suppliers.

#### **In the cloud**

'The best thing about this,' says a satisfied Egbert 'is that we will work entirely in the cloud. This will soon allow me to obtain a real-time insight into the capacity, the hourly utilisation, credit management and so forth, when I am abroad at an exhibition or something similar. I will then be transformed

from the super seller 'who simply fulfils a task', to an extremely well-informed CRM Manager. There is no sense in asking the production employees to achieve something which they simply can't, with regard to capacity. We also work with temporary personnel if necessary.'

For Abracad Technoworks and Joanknecht & Van Zelst, configuration with Exact Online Production in the cloud was completed successfully. Egbert expects to be able to work more efficiently, to control processes and to conclude projects with financial success because of this enhanced insight. On 1 January this year, Frank Konings was also appointed Internal Business Manager, and he is responsible for project management, for the workplace and engineering. Egbert remains the commercial man 'I am good at this part, that is all there is to it.'

#### **Nillesen in his leisure time: Averell Dalton**

Egbert Nillesen has a strikingly large presence about him. In his BBQ Team De Daltons, he has acquired the nickname Averell, the name of the tallest Dalton. De Daltons\* don't simply barbecue on a classic steel Hibachi grill, and even the mention of a Weber brings about a chuckle. No, De Daltons use The Big Green Egg or a ceramic cooker from Primo Grill, and they also cook seven courses on the BBQ, including a desert, for large gatherings of BBQ fanatics. And who is not included in this genre? This is Nillesen's ultimate hobby, besides golf and diving. Would you like more information? [facebook.com/BBQdeDaltons](https://facebook.com/BBQdeDaltons)

\*) Four tall outlaws who are captured by Lucky Luke regularly in the Lucky Luke comic strips.