Now is the time to realize your ambitions
Enterprise is crucial to Overijssel’s economy. Successful entrepreneurs generate turnover, create jobs and boost business-to-business activity.

Over the last eight years, the Province of Overijssel has gone to considerable lengths to stimulate business activity in our province. We have focused mainly on the business climate for entrepreneurs. The University of Twente has long been famous for the many successful spin-off businesses set up by former students: knowledge valorization in its purest sense. Venture Lab is a regional business incubator and has made a significant contribution to the business climate and entrepreneurial know-how in the region. As such, it has played an invaluable role in Overijssel’s economic policy. I am very proud of the successful partnership with ‘our’ university – the University of Twente – which we are now taking into a new phase with the Overijssel Centre for Research and Innovation.

In Overijssel, businessmen and women are working together with researchers and regional government to create a strong world-class economy. Surely the ultimate proof that partnership pays.

Drs. Carry Abbenhues

Provincial Executive for Economics, Tourism and Employment
Province of Overijssel
This is the third volume in the series of VentureLab Twente Entrepreneurs.

VentureLab Twente is developing rapidly. Early 2010 saw VLT move to The Corridor, which is located close to the University of Twente. Since then, we have expanded to 1,000 m² of office space, including one large and one small training room, several meeting rooms, offices with flex workplaces for our participants and of course, office space for VLT and Nikos staff. Now that we have our own facilities, we can expand into an active entrepreneurial community.

The number of participants making use of the free office space offered as part of the programme and registering their company at the address of The Corridor has been growing steadily.

VLT serves a wide range of entrepreneurs: the third group comprises companies working in the fields of medicine, software development, high tech systems, water treatment and X-ray diffraction. They all find themselves in different stages of company development, from the idea phase to accelerating growth.

In turn, VLT is also learning from its participants. We addressed the need for more interaction and collaboration by introducing more group activities. We started to offer workshops on business modelling, in which participants learn to develop their own ‘business canvas’. Further, we initiated ‘synergy groups’ in which we teach and stimulate participants to identify areas for collaboration and joint actions with enhanced value creation.

VLT also supports business trips, both in the Netherlands and abroad. For instance a meeting was organized with KLM and Schiphol executives at which nine VLT participants presented their companies at KLM Headquarters. In 2010, VLT was awarded a prize of € 22,650 from The Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW). This prize is used to offer travel grants worth € 500 for business trips outside the Netherlands. Eight trips have been awarded so far.

In February 2011, we presented the results of the first 18 months of VLT in a special VentureClass. As VLT receives funding from the Twente Regional Authorities, the Province of Overijssel and the European Fund for Regional Development, we felt it was time to share our results with the organizations that had put so much trust in VLT! Aard Groen presented some of the highlights of the past 18 months. VLT now supports more than 120 participants, and 34 new companies were registered at the Chamber of Commerce. Some 80 companies joined VLT to accelerate their business growth. Four companies presented their ‘business case’. One of them was group three participant Harry Roewen of IACS, who explained that since joining VLT, his company had grown from 11 to 21 employees and recently won orders that would double his company once again. The evening concluded with a panel discussion hosted by Kees Eijkel of Kennispark. Those taking part were Carry Abbenhues, member of the Overijssel Provincial Executive, Peter den Oudsten, chairman of the Region of Twente and the audience. The discussion revolved around VentureLab’s contribution to the programme on strengthening the economy in the East-Netherlands.

So to summarize: VLT does make a difference! Once again, we are very proud to have been able to support so many companies, thereby contributing to economic growth in our region.

Dr. Rob van Lambalgen
VentureLab Twente: on the path of success.

One of the questions that we investigate in our research on ‘entrepreneurship in networks’ at NIKOS (Netherlands Institute for Knowledge-Intensive Entrepreneurship at the University of Twente) involves how to help more people start businesses successfully. As a knowledge centre, we have conducted several studies to identify factors affecting the growth of spin-off ventures. Many policy measures are oriented towards creating meso-level conditions in which firms can thrive. Examples include cluster policy and the creation of multiple valleys, as stated in the Dutch economic policy. These conditions are possibly important, yet the main entrepreneurial action involves people, as well as organizations that are ‘under construction’. Although they may use these meso-structures, their businesses are built primarily within the micro-networks of the markets in which they work. This requires entrepreneurial competencies. In VentureLab Twente, we make sure that ambitious starting or growing high-tech entrepreneurs are aware of this necessity. Our weekly monitoring of the entrepreneurs’ activities further sharpens our insight into how ‘high-tech high-growth’ business can be developed and supported.

Venture Lab Twente was designed according to principles based on our academic knowledge and practical experience in implementing enterprise-support programmes. Recently, we presented results relating to the predecessor of VentureLab Twente: Kansrijk Eigen Baas (successfully becoming your own boss). At a reunion of the 540 entrepreneurs that had taken part in this programme, we presented the survival rate for three years later. On the basis of our survey, we would estimate that 70% of the participants successfully set up a firm during or soon after the Kansrijk Eigen Baas programme. Three years later, 60% of the participants had survived the first three years in their company. The survival rate is therefore 60/70*100= 86%. This is roughly twice the survival rate among average starters. If you then consider that many of the budding entrepreneurs came to this programme straight from unemployment, one can only conclude that entrepreneurship support boosts the performance of entrepreneurs.

Message from the Academic Director

VentureLab Twente: on the path of success.

The Venture Lab Programme offers ambitious entrepreneurs and business developers the opportunity to receive training, coaching and expert support in the areas of strategy, technology, finance, organization, marketing and sales, in addition to personal and team skills. The services offered by VentureLab Twente and other Kennispark Twente facilities also include laboratory facilities and access to national and international networks in the worlds of business, science and finance.

We wish to maintain contact with the alumni of our programme in order to follow their long-term development. This will make it possible to reinforce our insights regarding the growth of high-tech ventures by comparing the growth of VentureLab Twente alumni to that of other ventures. And in another three years, we will be able to make the first benchmark comparisons for VentureLab Twente. We would certainly expect to see similar results to those achieved by Kansrijk Eigen Baas. But looking at the results of development during the first year of VentureLab, we think that the results in absolute numbers of performance will be even better.

Prof. dr. Aard J. Groen
Scientific Director of NIKOS and Professor of Innovative Entrepreneurship
Forced to think things through - Harry Roewen
Excellent incubator for technostarters - Rahul Dahule
All for the sake of networking - Robert Reinink
It's in the air - Sergey Mitko & Elena Oudalova
Good education for India - Pravin Pawar
In search of investors - Bernhard Klaassen
Focus on the central theme - Christiaan Rossenaar & Loes Schulting
The art of connecting - Lodewijk Bergmans
Optimum balance for employees - Peter Lulof
Answers to specific entrepreneurial questions - Johannes Burger
The value of a coach - René Steffens & Helga Nakken
Richer for the experience - Wim Albersen
Access to India - Sangrum Rane
Getting inside the content - Jaap de Rijk & Johannes Bethke
Becoming an entrepreneur just sort of happened. At least that’s how Harry Roewen sees the start of his IACS company, which designs and supplies electronic control systems. “I tried to promote our products from the technological angle, but this isn’t what customers want. They just want a product that works properly.”

Roewen would be the first to admit it: becoming an entrepreneur has taken him a long time. “We technicians are naturally headstrong and introvert. We know what our product is capable of, we know that it is good, and we are convinced that it is just what the market has been waiting for.” Looking back, he thinks this made things difficult for him. “Someone I know told me about VentureLab, thinking it was just what I needed. I arranged an appointment with Jaap van Tilburg. He saw my operation as a start-up business, and me as someone with a lot to learn.”

This also applied to the business-economic side. Engineering is the driving force at IACS, Roewen explains. Developing new products and applications, improving existing products. But this simply isn’t enough. “We need concrete products if we are to succeed. And we have to know how to sell them; this will generate the income we need to carry on engineering.”

Roewen gives Level Control Products (LCP) as an example. This is a system that measures the contents of liquid storage tanks and automatically links the findings to relevant legislation and regulations. “I had reached the point where I wanted to bring LCP onto the market via the customer. VentureLab helped me to tackle this differently. We now promote ourselves more effectively and put more energy into the quality of our network.” The results speak for themselves: IACS is thriving. Germany is calling for the TÜV inspection agency to test LCP. A promise of things to come.

“VentureLab made me take a serious look at myself; forced me to think things through. Exchanging ideas with other entrepreneurs also helps. Technicians are not inclined to delegate. This creates a bottleneck. I have become aware of so many pitfalls. And then there’s the climate: it is so inspiring. I went back to the business every Monday bursting with new ideas.”
Biological invasion triggered by water is worse than water contaminated with oil. This is Rahul Dahule's firm opinion. He has conceptualized promising technology designed to address the problem of water pollution and hopes to see results very shortly. This explains his participation in VentureLab: 'For the network and the expert coaching. They are top class. To my mind, VentureLab Twente has international potential, particularly for technostarters.'

The basis of Dahule's innovation ('I have combined several different technologies', is all he will say about it) is his conviction that clean water is set to become increasingly more important. 'Future international tensions will revolve around water. And we will see serious water crises in many countries in Asia', he says.

For the time being, his invention is confined to purifying the ballast water (pumped into the hold of ships to help balance and lower them in the water) from cargo ships. International agreements state that in a few years time, ships’ ballast water must be treated before being discharged into the sea. Untreated ballast water is a bioinvasive species by definition, as it mixes microbes carried by the ship from one port to another. This type of contamination is far worse than contamination by oil. The difference is: you can see oil, but you can't see microbes.’

Dahule is convinced he can purify that water using a green, clean technology. 'Some 60,000 cargo ships sail throughout the world. This is an enormous future market', he concludes. Furthermore, the technology could be applied to other areas, such as purifying wastewater and drinking water. 'I can penetrate any market, which makes me very confident', he adds.

His confidence stems from his initial cautious approach. 'Step by step; you can't do this overnight. I've have done a lot of ground work.' He is still working on his technology, but has also taken time to explore the market. 'That's how I found VentureLab. Two elements of the programme are vitally important to me: the international network that opens doors to other, useful networks, and the personalized coaching. Unknowingly, Technostarters tend to make the same, common mistakes. The network of VentureLab not only teaches you practical ways of avoiding them, it also shows you smarter ways of correcting them. It is practical aspects like this that give VentureLab a leading edge and puts them at the forefront. They give technostarters a kick start in finding bigger, better, and faster ways of reaching the international markets. VentureLab works as a catalyst and an incubator for technostarters like me.'
Robert Reinink, director of the Master Networker Institute, is a unique participant at VentureLab. He is following the programme to polish up his own entrepreneurial skills. And, of course, to plug into the network. And while he is there, he also happens to be giving a workshop about networking.

Reinink learned about the importance of networking on the work floor. Literally. While working as head of technical services at the Koninklijke Machinefabriek Stork, he was responsible for the maintenance of buildings and machines. “It was a fairly formal organization. If you wanted something done, it could take up to a week. So I used to walk into the workshop and have a chat with the lads, and my maintenance work was done in no time.”

He gradually used this experience to change his career path. Together with his business partner Jos Essers, he set up the Master Networker Institute with the aim of introducing entrepreneurs to the benefits of networking. “We focus on what it is, how it works and how you can use it to benefit your business. We teach entrepreneurs how to make a good first impression”, he explains. But this duo also keeps abreast of all the latest networking developments and trends. Once you have joined, you have to keep your network up-to-date. “That will take an entrepreneur all the way to the negotiating table. But once you are there, it’s out of our hands: the rest is up to you.”

Reinink applied to VentureLab to polish up his own entrepreneurial skills. “It was a unique opportunity to learn something new. And it was a valuable experience. Not only did I acquire knowledge and insight, I also took advantage of the opportunity to extend my own network!” he laughs. “But more importantly, input from the coach helped me to realize that I want to focus on generating added value for entrepreneurs. Particularly by thinking outside the box. For example, I’m already involved with a firm that’s trying to reduce absenteeism. We’ve got plenty more plans and ideas. I’m still talking to the coach about them.”

And what about the double role as ‘pupil’ and trainer? “An extraordinary experience. You learn a lot yourself, and you teach others something useful. I enjoyed the alternating roles. And of course I will recommend VentureLab Twente. That’s what networks are for...”
It’s in the air

Materials and processes always leave miniscule traces in the air. The prompt discovery of these traces could enhance safety at airports and stadiums. Or prevent fires. Or help the police to detect marijuana plantations. Ion Mobility Spectrometry is the magic word. Steray is expecting to launch accurate detection equipment onto the market in the near future.

It is all about the speed at which molecules move through the air, explains Sergey Mitko. This can be measured. If the specific properties of certain substances are entered into the device beforehand, the alarm will sound as soon as it detects them. A short video film shows how it works. A laboratory set-up with a device that sniffs the air. In this case, it has been primed to detect Mitko himself. Various people pass their hands under the ‘sniffer’. Nothing happens until Mitko does it. An alarm sounds immediately.

“This just goes to show that every application needs its own formula”, explains Elena Oudalova. “For example, you can enter the properties for explosives. Then, if someone walks through the gates at Schiphol Airport carrying any of these substances, they will be spotted immediately.” Mitko nods: “The advantage of our technique is the fact that it is much more sensitive than the other systems.” Schiphol is one of the parties considering Steray. The police are also interested. If the device can detect marijuana, they would not need to go beyond the front door to find out whether the occupier was growing marijuana upstairs. It may even be possible for a police car to detect an illegal plantation driving through the street.

It’s hypermodern technology. In February 2011, NL Agency granted Steray a tender to develop a portable device to help aid workers detect dangerous substances. “It is still technology, and it must be put into practice to come up with practical devices. This alone would be enough to make VentureLab a valuable experience for us. The coach sometimes asks very critical, but fundamental questions. And the network is useful, of course”, says Mitko. Oudalova continues: “Because we need support from investors, entrepreneurs. This can be tricky, particularly when our pitch becomes too technical. And VentureLab helps us there too. We would recommend it to everyone.”

www.steray.com
Whenever Pravin Pawar will have time for entrepreneurship, he has a clear aim: to set up a network of International Schools in India. “To bridge the gap between Indian and western society”, he explains. It sounds somewhat idealistic. Pawar laughs: “Yes, that’s what they said at VentureLab. If I want to approach this seriously, I’ll have to draw up a good business plan. This is my first task.”

Pawar hopes that an International School Network will increase opportunities for the lower and middle classes in his native country. “It is fascinating to see how social differences no longer play a role in the Netherlands. This is unheard of in India. It started me thinking. A network of really good schools could help to bridge the gap between here and there. It would result in a large group of well-qualified Indians, and India would become a more global society.” It is a growth market: the population of India is expected to rise from 1.15 billion to 1.53 billion during the period up until 2030.

At present, he is working as an ICT researcher in the European healthcare project ‘Bravehealth’, and studying for his PhD at the University of Twente. His PhD research focuses on a mobile patient monitoring system that transmits so-called biosignals from the patient to the healthcare professional, thereby allowing the patient to roam around freely. “This subject is not generating much interest in India. Healthcare is completely different there. Indians tend not to spend large amounts of money on healthcare. To ensure a better future for the next generation, Indian parents prefer to invest their hard-earned money in their children’s schooling.”

Hence he decided to focus on education in India instead. And in the long run, this will of course influence the country’s healthcare. “Once I’ve completed my PhD, I’ll have time to build up a network in India and devise a solid business plan. At VentureLab, so many of the participants have already managed to act in line with their heart; I’m not quite there yet, but I soon will be. That’s the great thing about VentureLab Twente: whatever your background, they turn you into an entrepreneur.”

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It was in the early 1970s while training in a hospital gynaecology department that Bernhard Klaassen first encountered a vaginal speculum being used for pelvic examination. “What a culture shock! It was like an instrument of torture! How could we do this to women?” Many years later, he designed the Femiscope to make this examination less gruelling. It has already won him various prizes.

His invention is on the table in front of him. It has a green handle and a white disposable end-piece. The end-piece is anatomically shaped. “It works according to an entirely different technique, designed in line with the female body,” explains Klaassen. “Much friendlier and easier to use; as you can see, it doesn’t look at all threatening. The doctors are happier with it too. The handle has a fitted light and can be disinfected, while the end-piece is able to part the vagina walls easily, even when a woman is overweight. And it can be thrown away afterwards. I use it in my own surgery and all the reactions are positive. Women can even use it themselves, to examine when they are most fertile, for example.”

In short, this could be the perfect solution. Klaassen has been given a world-wide patent on his design. As well as being a GP, he is also a recognized member of the Dutch Association of Inventors and won a gold medal for his Femiscope in 2003 at the Salon International des Inventions in Geneva. It would seem obvious to assume that his invention would take the global market by storm. After all, the traditional speculum is used some 460 million times a year throughout the world, including four million times in the Netherlands.

However, the reality was not quite so simple. The instrument found one buyer, and then the recession set in. “But this is a fantastic invention, as various studies have confirmed. It’s the step from invention to mass production that’s proving difficult.”

Which is why he made the step to VentureLab Twente. “I now know how the market works and how businessmen think. And I’ve built up an enormous network. I hope that the contacts with entrepreneurs or investors will pay off. It has been proved that this product is good. The Femiscope always give good sight, it’s less intimidating for women and it’s more hygienic. Thanks to the fitted light, it can be used absolutely anywhere. So it’s time for the next step.”
Focus on the central theme

With more than thirty years experience of consultancy, Christiaan Rossenaar and Loes Schulting are not the average VentureLab Twente participants. They have just started up a new agency: Excellence Without Compromise (EWC). So why the need for VentureLab? "It kept us on the ball and forced us to focus on what we really want", summarises Loes.

Excellence Without Compromise wants to be a different type of agency, with a different approach. "The name is a statement", says Loes. And Christiaan adds: "We want to offer real solutions to companies that want to expand, for example, or to companies facing specific problems. Solutions that continue working long after we have gone. The measures we put in place must ultimately become an integral part of the business. That's what makes it a real solution, one that is achieved without making compromises."

They talk about a holistic approach. "The organization and its clients form the basis. We are transient; it is the company that must progress and hopefully progress better. So the owner of the company and potential bottlenecks are our prime consideration. We explore other potential avenues for the business. We have to think outside the box. It is a creative process, which inspires people. The results are their results, results that they think will help them on their way. We don't go there to perform tricks", explains Loes.

“We call this rolling up your sleeves and getting results”, continues Christiaan. “We have designed a few instruments to help with the process, whereby we opt for the personal approach. We don’t do this on our own, we work with a network of specialists. We offer people facilitating entrepreneurship, to create strategic and sustainable market value. With consideration for corporate social responsibility. Value is added to the business and clients can count on added value.”

Business partners Loes and Christiaan decided to take part in VentureLab Twente to improve their grasp of the concept. Not so much to learn, but to expose themselves to new ideas and opinions. “You talk to other professionals during the courses and workshops, James Anderson, for example, who is in charge of Business Market Management. VentureLab was the agenda we needed to think ahead, step-by-step”, according to Christiaan. Loes agrees: “It was a meeting place where we could reaffirm our central theme. And we managed.”

www.ewc-adviesgroep.nl
The art of connecting

It would appear to be an impossible task: how to combine Lego bricks with Meccano metal strips? And yet this is the type of problem faced by software system designers on a regular basis. "Every software system needs different types of connections. Up until now, it has been impossible to combine them", explains Lodewijk Bergmans of Stex bv. He has found the solution: Coop.

"Although the concepts of Coop are easy to describe, it is much more difficult to explain the technology behind it", says Bergmans. This requires more than a passing understanding of how software systems work. He explains about the numerous connection techniques, each with their own possibilities: sometimes Lego is more suitable, sometimes Meccano. Larger or more complex software systems often need a number of these different connection techniques. However, software designers only have a limited choice, as if they can only use wooden blocks. A combination of Lego, Meccano and wooden blocks within one system does not seem to be an option.

But this is exactly what Coop has to offer, bringing countless advantages, such as being able to manage the complexity and improving the scope of maintenance. He has already given a presentation at General Electric in England. "I hope to be able to run a pilot project over there. The corporation has its own 'Lego', so this would be a great challenge in technical terms."

His dealings with this multinational came about thanks to a contact at VentureLab. "This alone is an indication of how valuable the programme is. But that's only the start of it. I have a technical background and work as a researcher and consultant. VentureLab taught me to explain what I do and show people how it fits together. And you create an inspiring network of entrepreneurs."

Bergmans has also found an answer to his other question about establishing Coop in the market. For the time being, he will integrate this innovative product into his consultancy activities. Stex bv provides support to software designers building systems that can continue to grow. 'Scalable design', in jargon. "Coop can be part of this. To bring this onto the market as a ready-made product, I would need to make a substantial investment. So I am offering it now, while I continue to develop it. I am creating a demand. And then I shall have the solution ..."
"Employees can be absent for various reasons. People are sometimes ‘just ill’, but there may also be other factors involved. We are among the first to think of analysing the complete spectrum and providing a comprehensive concept." Peter Lulof, from Het Interventiebedrijf, explains about the 4Qs: IQ, EQ, PQ (physical health) and SQ (the spiritual dimension). "All four quotients must be in equilibrium for staff to function to the best of their ability."

The comprehensive advice offered by Het Interventiebedrijf provides solutions in the event of absenteeism (or potential absenteeism). "This usually involves a return to the subject’s own workplace, but it might involve advising an employee to consider the possibility of another job", says Lulof. "Our approach gets to the bottom of the problem. This is always the best place to find a long-term solution, whether the problem is mental or physical, a conflict at work or career-related. And our methods work equally well for prevention. The Q4-scan we are currently devising with UT (University of Twente) can be used to spot individual employees before they lose their balance."

He is convinced of the need for his product. "Just look around you: keeping your staff healthy is so important these days. There’s the raising of the pension age, the ageing population, the threat of shortages in the labour market."

This last aspect offers prospects for the future, he believes. "It will soon become imperative to analyse, monitor and improve our employees’ health. The future of businesses may even depend on it." The striking thing is that Het Interventiebedrijf did not evolve as a healthcare organization, but as a business service. The company works on a national scale, with the best professionals in every field.

"The time was right for me to join VentureLab. They have helped me to compile a well-thought-out business plan. The idea of asking UT to help devise the Q-scan also came from VentureLab. I think I will stay on as a member for another year, to deepen my knowledge. To work out the details of my operation, particularly in the marketing and sales area. This is where I intend to make the next round of improvements."

www.hetinterventiebedrijf.nl
Johannes Burger does not see himself as the most committed participant in VentureLab. There is just too much going on in his own company, Cooll, which revolves around sustainable cooling solutions. Within the next few years, a fully-fledged prototype must be developed and ready to be produced in a small series. “So we have very specific entrepreneurial questions. VentureLab seems like the perfect place to ask them.”

Sustainability is what it’s all about for Burger and his colleagues. They want to use heat for cooling. In countries where high temperatures and excess sunlight are commonplace, this would allow air-conditioning (well-known for its high energy consumption) to operate on a thermal system, without the need for electricity. In much the same way, central heating boilers could be made more cost-effective in cooler countries, like the Netherlands. “Don’t ask me about the details”, smiles Burger, “but we think we are on the verge of a breakthrough. We are very busy at the moment; the first prototype should be ready by 2013 or 2014.”

There is no doubt about the future prospects. Cooll was happy to take advantage of the University of Twente’s TOP programme. The Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation granted funding as part of the Energy Research Subsidy programme. At present, most of their time is spent on research. “Which is great”, says Burger, “but we must also put our designs into practice. This is new technology. We carried out a technical and economical feasibility study into the intended results between 2007 and 2009. The results were highly promising, which gave us the incentive to start up our own business. There is a huge market waiting if we can make this sector more sustainable.”

And this is where VentureLab comes in. “We recognize gaps in our experience and so we had very specific questions. The coach and other partners helped us to focus. Next year, we will start with product development, which is relatively new to us. What’s more, VentureLab has opened up a whole new network. Ultimately, our product will be sold to end users. We have already gathered a few important players around us, including a manufacturer of central heating boilers, an installation company, an end user and an energy consultancy. This makes it even more important to tap into entrepreneurial expertise. And therefore to commit to VentureLab.”
“Suddenly, our coach said: ‘Just do it! Listen to your gut feeling before you fall into a routine.’ That’s when he really proved his worth.” René Steffens, director of CMS Engineering, came to VentureLab with his partner Helga Nakken with two aims. He wanted to learn how to run his expanding business. And he wanted to forge the transition from a product-based to a service organization.

“René is the kind of entrepreneur that would rather pull on the overalls and be the service engineer himself.” This is how Helga characterizes her partner. He nods. This is how he started CMSE. “We advise production companies about the best way to deal with lubrication, oil contamination and friction control. This is important; almost 50% of all breakdowns are due to faulty lubrication.” CMSE now employs six full-time staff, four of whom work outside Enschede.

“We have become an organization”, concludes Helga, “which means that René must change from an entrepreneur into a manager. He must learn to delegate. We went to VentureLab together as partners, to learn to make better use of each other’s competencies.” René: “Turnover is always at the forefront of my mind. I have to realize that I am not the company.”

Furthermore, he is currently working on an innovation. A web-based system with all the relevant information for companies and third parties. Complete with KPI (Key Performance Indicator) dashboard and a helpdesk. “This has huge benefits. It allows you to make your machines more durable, save on energy, lubricants and machine components and operate your machines for longer hours. What’s more the quality is guaranteed.” But it also means a change in the way CMSE operates. “Whereas we used to charge by the hour, we will now have a product that forms the backbone of our business”, says Helga. And this means serious decisions. René: “That was the point at which our coach made that comment. We’ve got a great innovation, but it won’t take off unless we change with it.”

VentureLab suddenly became more intense. And sometimes confrontational. “The thing that makes VentureLab so effective is that the advice and ideas come from experienced entrepreneurs. And that you take time to consider them. This allows you to make better decisions”, explains René. Time to hang up the overalls? Helga shakes her head: “I can’t see that happening. René needs to keep in touch with the work floor. It makes our product even stronger.”
If Wim Albersen learned one thing from the VentureLab programme, it’s that he is not an entrepreneur. But he isn’t letting it get him down. Luckily, he also discovered that developing new products and applications is his real passion. “I still have plenty of ideas, and I am richer for the experience” he says cheerfully.

He had been thinking about moving into entrepreneurship for some time. “I spoke to Rob van Lambalgen, director of VentureLab, who told me that I belonged to the target group. That’s why I signed up.” He is still enthusiastic: “I enjoyed myself and learned a lot. There is a very open atmosphere, people bounce ideas off each other and you’re constantly brainstorming. The atmosphere is dynamic and I feel richer for the experience.”

Albersen was able to develop a few new ideas during his VentureLab period. These include an electric flossing device that can be attached to an electric toothbrush. The prototype has shown that it is feasible and works. However, he stumbled across unexpected obstacles while applying for patent. “There was so much paperwork. I hate it and I am not good at it. Basically, I’m a technician, even more so when it comes to software. I’ve come to the conclusion that I’m simply not an entrepreneurial spirit. End of story.”

He will continue with the developing side. He and a colleague are currently working on an application for image recognition in camera images. He was originally inspired by the sport of motocross. During motocross meetings, trial officials take care of the safety side. But there are no officials present during training sessions, when there is a real risk of riders literally running each other over. Digital analysis of camera images could be the solution. “Cameras placed in strategic positions will register an absence of movement, because one of the riders has crashed, for example. You can use this knowledge to stop the training”, explains Albersen. “The scope of this principle is infinite. You could use it in healthcare, for example. This is potentially an enormous market.”

But not one he will be exploring as an entrepreneur. He laughs: “My colleague is better at that side of things. Innovation is more my cup of tea.”
Sangram Rane descends from a long line of Indian entrepreneurs and came to the Netherlands five years ago. Unlike many of his fellow-countrymen, he did not feel the urge to study in a traditional English-speaking country. He is now in Enschede, paving the way for UCP Europe, the European branch of parent company Urmila Chemopharma. "To help businesses in the west make a soft landing in India," he explains.

Rane came straight from Mumbai to Enschede to study Electronic Engineering at Saxion University of Applied Science. During an internship in Washington, at the Netherlands Office for Science & Technology, he realized that his future should be at the "interface of business and technology". Instead of working in his father's company, which specializes in the production and exports of speciality chemicals and anti-oxidants, he decided to open its European division in Enschede.

“It was my father’s idea to open a branch in Europe. Since the inception of our company twenty years ago, the Netherlands has been one of our main markets and we have developed good relations here. But we are not only interested in sales, we are more keen to start up new activities." UCP Europe sees itself as a hinge in the trade between Europe and India. The company wants to introduce innovative high-tech products from the Netherlands into the Indian market, and aims to help manufacturers achieve this.

“One of our areas of interest is medical – diagnostic equipment. We can provide manufacturers with market access to India. We would also support sales and further business development, and if it is not within our expertise, we have a wide business network in India. We can even offer some manufacturing capacity with our new factory.”

Customers are an essential part of this master plan. This is what brought Rane to VentureLab. "To us, VentureLab Twente is a unique business incubator", he explains. "I haven’t taken part in everything; I made a selection of the things that were important to me. The coaching from Jaap van Tilburg was particularly useful. He helped me focus, and the association with Venturelab certainly opens a lot of new doors. As does the relationship with the University of Twente. This should help us to make our new branch a success.”
A revolutionary concept. That’s how Jaap de Rijk and Johannes Bethke see their method of using X-ray technology to penetrate right through to the innermost contents of objects. “Take an airport. Your case goes through the scan. The security person can see a tin, but he doesn’t know whether it contains shaving cream or explosives. Our technology makes this clear within a couple of seconds”, explains De Rijk. “It’s a discovery that will change the world”, adds Bethke.

The duo has known each other for years. They recently formed EnTech Scientific BV, under the motto ‘Applying New Generation X-Ray Concepts’. Bethke: “We have numerous ideas we want to develop and market.” And this X-ray technology is the first. Bethke spent months experimenting with it in a laboratory. With varying degrees of success. Until the breakthrough in September 2010.

“It works!” says De Rijk. “It obviously still needs refining, but we know that it works. Just imagine how important this could be to security and the detection of dangerous substances. Not to mention the fight against terrorism. This equipment will soon be able to see more than any other devices, and within a few seconds.” Other possible applications are already emerging. It could be of use in the chemical industry, but also for pathology, for example. “We can detect metal in a body without having to dissect”, says Bethke.

But De Rijk and Bethke are keeping the details to themselves. “It’s our intellectual property so we want to protect it”, says De Rijk. “That’s one of the things that makes VentureLab so important. You’re given a coach who thinks along with you, and who has a network that includes subsidy providers and the University of Twente. We are both reasonably experienced, but this has proved to be a truly inspiring environment.”

And one that gave them food for thought. The forthcoming period will revolve around further developing their technology. “We will not be producing or marketing it ourselves. Our clients are parties that will integrate our concepts into their own products”, explains De Rijk. And Bethke: “We will first set up our own laboratory to work on developing the concept. And then we’ll have to see; we have plenty more ideas.”
This publication was produced in order to highlight the innovative developments in VentureLab Twente and to convey general information regarding entrepreneurship. Although this volume was prepared with the greatest of care, no responsibility can be accepted for inaccuracies. It is also important to remember that both law and practice are subject to continual change.

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