

Entrepreneur Consultancy

a starting startup consultancy

Interview with M. Driesen

By E. Engelsman

What better place to start a business than in the Amsterdam docks? Drs. Martijn Driesen is one of the starting companies operating from an old warehouse refurbished to a center for starters. It offers a splendid view over the harbour from which the VOC once started as the first Dutch venture firm.

The e-scan

The product that Martijn developed is dubbed "e-scan". It measures a person's psychological profile against that needed to succeed in a type of business. For example, a good interest in what customers really want is quite important to raise a startup's chances of success. A twenty minutes questionnaire has to be answered, after which the software can create the profile.

Financers often wonder: Do the business plan and the business man combine? In other words, is the person who has written the business plan also the person to carry it through? Martijn's claim is that while the business plan measures qualities of the product idea, the e-scan offers insight in the qualities of the entrepreneur. But the e-scan is a larger concept than the disk carrying the software. After the assessment, which results in a brief description of the person's better and weaker capabilities, the entrepreneur can consult a career counselor to improve his weaker points, for example by following personal effectiveness courses. With hindsight, the product cleverly fills a niche: It offers a kind of career counseling for people who want to start for themselves, i.e., those without a future employer.

Business network

It is interesting to note how Martijn is running his business. Distribution and sales of the software have been left to EasyStart, a company which sells business plan software, and banks or chambers of commerce, respectively. Further consulting resulting from the test result have been outsourced to career counselors, to which Martijn offers the necessary training and support. Trainees are hired to examine the need to support specific branches of industry differently. This network of partners allows him to concentrate further on product development. Rather than keeping control of the entire concept, he distributes responsibilities to his business partners, thus creating a larger support platform.

Martijn stresses the importance of early customer contacts as well. Through frank discussions with his prospective customers, the chambers of commerce, he found out that they would like the self-assessment capability of the product. His initial plan was to let the starters fill in the questionnaire at the chamber's counter, but they weren't sure such an approach would work.

Essential part of a business plan, apart from the product idea, is the marketing plan. This part describes how the product will be sold and distributed to its users. For example, mass distribution of

Starter of the year 1998

Business plan competitions are probably the best way to start a business. The competitiveness of the participants, the access to expert knowledge, and of course the grand prize to kick off your companies funding make it the ideal catalyst for starting your business.

De Baak, the management center for Dutch employer unions VNO-NCW, together with Think Tank, a network organization with interest in entrepreneurship, organize a business plan contest. This contest, the largest in the Netherlands, is now held for the seventh time. The winner of the competition will receive Fl 15000,-

Starters who want to participate have to write a business plan in which attention should be paid to such issues as company goals and environment analysis. During the competition the contesters can address a helpdesk with experts from KPMG, ING, and lawyers for assistance with the contents of their plans.

The competition can still be entered until October 16th, 1998. During the awards session, the six finalists will present their plans, after which the jury, chaired by Drs. J.C. Blankert, chair to VNO-NCW will appoint the winner.

For more information, see <http://www.debaak.nl/starter/>

a product requires ease of use and limits the price of the product, Conversely, by targeting the product to specific niches, direct sales may increase the margins on the product. The financing part of the business plan is then derived from rough estimates of market sizes of the marketing plan and the costs to develop and manufacture the product.

What about Twinning?

Martijn is enthusiastic about Twinning as a method to improve starting conditions for entrepreneurs. He also emphasises the need to make students aware during their study of the possibility of either working for an employer or becoming an employer themselves. As a trainer on a course on entrepreneurship, he is actively involved in this perception change process. Students are a specifically important group with starting potential, compared to employees with guaranteed and higher incomes. Although counter-intuitive, research has shown that the number of startups increases in an economic recession, while it decreases in booming periods. An explanation is that employees who risk losing their jobs may very well take the risk of starting a business of their own as well.

Intrapreneurship

Intrapreneurship becomes more common in the Xootic working environment, as larger companies realize the importance of product innovation and new business development. What would be parallel-

s and differences between entre- and intrapreneuring? Clearly, intrapreneurs seek the freedom to explore new options and uncharted terrains. They are often less interested in common career tracks, which often involve more cautious behaviour and risk avoidance. A strong difference between entre- and intrapreneuring is that intrapreneurs desire a secure income and the comfort of a team. Entrepreneurs are more driven by their internal desire to build and sell their own product, characters to which Martijn refers as "Eigenheimers" (the word loses its meaning in an English translation). For new business development to be successful it is important that top management supports the team, not only in words, but also in development time and money. Team members should not have the same opinions. Rather, conflicting views may enhance the final quality of the product through discussions in the group. Although the e-scan could also be used to assess intrapreneurs, Martijn thinks that it would be better to position a new product which focuses on team characteristics rather than the individual traits.

Research

Apart from being an entrepreneur, Martijn is also a researcher, working on a Ph.D. thesis under supervision of Prof.Dr. Zwart, RijksUniversteit Groningen. Actually, the e-scan concept originated from research he performed for his masters thesis. His Ph.D. thesis discusses the importance of the entrepreneurs character on the success of a new company. The quantitative data required for founding

his theories are obtained as a side effect of his business by asking entrepreneurs to volunteer in questionnaires related to his research.

New opportunities

E-scan will become available in autumn 1998. This is not a reason for Martijn to sit back and relax. In

fact, he has plenty of new ideas on which he can concentrate. Furthermore, Greek banks have shown interest in the product, so research will be carried out to adapt the e-scan to the Mediterranean culture. We can expect to hear more from Martijn Driesen in the future.



Martijn was the winner of the audience award of the “Starter of the year” contest held in 1997. His entrance in this competition was partly a learning experience, and partly a clever move to establish his specific business. Could there be a better way to promote an entrepreneur assessment product to an audience of financiers, commerce chambers, and entrepreneurs themselves than a business plan competition?