

MORE THAN A CENTURY OF EXPERIENCE TO SHARE: BETWEEN MEMORIES AND A VISION OF THE FUTURE

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TROX Belgium has been an expert in ventilation and air treatment in Belgium since 1967. Based in Anderlecht, the company currently has a team of around 50 people. We had the pleasure of meeting four of them, each of whom has been active within the company for around 33 years, helping to maintain its excellent reputation. From love for the product to the impact of digitalisation, the interview highlights the employees' passion for their work and how they have adapted to change over the years. It is a tour de table of memories and visions for the future, which will focus on strong team cohesion and a corporate culture focused on employee well-being.

Hugues Sirjacobs, Bernard De Poorter, Alain Dubois and Bart Pennewaert: all have a technical profile and are Sales Engineer or Business Development Manager, with the former having an external technical sales role with end customers and the latter managing internal specification specialists.

The four musketeers

Alain Dubois kicks off the conversation: "Having started my career at TROX 34 years ago as an internal salesman, I quickly moved on to external sales. The role of Sales Engineer suits me well because it allows me to meet a large number of people and diverse customers. I do not see myself - and I am not seen that way by customers/prospects - as a salesman, but more as an engineer who does what is necessary to ensure that the customer gets a solution that works.

Sitting next to Alain, Bart Pennewaert illustrates the strong bond that exists between TROX Belgium and its employees. He started at TROX as a Sales Engineer in 1990 and worked there for almost 19 years before leaving to see if the grass was greener at the competition. This was clearly not the case, as less than a year and a half later he returned to TROX as Sales Director (until 2020) and Bart rose further to Business Development & Service Director. In the meantime, TROX had expanded its product range to include air handling units, necessitating the creation of a team of technicians to maintain the installations and troubleshoot problems. Previously, the range included "everything from air intake to air outlet". Until Mr Trox, at the parent company in Germany, decided to offer complete solutions, including air handling units.

Hugues Sirjacobs, an industrial engineer by training, has been with TROX for 33 years and is currently Business Development Manager, after a long stint as a Sales Engineer. "The purely commercial aspect - negotiating - takes up only about 10% of my time. The rest is spent on technical matters. Two years ago, I got the chance to switch from external to internal sales by swapping jobs with a young internal salesman who wanted to make the switch in the opposite direction. Since then, we work together as a team and I train him, with him doing the negotiations and me dealing with the technical aspects at every stage of the project. We make a perfect team. The fact that we can carry out complex studies in-house for the customer is one of TROX's strengths.

After studying electromechanics, Bernard De Poorter joined TROX by chance in 1990, after working for several years at two other companies. "At that time, there was no training in HVAC, so we were trained on the job. This is what makes us so strong today, and is reinforced by our experience: within the market, we have an image as experts, as a point of reference.

When a company is known for the quality of its products, its technical know-how ... as is the case with TROX, it makes sense that we are seen as a partner committed to the health of its customers' employees and not merely as a supplier.

Decades of evolution and adaptation

One of the four musketeers holds up a quotation typed in 1987 in several copies using carbon paper ... "There were two secretaries who did just that. That work is a thing of the past. Our tools have completely changed. When we started, there were no computers. Customer files were kept in a plastic box with small index cards."

Hugues: "When we went to visit customers, we did it by car, but without GPS or mobile phones. We worked differently. It was no better or worse than today. Today, many meetings are held via Teams, but for Sales Engineers, nothing beats a face-to-face meeting from time to time to keep

the human and relational aspect with the customer and to get certain information more easily. The new generation tends to want to do everything remotely."

The conversation covers the evolution of TROX's products and services, including the addition of air handling units and the importance of air quality, particularly highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 1990, TROX's product range was much less extensive. Today, the company offers advanced control systems, complete systems and solutions for specialised areas such as laboratories and fume extraction. Alain explains: "Everything has changed enormously since the 1990s. We used to bring a fixed amount of air into a room without asking too many questions. Now everything is precisely controlled based on occupancy and other parameters, combined with building management systems that have developed exponentially. Bart adds, "You can tell when a building is obsolete by the technology in it. We are regularly asked to replace the HVAC in buildings that we equipped 15 or 20 years ago. This is particularly the case when the building is being redeveloped or converted to accommodate other functions.

The expansion of the product range and increase in the number of customers has also been accompanied by an increase in 'data'. While a Business Development Manager used to spend 15% of his time on reporting, today he spends much more time collecting, integrating, synthesising and transmitting information at all levels, at the expense of more fundamental tasks. "You might think that with the tools we have today, everything would be faster, but that is not necessarily the case."

Doing good work

"What keeps us here? The product, which is technically interesting, and the working atmosphere. We get along well, we are almost friends, and turnover in the team is generally low. Of course, many new colleagues join the team. And TROX gives young people time to learn, without putting them under unnecessary pressure. Older colleagues are far from burnt out because they feel valued, especially by the guidance of younger colleagues. TROX has managed to keep the demands on its employees at a fair and humane level, avoiding internal rivalries between salespeople.

Bernard continues: "We get a lot of satisfaction from our work, both internally and with our customers, because we feel valued: if a customer has a complex problem, they come to us. And we are very likely to win the contract because we inspire trust. Now it is up to us to pass on the knowledge and expertise we have built up over the years to the next generation, so that TROX can maintain its reputation as a technical expert.