

FRAXINUS NEWS

N°7 // 2019

FRAXINUS

CHALLENGE US TO
AN INNOVATIVE
FUTURE.
LET'S MEET!

“ Continued commitment to strong partnerships with customers and suppliers.

Dear reader,

Since the last edition of Fraxinews, we've had the opportunity to carry out some great projects again. These are achievements where we challenged ourselves over and over again and where we took the production process of multiple customers to a higher level thanks to the combination of their specific product knowledge and our expertise in handling and process optimisation.

For the new edition of Fraxinews we visited TWE Meulebeke, TVH, Trappen Verschaeve and Eternit: these four cases highlight the Fraxinus working method. Projects like this are the result of a close collaboration between Fraxinus and the customer and also the cooperation between Fraxinus and our suppliers. You can read more about this in the article with SEW-Eurodrive.

Finally, this year we are celebrating 15 years of Fraxinus. This is the perfect time to thank all our customers, suppliers and employees for their continued trust in Fraxinus.

Looking forward to another 15 years of innovative mechanical engineering.

Hans Van Essche, CEO of Fraxinus



PACKAGING LINES



ROBOT PROJECTS



MECHANICAL ENGINEERING MADE-TO-MEASURE



STACKING SYSTEMS



CONVEYOR SYSTEMS



MANIPULATORS

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FRAXINUS MEETS KNACK VOLLEY



At Fraxinus, every new employee follows an **intensive training trajectory**. But how does it work with rising talents in a professional sports club? As loyal supporters of first-division Knack Volley Roeselare, we invited main hitter and established asset Hendrik Tuerlinckx, rising star Mathijs Desmet and coach Steven Vanmedegael, together with our established asset Bart Barbier and young colleague Emile Schollier, to exchange ideas about **coaching young talent**.

From left to right: Bart Barbier, Emile Schollier, Hans Van Essche, Hendrik Tuerlinckx, Steven Vanmedegael and Mathijs Desmet

“Above all, it’s about having the right mentality”

ATTRACTING NEW TALENT

Obviously, the first step is to find that new talent. Bart Barbier explains: “We’ll get new engineers from the school desks: via a summer job, as was the case with Emile, or by doing an internship. This way, we already see that someone’s got what it takes and how that person fits into the team.” At Knack Volley, too, the search already begins in the schools. “A lot of new players come from the top sports school, but we also scout athletes at (youth) championships”, says coach Steven Vanmedegael. “It takes a lot of time to find a player who complements the rest of the team, but the real work doesn’t begin until they actually start.”

IT STARTS WITH INTERNAL TRAINING

“That’s the same with us. Regardless of their previous experience, we immerse new colleagues in the entire production process. This gives them that essential gut feeling: you can draw something in ten different ways, but for the technician who has to assemble the whole product, there’s always one way that works best. You can only acquire this knowledge in the workshop itself. After this, they move on to engineering, where they start making workshop drawings. Finally, they end up at the design table. During this process, we mold the new colleague in the so-called ‘Fraxinus style’, typified by the high degree of finishing and the flexibility of our machines, which allow for easy maintenance. That calls for a special eye for detail”, says Bart.

MENTALITY IS KEY

“When it comes to knowledge and experience, our mentality plays a prominent role. As a coach, I mainly refine the technique, but the most important factor is the dynamics between the players, who spend much more time together outside the training sessions. That’s where the team really is formed”, says coach Steven. “But it’s mainly the individual

mentality of the player that will make the difference between a mediocre player and a real top athlete. Everyone’s treated in the same way, there’s no walk-in process in which newcomers get a tailor-made plan. This is an enormous adjustment for young players. Experienced players already have their attitude, but the young players start with a blank page: the top sports school is vastly different from the top sports mentality of a club like Knack Volley.

“Details are the difference between good and great.”

We update tactical-technical skills during training, but what knowledge do the players gain off the playing field? I’m thinking of the eating and sleeping pattern, building in enough rest... This is the mentality that sets top athletes apart because they don’t develop much in terms of tactics and technique between the ages of 18 and about 30. It’s in the passion of the player. “Excellence takes time and sacrifice. Otherwise, you won’t excel. That’s true everywhere”, Hendrik adds, and Mathijs can confirm that: “I’ve been with Knack Volley for three years now, and the difference between top sports school and club life is huge. You have to go through a certain process to refine your mentality, which needs time and experience.” “I can see some similarities in that area”, adds Emile. “The time I get to familiarise myself with every part of the production process helps me enormously to lay a good foundation. I’m all for it!”

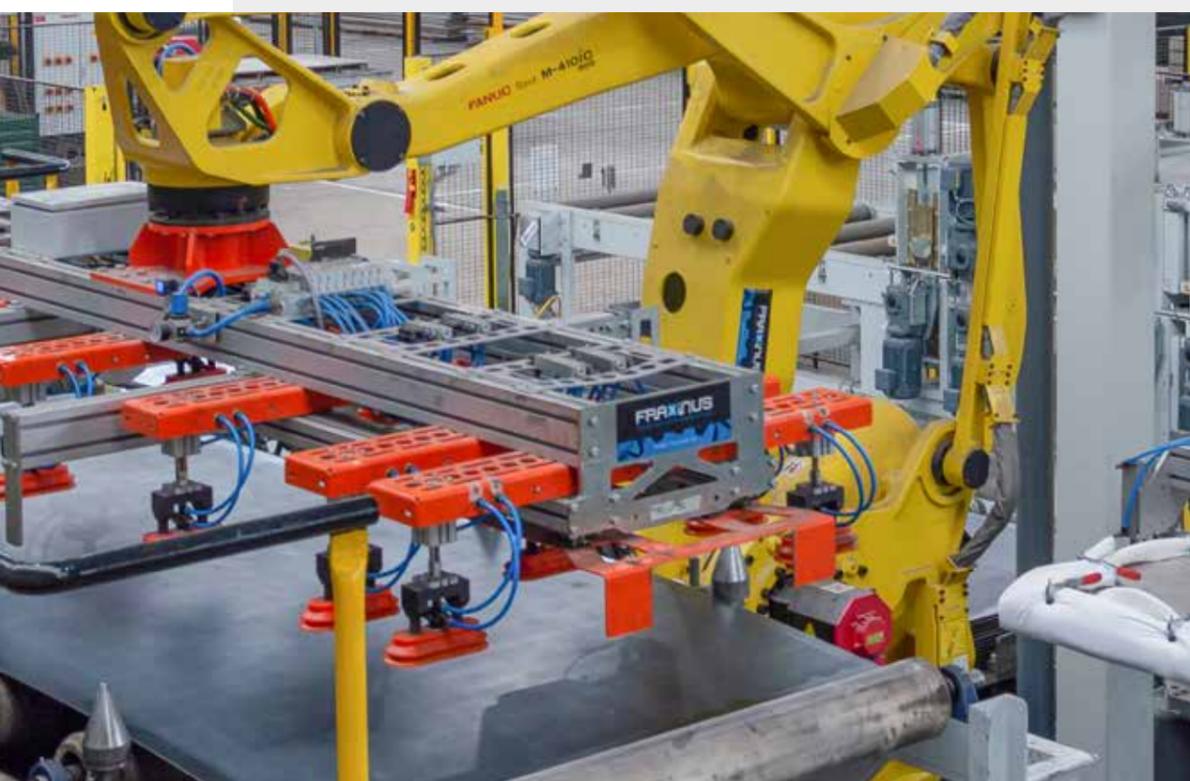


NEW HANDLING SYSTEM FOR ETERNIT

Simultaneous stacking and sorting of fire-resistant panels

Eternit has a clear mission: as part of the Etex Group, a Belgian industrial group specialising in the production and sale of high-quality building materials and systems, the company wants to **inspire people to build places that are safe, sustainable, smart and beautiful**. Hence Eternit is fully committed to innovative product development and relies on strong partners who share this vision.

In their search for a partner for the automated handling of their new monolithic fire-resistant panels, Eternit was introduced to Fraxinus two years ago during a networking event in Kortrijk called 'Bedrijvencontactdagen'. Two years later, the Fraxinus label hangs on the proverbial façade of various steps in the production process at their factory in Kapelle-op-den-Bos. This prompts a short conversation with Bertrand Van Acoleyen, engineer at Eternit.



FACTS & FIGURES

INVESTMENT IN NEW PRODUCT
5 million euros

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES
650 people at Eternit in a group of 14,500 employees at Etex Group

QUALITY CERTIFICATION
First building materials product with ISO 14001 environmental certificate

→ more info at
www.eternit.be

What did you call in Fraxinus for?

"The development of our new monolithic fire protection panels involved a completely new production process. For us this was the ideal opportunity to redesign the handling system of our products and bring some innovation to the process. It gave us the opportunity to expand our range of suppliers. I asked around and finally we ended up at Fraxinus. It was immediately clear that, despite the complexity of our handling system, Fraxinus would be up to the task. After all, I didn't need to go to Fraxinus for an ordinary stacker: in the future, I might as well shop at Alibaba for that (laughs). All kidding aside, the handling of our panels has a lot of specific requirements and I had the time and opportunities to find a good partner, so we could have a win-win situation for both of us. Fraxinus proved to be the right people for this."

You make it clear that you chose not to share all the information about the project with Fraxinus all at once.

"No, that's right. I know from experience that it's better to share the necessary information step by step for such large projects. In the meantime, I can also perfectly assess the consequences of temporarily withholding certain information. If you can provide information step by step, you won't overwhelm the other party and you'll avoid paying too much attention to details. From the beginning I had the feeling that I could work with Fraxinus perfectly that way."



From left to right: Hannes Dekeyzer and Bertrand Van Acoleyen

Fraxinus currently has three installations at Eternit, but these projects weren't carried out in chronological order of the production process.

"A conscious choice. The first two machines have been operational for a while and are situated a little later in the production process than the third plant currently being developed at Fraxinus. When the Eternit panels arrive at the first Fraxinus machine, they are stacked alternately with iron spacer panels.

“ By sharing the information with the developers step by step, we maintain our focus and the project moves forward.

— Bertrand Van Acoleyen, Eternit

The first machine ensures that the fresh fire-resistant panels are unstacked, with the first robot taking the Eternit panel and the second robot simultaneously taking up the spacer panel. Once the base panel is completely unstacked, we move on to the appropriate stacking sequence depending on the panel type. The robot that takes the Eternit panel places it on another base panel in preparation for the high pressure steam process in the

autoclave. This robot stacks ten Eternit panels, with a third robot placing an intermediate layer every ten panels so that the steam can reach each panel. This was engineered in such a way that we can put a maximum number of panels in the autoclave at once. It also ensures that all panels are steamed with the same quality. The second installation is located just after autoclaving. The panels with the intermediate layers come from the autoclave and the robot takes the ten panels one by one and places them on a wooden pallet in the direction of the finishing line. A second robot removes the interlayers. In this phase of the production process, we have some leeway if something goes wrong, which also gives us time and space to test a new handling system. In the third project, however, there is no such luxury: this machine is linked to the production machine that continuously produces panels. It goes without saying that in this part of the production process you can't let too much go wrong. You can't entrust a project like this to a new partner with no prior knowledge of the product and the production process. That is why we have decided to start with the installations for stacking and de-stacking the panels first. Given that it went smoothly, the logical consequence was that for the third project we once again called on Fraxinus and their knowledge."

Soon, we'll be testing the third installation.

"The moment of truth has come... And the proof will be in the pudding!"

The key to success

BY HANNES DEKEYZER

Sales engineer Fraxinus

—

"We acquired a great deal of know-how during the development of the first two machines, in terms of software as well as mechanics and cabling, and this experience was absolutely essential if we were to be able to go to the next level with the third project. In this installation, as in the first project, the plates are simultaneously incorporated by two robots, which in itself is quite complex. However, the difficulty in this part of the process lies in the fact that we are in a small zone with a very limited cycle time. Moreover, the panel is still wet and limp in this part of the process. If you have to pick up a wet product with a suction cupboard at such speeds and with different parameters and dimensions, **you know right away that it's important to listen very carefully to the customer** and that we had to **absorb the tips and tricks from Eternit's engineers like a sponge**, so that we could take all the technical information into account in every detail in the development of the installation. It's the combination of their specific product knowledge and our experience – with Eternit but also from projects with other customers – that ensures the success of a project with these space and timing constraints."

REVOLUTIONARY PROJECT FOR NEW TVH DISTRIBUTION CENTRE

Automatic stacking of small shipping boxes



“It is a revolutionary installation that can be of interest to many e-commerce companies.

— Erik Deceuninck, automation manager TVH

“We were facing a lack of space in our logistics department in Waregem. That’s why in 2016 we decided to construct a new building next to our main building. The work is almost finished and soon the new distribution centre will be fully operational”, says Erik Deceuninck, automation manager at TVH. Together with his colleague Bart Reyntjens, team leader for automation engineering, among others, Erik is responsible for following up this particularly complex handling project in the distribution centre, which can be briefly summed up as ‘Automatic stacking of small shipping boxes in three formats’.

Why did you decide to automate this project?

“The initial intention was to load the boxes with a telescopic conveyor directly into the truck. This is a very simple system, where the boxes could then be stacked in the truck by a person. But in the end, this proved to be unfeasible. After all, no fewer than 2,500 boxes are to be loaded per hour: at this pace, it is not ergonomically justified to have an employee do this. And we haven’t even mentioned the Belgian temperature fluctuations, which can also make working a lot more difficult. That’s why we decided to automate the whole thing anyway”, says Erik.

How will the automation process proceed?

Bart explains: “The distribution centre has four floors. The boxes are picked on the second and third floors, and then go up to the fourth floor. There they are channelled into the right cells and returned to the carrier. The project runs in two phases. With the installation we’re building now, we can handle up to 2,500 boxes per hour. In the second phase, we’ll be able to handle 5,000 boxes per hour.”

A complex project.

Erik: “Absolutely. What initially seemed like a simple project has become a complex system. After all, we have three different box sizes, ranging from 200x300mm to 400x600mm each with a variable height of 30 to 300mm.

From left to right: Erik Deceuninck, Hannes Dekeyzer and Bart Reyntjens

TVH needs no introduction. The company, situated in Waregem, is the world player par excellence for the supply of parts and accessories for **material handling and industrial and agricultural machines**. In addition, the company rents and sells **aerial work platforms and forklifts** worldwide. The multinational is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary this year, but it's only at the beginning of a flourishing future. Evidence of this? The reason why they called on Fraxinus.

The weight also varies from 0 to 20 kg. This requires a lot of technical calculations to stack them efficiently and stably, with a minimal loss of space."

How did the automatic box stacking come about?

"This has been a very intensive process involving a great deal of testing. The people of Fraxinus were here on-site once every two weeks during a total period of two years. In the first phase, the layout of the process was outlined and determined. Then we came to the challenge of stacking the boxes. In the first instance, it was about the stability on the pallets. We stack up to two metres high, which means that around 16 stacks are made for the smallest boxes. It goes without saying that this is a very fragile construction that could fall over at any time. So, we integrated the cage into the project: the pallet ends up in a cage, which is then transported to the wrapper. Once it's wrapped, the problem of stability is solved", explains Erik.

Bart adds: "The second challenge was the variety of box sizes, which meant that we never had a perfectly flat bottom layer and so we couldn't work with the intermittent sheets. To ensure that we wouldn't stack like an accordion, we've integrated software that constantly calculates the current height of the stack and indicates which tower can be built upon without being higher than the tower behind it.

"In addition, throughout the process it was also decided to put two gripping arms in one cell, on the one hand because the boxes are delivered faster than one gripping arm can handle, and on the other hand it was impossible to develop one adjustable gripper for the three different sizes. Finally, we also had to see how we could make the installation as safe as possible for man and machine. This was a very long process, and every part of the process was thoroughly checked", says Erik.

At this very moment the construction of the installation starts: a crucial phase in the project!

"Tomorrow (1 October, ed.) we will start building the logistical loop for the transport of the boxes to the cells. In two weeks' time, the stacking installation will be brought in. We've provided roof openings for this, which can be opened and closed. This also had consequences for the size of the installation itself: it had to be adapted to the dimensions of the hole in the roof. Finally, we also determined that the point load on the floor would be too heavy, so we decided to place them at right angles to IPE profiles, which means that there's a lot more load-bearing capacity. This makes things much more complex when you have to install such an installation on the fourth floor of a building", explains Erik.

How do you look back on the collaboration with Fraxinus?

Bart and Erik agree on that: "The entire process was engineered and tested down to the smallest detail. Fraxinus was even involved in the construction of the distribution centre so we could make the right estimates for the holes in the roof. Fraxinus is constantly thinking along with us and we really appreciate that. The project has called for patience and perseverance from both sides, but we really trust each other. Both Fraxinus and we put our necks out for this project, but we came up with an efficient solution that performs well enough to meet our needs. Now we're looking forward to the installation becoming operative, so next year at least come and see how it goes!"

Extensive testing is the foundation for success

BY HANNES DEKEYZER
Sales engineer Fraxinus

"To do this project, we created several test setups in our workshop. This allowed us to try out our theories and we discovered that certain approaches weren't feasible in practice. It took two years to achieve the effective end result. Fortunately, we had the luxury of enough time to carry out thorough tests. In this way we were able to bring the project and the stacking efficiency to a high level. If you have time constraints, you have to make adjustments while the final installation is already under construction. That can cause many more difficulties. In the end, this successful test phase led to the creation of a prototype cell, which we built up and tested in our workshop. When it turned out that it worked well, the customer decided to order three more cells and the complete loop to connect the individual cells."

NICE TO KNOW

- > The **new distribution centre** has a surface area of **12,000 m²** and extends over **four floors** with a total **usable height of 25 metres**.
- > The QR code of the box is **printed directly by laser**: no more ink needed!
- > As soon as the order arrives, it is **delivered within 24 hours in Europe and within 48 hours worldwide**.

→ more info at www.tvh.com

15 YEARS OF FRAXINUS

The pioneers of Fraxinus



RYAN DEBACKER
Engineer

—
“Hans and I had been working together for some time when he decided to found Fraxinus. I had no hesitation and followed him immediately. It’s nice working here in a pleasant environment. Every day I’m busy with something different. I come into contact with a lot of sectors, from food to wood to plastic. I’m quite a keen learner by nature, and in a company like Fraxinus you can learn a lot if you’re open to it.”



MARCIN FRANCUS
Technician

—
“Milling and turning: that’s what I really like to do. Here, as a craftsman, you’re really appreciated. You get good material to work with, all the tools are of the best quality. I’ve seen the company evolve enormously. In the beginning, everyone had to be very flexible and be able to work independently on every level, but gradually the tasks were more divided and there was more structure. Nonetheless, there’s still a family atmosphere: every year we go on a pleasant surprise trip together, we celebrate Sint-Elooi together...”



PATRICK VALCKE
Mechanic

—
“I ended up with Fraxinus through Marcin. Every day, as a mechanic, I get more new challenges: the installations are becoming more modern and larger, the materials more sophisticated with more technology. What hasn’t changed is the variety of the work. Sometimes I spend up to two months working at a customer’s facility to assemble a new installation. That variation keeps it interesting!”

This year, Fraxinus is celebrating its 15th birthday. In 2004, Hans Van Essche started the company in Izegem. Time for a look back through the eyes of CEO Hans and his pioneers Ryan, Marcin and Patrick.

Our milestones

2004

START-UP IN IZEGEM

Hans starts up Fraxinus in a rental property of 1,000 m² in Izegem, armed with a milling machine and some welding stations.

2006

MOVING TO BEVEREN

The move meant an expansion to 3,500 m². During this period, all business processes were streamlined and automated as much as possible, from accounting to engineering.

2008

NEW MACHINERY

The year of the purchase of the first large milling machine. From then on, systematic further investments in turning and milling machines for piecework and large pieces, overhead cranes...

2011

EXPANSION OF THE SITE

In order to be able to develop more installations at the same time, Fraxinus built two additional halls of 3,000 m² with overhead cranes.

2018

ADDITIONAL EXPANSION

Seven years later, Fraxinus once again needed more space. That’s why the company built three new halls, good for an additional 3,500 m². The offices were also renovated.

“Staying innovative is the message for the future”

INTERVIEW WITH HANS VAN ESSCHE



From the very beginning, Fraxinus has been trusted by a number of large companies to carry out complex projects. Their discerning mindset has allowed Fraxinus to work at a certain level right from the start.

“If you make simple things from the start and stagnate there, you’ll stay in that segment. We had to push ourselves immediately to take on technically difficult challenges. It’s thanks to the confidence of those customers that Fraxinus was able to make a good start”, says Hans.

A job you couldn’t do alone.

“That’s right. Ryan (Debacker) joined almost immediately and then it went fast. We also immediately looked for top-quality partners for machine parts and remain loyal to them: if they’re competent and competitive, we won’t need to look for other ones. There’s strong mutual respect and blind trust. This also applies to our relationship with customers. Most of them are repeat customers. We have customers who have a one-off project carried out and can then continue with that installation for years, but we also have large groups in our customer base that we work for almost continuously. These long-term relationships are really part of our business, without us *resting on our laurels*.”

What do you think is Fraxinus’ recipe for success?

“Above all, we believe in not making things too complex. We always try to present a concept or idea as simply as possible so that the customer immediately understands what we want to do. In addition, our short lines of communication are also a strong asset.”

“We owe our technological lead to the confidence of a number of customers who believed in our technical capabilities from the outset.

— Hans van Essche

How did you see Fraxinus developing?

“We’re experiencing steady growth. At the moment, we’re growing around 15% each year, in terms of both turnover and personnel. Of course, we hope to be able to maintain this growth. Our customer base is also evolving rapidly. We see a strong consolidation of the market with numerous production companies being included in larger groups. As a result, we suddenly have a number of global players

in our customer portfolio with contacts far and wide. This gives us an international reach and enables us to operate worldwide. This brings a lot of opportunities for the future.”

Speaking of the future: what’s on the agenda for the coming years?

“Above all, we must continue to innovate and keep up with state of the art. 20 to 30% of our projects contain technology that’s new to us, while the other 70% to 80% are projects with existing technology that we’ve mastered fully. We need this balance to be able to innovate and grow at the same time. At the moment, we’re eager to work with a new top technology from an American partner. So, we’re looking for a project where this technology can come in handy and we hope to find a customer who wants to join us in this story soon. This means that, as a company, we could make huge strides forward and uphold our technological edge.”

What are the challenges involved?

“Finding the right manpower to achieve our growth remains a major challenge. In the meantime, we’ve already accepted that we need to train new people ourselves: most of the new employees come from a different sector or have done an internship with us and then acquire the necessary knowledge and experience on the job. We give them the time to do so, and that’s probably appreciated because fortunately we don’t have a lot of staff turnover.”

TRAPPEN VERSCHAEVE

Increased efficiency in several domains thanks to a single robot

Almost sixty years ago Schrijnwerkerij Verschaeve from Lauwe was born. When bungalow construction began to weaken in the 1970s, the company evolved from a general carpenter's workshop to a staircase workshop. Today, Jan Verschaeve represents the second generation of the company and his sons Bjorn and Steve are also active in the family business. Last year, they planned to buy their **fifth CNC machine** and asked themselves who would operate it. **Could automation be an option** when you're constantly short-staffed? Find out below how Fraxinus provided the managers with an appropriate answer.



FACTS & FIGURES

EMPLOYEES

25 blue-collar workers - 9 white-collar workers

SITE SURFACE

> 25,000 m²

NUMBER OF STAIRS ON AN ANNUAL BASIS

2,000 staircases

NUMBER OF STEPS ON AN ANNUAL BASIS

30,000 steps

NUMBER OF STEERED AXLES NEW MKM CNC MACHINE

61 controlled axes without robot

AVERAGE ANNUAL TURNOVER

5.5 million euros

NOTEWORTHY

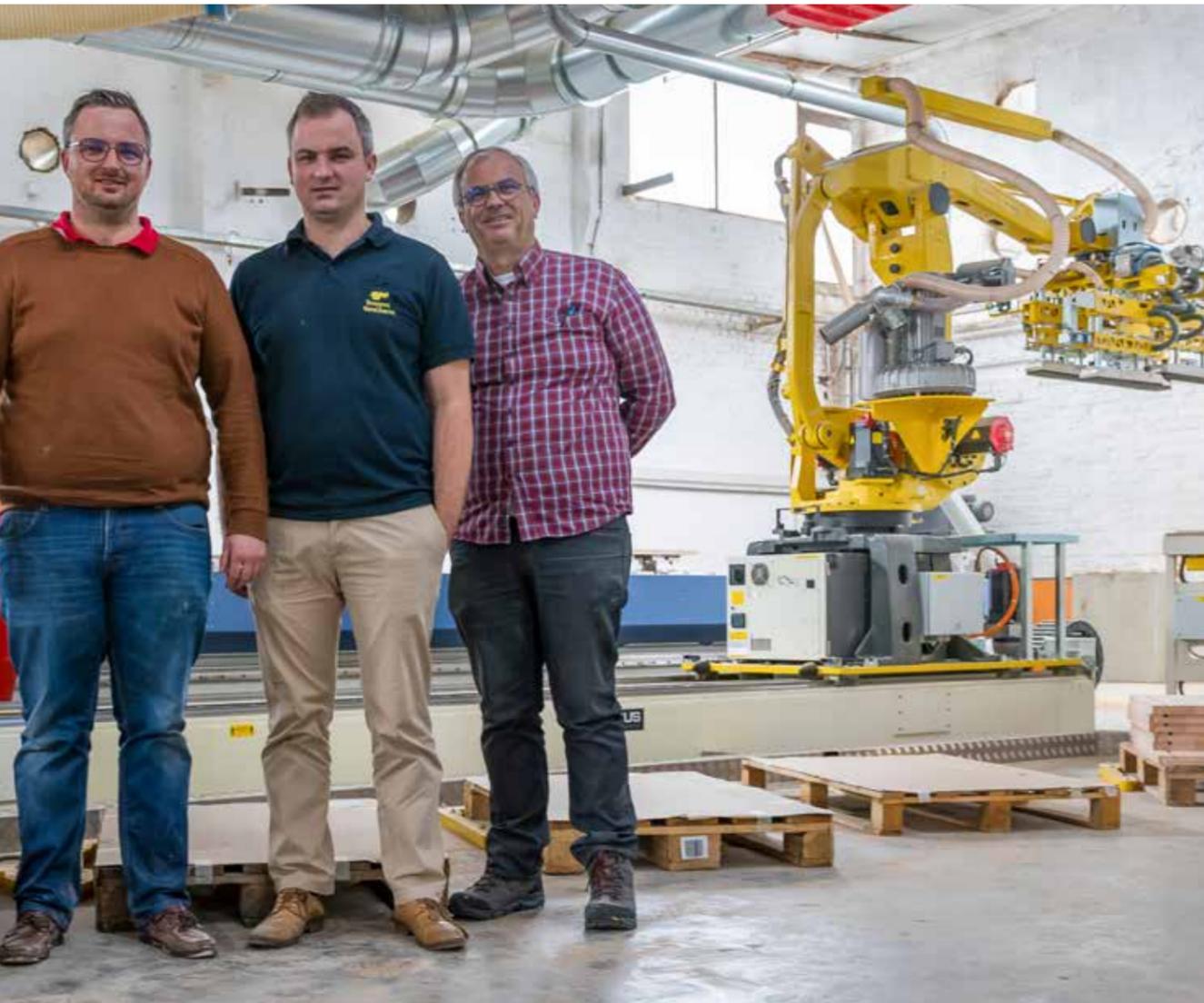
Last year, turnover increased by 18%

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

the company will be celebrating its 60th birthday next year?

→ more info at
www.trappen-verschaeve.be





From left to right: Steve, Bjorn and Jan Verschaeve

The new CNC machine was the reason to consider further automation.

“That’s right. From the very beginning of our existence, we’ve always kept our machinery up to date. In the 1990s, we were one of the first to work with CNC. Our first machine was from Dubus, France, and then we switched to MKM. Last year, we bought our fifth CNC machine and we considered the idea of automating the loading and unloading of the machine”, says Jan Verschaeve.

How did the cooperation with Fraxinus come about?

“We had contacted several companies and we found out about Fraxinus through a leaflet. In the end, we chose Fraxinus, mainly because they had already made a very specific, detailed and well-defined proposal that could immediately serve as a basis for further work”, says Bjorn. “In addition, during the first conversations with Hans (Van Essche, CEO of Fraxinus), we already felt that we’d found a partner who understands our language and speaks it himself. To the point and with the necessary expertise: that gave us the necessary confidence to go further.”

The installation also required close cooperation with machine builder MKM and staircase software supplier Compass.

“That went very well. The construction of the robot became a partnership between

four companies. On the advice of Fraxinus, we went to Germany with them to discuss our project with MKM and Compass in detail and to focus on the objectives. We clicked very well, and they were immediately involved in the story. In addition, all partners had their decision-makers at the table: this allowed us to act and decide quickly”, says Jan.

What influence does this robot have on your workforce?

“The employee who used to load and unload the machine on a full-time basis can now carry out a lot of extra tasks”, says Bjorn. “He even takes over preparatory tasks that normally take place in the office. This is a great advantage: on the one hand, he can prepare everything immediately in his own technical language, which saves time.

On the other hand, colleagues in the office can also work more efficiently again. In other words, we’ve created more capacity at different levels.”

What does the future hold for Trappen Verschaeve?

Jan: “During every team meeting we talk about finding employees. A shortage of personnel can be a serious brake on a company. It’s not a comprehensive solution, but further automation will certainly be indispensable in the future if we are to continue tackling the opportunities that come our way.”

Highlighting the solution

BY HANNES DEKEYZER
Sales engineer Fraxinus

“We’ve installed a robot track for the CNC machine. In addition, six pallet positions and an alignment table are provided. An employee comes to place three full pallets of unprocessed planks and three empty pallets. The robot then picks up a plank with the automatically adjustable suction cabinets and places it on the alignment table. In this way, we ensure an accurate position before the planks are placed on the machine. Then the robot takes a second and possibly a third plank, aligns them and places them on the machine.

This loading and unloading of the planks take place during the milling process of the machine on the free zone. The machine is divided into two zones on the table, and a pole unit. This gives you a **continuous process that only requires human intervention every two to three hours.**

Trappen Verschaeve works completely to measure, which means that numerous combinations and dimensions are possible. That’s why **each plank has to be read in by the robot via a barcode**, so that it can be optimally positioned. In addition, the software also calculates whether it can lay two or three planks in one milling plane. This allows us to make maximum use of the table’s capacity and to optimise tool changes, which saves an extra amount of time.

In addition to the two zones on the table, as discussed earlier, there is also a pole unit. This section is used to process the poles on all four sides and to make them to the right length. This works in combination with the first section of the table so that we also get a continuous process here. The poles themselves are transported to the robot via a chain conveyor system, taking into account the position of the barcode.”

A NEW PRODUCTION LINE FOR TWE MEULEBEKE

Handling and packaging nonwoven rolls



TWE Meulebeke is part of TWE Group, the global market leader in the nonwoven industry. The innovative mindset of the production company is deeply rooted in everything they think and do. It will be no surprise then that at TWE Meulebeke they were eagerly awaiting the implementation of a completely new line in the Hygiene department. TWE Meulebeke was once more counting on Fraxinus for the packaging of its reels. A sophisticated process that requires a word of explanation from Marc Cottens and Frederik Geldhof, respectively project & process manager and project manager at TWE Meulebeke.

A visit to the new Hygiene production hall in Meulebeke feels like a technical journey through Europe: an impressive machine park with equipment manufactured in Germany, France, Italy and Belgium uses polyester fibres to make technical textiles for diapers, feminine hygiene and incontinence products. At the end of the production process, the product is slit into strips and then rolled up together on reels. From that moment on, Fraxinus' installation comes into the picture.

Can you tell us more about the installation?

"The purpose of the installation developed by Fraxinus is the flawless packaging of the reels", says Marc. "The Fraxinus installation receives a complete mother reel that has been cut into narrower reels and takes over from there. In a smooth process with three robots, the reels are flattened, packed and then wrapped again with a pallet. This last action is necessary to guarantee hygiene, because under no circumstances is our product allowed to come into direct contact with the wooden pallet."

Does the production of hygienic articles still involve any issues?

"In the development of the new line, we had to take a look at several issues. On the old line, all the reels were placed in a container and from there they were separated by an employee. Now there is no human contact and everything that comes into contact with such a product is made from stainless steel and other non-painted materials. This way, we can guarantee that no foreign materials end up in the fleece. You can imagine what the consequences would be of a wood splinter ending up in a diaper", says Frederik.

Fraxinus was definitely no rookie here: in a previous project, they have already developed an installation for you that takes spools from the machine and places them on a robot to be packed.

"That's right. On one spool, about 20 kilometres of fleece can be twisted, whereas a reel usually contains 2 kilometres of fleece. For certain customers, it's more efficient to be able to work with 20 kilometres at once, because this requires far fewer adjustments in the settings of their machines. We started to work on this in 2013. Fraxinus made the installation that takes the spools from our machine and places them on a pallet with a robot and packs them. That was not an obvious project, but it all went well, so we decided to turn to Fraxinus once more for the new installation", says Marc.

Such projects obviously require a great deal of preparation.

Marc: "We've learned from experience that thorough preparation has an enormous influence on the success of a project. The technical meetings in the run-up to the construction are frequent and intense. Everything is worked out in detail in 3D so that we can view the machine virtually. But beware, this is also necessary for a packaging machine. After all, this phase of the process is so customer-specific that many aspects have to be taken into account. Just think of labelling, production planning..."

So, it's not a standard story.

"Absolutely not! Our customers all have their own specific requirements when it comes to packaging: one wants a pallet with a carton at the bottom and a carton at the top, the other customer wants a carton between each reel, a third one doesn't want

IN A NUTSHELL

TWE Group

The Hygiene department makes nonwoven products and since May 2019, it has had a **completely new line with a larger production capacity than the existing one**: the line is currently running on two shifts and soon a night shift will be starting on this line as well. The fully automated production line is operated by operators with strong technical insight. Although TWE Meulebeke's turnover has tripled in the last thirty years, the number of FTEs has increased by only about 8%. This is a result of extensive automation and innovation, but the company is constantly looking for technical staff to operate the machines.

→ more info at www.twe-group.com

The key to success

BY HANS VAN ESSCHE
CEO Fraxinus

“The construction of a new installation is always the beginning of a close partnership for us. We rely on the customer’s experience and we need their know-how to complete a project. At TWE Meulebeke, we were on the same wavelength: the numerous meetings, the exchange of information, an extra meeting to get additional information... This has become the standard approach for us. We also can’t afford to let our projects drag on during construction and lose time due to a lack of communication and preparation in advance. If 3 to 4 of our 20 projects running at the same time are delayed, our internal planning will be in shambles. In short, **preparation is key.**”



any cartons... The diameter of the reels can also vary according to the order, which also has its implications on the stacking of the reels. All these things require flexibility and customisation”, Marc explains.

How would you describe the collaboration with Fraxinus?

Marc: “We did not hesitate to hold an additional meeting or exchange some extra drawings, if necessary. We’ve also noticed that the project has grown as we’ve talked about it. Through close consultation, you gain new insights and discover additional possibilities that can further optimise the machine. You can only achieve this if you meet regularly and take the time to talk about it.” The short lines of communication and the no-nonsense approach are also *typical of Fraxinus* for Frederik. “We always see the same small group of people coming back in every phase of the project. For this project we mainly saw Hans (Van Essche), who takes care of the commercial side and Jelle (Parmentier), who follows up on the technical side.”

This way of working has also led to a radical last-minute optimisation in this project.

“During the preparation, Hans and Jelle noted that the capacity of the packaging section would be over-dimensioned in terms of speed, and that the second line – the rinsing line – could be perfectly connected to it. This was pointed out, but we took into account that this would be a multi-year plan. Nevertheless, just before the completion of the first line, we received the approval of our management to connect the second line directly to the packaging line. In this way, we created a joint packaging department for the two processes, a change that will result in considerable time and cost savings”, Marc concludes.

From left to right: Hans Van Essche, Jelle Parmentier, Frederik Geldhof, Marc Cottens, Patrick Valcke and Johan Valcke

SHORT NEWS: FRAXINUS

NEW OVERHEAD CRANES AND SOLAR PANELS

Production workshop continuously evolving

October 2019

3 NEW CRANES

end of 2019

240 SOLAR PANELS

In 2018, Fraxinus built three new production halls at the site in Roeselare-Beveren. This expansion of 3,500 m² means that there's **more space to efficiently manage the intermediate stock** and allows us to test run machines under construction. Today we have some new modifications scheduled and production manager Andy Kerckhof is eager to explain them.

NEW OVERHEAD CRANES

"Soon we'll be starting the execution of a large project where we'll be assembling a lot of heavy pieces. With a view to carrying out this assembly in a safe and ergonomic manner, it was decided to install three new overhead cranes in October, each capable of lifting 6.3 tonnes. It isn't just an ergonomic issue, but we'll also be able to work faster. The overhead cranes will be installed in two new production halls that were built last year. During construction, we thought we wouldn't need new cranes for a long time, but barely a year has passed and we're already there (laughs)."

NEW SOLAR PANELS

"By the end of the year, we'll be installing 240 solar panels. We want to be part of the trend towards self-sufficiency in terms of energy. For example, we've already invested heavily in LED lighting in our halls, and we're trying to control energy consumption efficiently with automatic control. We try to apply this as much as possible."



ANDY KERCKHOF IS CELEBRATING 10 YEARS AT FRAXINUS



"I started at Fraxinus to take over Hans' tasks in the workshop. At that time two production halls were operational and shortly after that we started to expand. I've seen the company **grow on every level**: both in terms of infrastructure and personnel, but also in terms of the size of the projects. There's a real **hands-on mentality** here, and they don't beat about the bush.

Communication is straightforward, and for my job that's certainly an added value. The workflow has to be right so that each project can be completed on time, and a good organisation is essential for this: if it runs smoothly, everything else will follow automatically. After ten years, it still gives me great satisfaction if a machine or robot can be delivered to the customer within the agreed time."

Fraxinus is growing

Over the past year, we've welcomed three new colleagues in different departments.



JURN TRIO

Band saw operator

"During my search for a new job, I visited four companies. At Fraxinus I had a good feeling right away: the atmosphere is great and we're creating great installations. There's also a lot of variety in the projects and that makes it very exciting!"



HERVÉ HENON

Welder

"As a welder, I primarily take note of the company's infrastructure. When I first visited Fraxinus, I saw right away that everything here is still new. During my tour, I immediately noticed that there's plenty of room to work here and that everybody is equipped with professional tools. I also clicked immediately with my colleagues. That's how I was able to choose Fraxinus so easily!"



SANDER SAMYN

Project engineer

"I recently started at Fraxinus and I'm still in training: the first two weeks I worked in the assembly department and I was able to go on-site for installation a few times. After that I mainly worked in the workshop: turning, milling... After six months in the workshop, I'm going to learn the office work and then I can start making technical drawings. Thanks to the intensive training programme, I'll soon have a better understanding of how the installations will be made in practice when I draw. I'm totally in favour of this approach!"



From left to right: Ryan Debacker, Raf Vermeylen, Ann-Sofie Werbrouck and Peter Corrijn

“ We’re technology leaders and we need to differentiate ourselves with our knowledge. That’s why we stand shoulder to shoulder with Fraxinus.

— Raf Vermeylen, managing director
SEW-Eurodrive

PARTNERSHIP WITH SEW-EURODRIVE

Customer first, always.

Fraxinus’ installations are always the result of a partnership with suppliers who, like Fraxinus, always strive for the most efficient solution. One of these partners is SEW-Eurodrive, an international player and leading **manufacturer of drive technology** with more than 80 years of experience. Ann-Sofie Werbrouck and Ryan Debacker of Fraxinus visited the SEW Innovation Hall in Marke with account manager Peter Corrijn and managing director Raf Vermeylen for a one-on-one meeting.

At the start of the conversation, Raf and Peter immediately express their appreciation: “It’s pretty special that we get a sounding board in your newspaper.” But for Ann-Sofie of Fraxinus it’s crystal clear: “We want to have at least as good a relationship with our suppliers as we have with our customers. Because we need the support of strong suppliers who don’t shy away from going the extra mile if a problem pops up.”

Your Belgian head office is in Leuven, but we’re here in your innovation hall in Marke. What brought SEW-Eurodrive to West Flanders?

Raf: “First and foremost, we were too far away from our West-Flemish customers, who represent a significant part of our turnover. This local service is a strong argument for potential customers.” And service is becoming increasingly important, it turns out. “For example, there’s a growing demand for AGVs. One of our service technicians sometimes gives live demonstrations here, which makes this close-knit service really tangible: There is always someone nearby to solve a problem quickly”, adds Peter. “We also need local motion control specialists who can serve our West-Flemish customers. They have a workstation here and can quickly reach the customer’s premises from here. Finally, we are also seeking closer contact with Howest, for up-and-coming talent with a technical background”, says Raf.

One of the installations in the innovation hall was built by Fraxinus.

“With this system, SEW-Eurodrive can demonstrate motion control applications. We took care of the mechanics of the system”, says Ryan. Raf adds: “In the meantime, the hall already offers a number of additional possibilities. We’re now also using the space to experiment with existing machines or with new technology from start-ups, and we’re looking at the potential to use them later in our applications. We also train new employees here. There were also two master’s theses recently, which allowed us to strengthen our ties with schools. By the way, one of those people is now working for us.”

SEW-Eurodrive has made a serious shift towards innovative technology in recent years.

Peter: “We can certainly say that. We’re putting a huge amount of effort into knowledge and we’ve transformed our role as a product supplier into a partner who works on the total solution.” That sounds like music to Fraxinus’ ears. “Innovation and digitisation are high on the agenda. Our joint business is situated in the physical world and it’s a challenge for both of us to make sure we don’t miss the trend”, concludes Ryan.