



What the Crisis Code Cracker meant to Stefaan Dewulf of Ethilog

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“Due to the corona crisis, we had been postponing our strategic projects. With the help of POM West-Flanders and Sirris, we are now innovating again. Now that the feasibility of our idea is definitively proven, we want to build a proof of concept as soon as possible.” This is Stefaan Dewulf, CEO of [Ethilog](#), about his experience with the [Crisis Code Cracker](#), Sirris’ three-part action plan aimed at helping technology companies emerge stronger from the crisis.



Some 10 years ago, former Picanol Group Mechatronics Vice-President, Stefaan Dewulf, decided, together with a colleague, to continue one of the group's innovation projects outside Picanol. In 2017, Ethilog was launched and within a few years it became the Flemish market leader in the automation of distribution and traceability of medicines in hospitals. "Our systems make it possible to follow and manage medicines from the moment they enter the hospital until they are administered to the patient," explains Stefaan Dewulf [in his interview with Bloovi](#) (in Dutch). Ethilog's success, he says, lies in the far-reaching automation of these processes and because it solves a bottleneck in the distribution of medicines in hospitals. It takes such a long time to bring medicines from the hospital pharmacy to the patient, that there is a return flow of 20 to 40 percent,



The potential of digitisation and automation

Ethilog solves this problem by bringing the push pull point closer to the patient. "Today we install medicine cabinets directly on the ward. As a result, 80 per cent of the volume of medicines on a ward can be administered just-in-time directly from the cabinet. The nurse no longer has to go to the pharmacy every 24 hours, but picks up the medicines several times a day, based on the last electronic prescription," explains Stefaan Dewulf. This way of working reduces the workload of nurses by 15 per cent, and in the hospital pharmacy by as much as 50 per cent.

Stefaan Dewulf: “The best proof is our proof of concept: we always let hospitals try our cabinets for a fortnight. And we have never had to take a cabinet back. Everyone sees the point of it immediately.”

Nevertheless, Stefaan Dewulf wants to drive Ethilog’s automation even further:

“There is still a lot of automation potential in the hospital pharmacy. We are looking in the direction of robotisation for this. The problem is that the solutions on the market today are big robots, requiring huge budgets, both in purchase and in total cost of ownership.”

That is not an option for hospitals. A hospital cannot make this investment and then depend on it for the next fifteen years. They need an evolutionary system. That is why we soon arrived at cobots. Besides, over the past five years, this technology has also been widely used in industry. So, the time was right. The only problem was that we didn't have any experience with cobots ourselves.”

The power of pilot testing

That’s where Sirris came in to offer advice, supported in West-Flanders by POM West-Flanders [to allow companies to innovate even during the corona crisis](#) via initiatives such as the Crisis Code Cracker.

For Stefaan Dewulf, the cooperation was a success story:

“We had already approached commercial partners to explore the idea of cobots. However, they looked at the problem from the perspective of their product offer, and we were not 100 per cent convinced that this was what we needed. That is why Sirris was such a relief. They had the same expertise, without a commercial edge. We sat down with specialists straight away. This proved to be an ideal opportunity to test whether our vision was achievable, both in terms of technology and performance.”

Within the framework of the Industry 4.0 living lab, the Sirris Application lab on the Kortrijk site gives companies access to a realistic industrial test environment with a range of equipment, such as cobots, AMRs, etc. to be used. Pilot plants can be built and tested in the very short term here, without heavy investment from the companies themselves or commercial commitments to partners.



“That was exactly the point where we got stuck in our innovation,” confirms Stefaan De Wulf. “We had done some simulations ourselves and we thought it would work, but how could we test it in a real environment on a real robot? Building such a robot all by yourself for a project with so many question marks is far too big an investment.

Making a long-term commitment through a commercial partner was not an option for the business: “Even then, you lose a lot of time, because you first have to build up the knowledge internally in order to be able to carry out the tests. In the Industry 4.0 living lab, we were literally able to test and demonstrate the feasibility in one day. On the one hand, this was due to our good preparation and, on the other, because all the infrastructure was in place and we could call on the extensive knowledge of the experts present, Manie Conradie and Federico Brinchilin.”

Proven feasibility

The support from POM-West-Flanders and Sirris came just at the right time for Ethilog, concludes Stefaan Dewulf: “Due to the corona crisis, we had been postponing our strategic projects. Thanks to them, we are now innovating again. Now that the feasibility of our idea has been definitively proven, we want to build a proof of concept as soon as possible.” That should help us to explore the pain points. But we also want to take it to prospects to convince them to set up a pilot project with us.”

Other West Flemish companies that, like Ethilog, successfully used the [Crisis Code Cracker](#) are [Anziplast](#) and [Modular Lighting](#).



Authors



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