

Innovation with Start-ups: The Vopak Way

Interview with Bart van der Meer, Innovation Engagement Leader Vopak

This year Vopak celebrated their 400-year existence. A milestone Vopak would never have reached without innovating. “We’re constantly searching for solutions for problems that occur in the business. Start-ups can be a great help in solving these problems in a quicker and more efficient way,” says Bart van der Meer, Innovation Engagement Leader at Vopak.

Before you can innovate, you have to know what innovation is. What do you see occurring in the world? The self-driving car, the self-propelled truck, big data analysis, etc. and what can you do with it? “Through interviews at terminals we started looking at improvements that can be made at the terminals,” informs Bart van der Meer, Innovation Engagement Manager at Vopak. “From these interviews a total of 60 use cases were categorised, from which 30 are now in the Study or Proof-of-Concepts (PoC) phase. A PoC means that we are experimenting with technology on a small scale within the terminals to validate the technology and its potential business value. If it is successful, we develop the business case so that the terminal can go to pilot scale.”

Proof-of-Concept

“A PoC typically has a duration of 6 to 8 weeks. This gives us enough time to demonstrate that the technology will actually work. We also have a separate innovation budget, which we use to test different technologies. The benefit of a PoC is that if the PoC fails the financial risk is lower than when a big-scaled project goes wrong, this can cost the company millions. That is why a PoC works well,” according to Bart van der Meer. “From the PoC we then produce a Minimum Viable Product (MVP). Based on the MVP a business case is made together with the business. This is an investment proposal for a single terminal, the first location that tests the technology on a large-scale project.”

Pilot project with AquasmartXL

AquasmartXL recently concluded a successful jetty inspection at the Vopak Terminal Botlek. The pilot project was commissioned by Vopak and carried out in cooperation with RoNik Inspectioneering. “The first time I met AquasmartXL was on the Selection Days of PortXL. Vopak needs to inspect on a regular basis underneath jetties, this takes a lot of preparation to mitigate any risks. So I thought: why not use the aqua-drone of AquasmartXL in combination with the

technology of RoNik Inspectioneering,” says Bart. “At first Vopak was a little hesitant, but luckily AquasmartXL and RoNik were clever enough to involve an inspector to make an independent inspection report. Through this we could demonstrate to our own inspectors what the added value was of the project. Jetty inspections can be done faster, simpler and without risks. In combination with the report the pilot was very successful. Through this we have created an internal market for drone inspection and AquasmartXL can continue their work.”

Watch the Vopak and AquasmartXL jetty inspection here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0-mSWF04ZQ>

Cooperation with startups

Working with start-ups and innovation does not come naturally to a lot of big corporates, but with the advent of Leo Brand, CIO at Vopak, we really received a boost to start innovating more. “Leo really brought in the energy and made people aware of what is happening outside our company. We are now aware that we cannot sit still. Leo has activated a lot of people as well as setting up an innovation department.”

“Start-ups can bring us numerous advantages and create momentum. We are constantly searching for further improvements of our business. Start-ups can be a great help with improving in a quicker and more efficient way. Start-ups, on the other hand, can make use of a big corporate to develop their product. They get the space to run tests and if it turns into a success, they have created market traction in a market section. Programs like PortXL also bring a lot of dynamics to a corporate. Seeing what is happening in other branches and ports really triggers me. The 12 start-ups PortXL delivered in the first program really inspired me to be more creative. There is just so much going on, you just have to be remained alert.”

