

20 YEARS 4PS

A trip down memory lane with
André, Martin and Wim





20 years 4PS: A trip down memory lane with Martin, André and Wim

Martin still remembers that day as if it was yesterday. 4PS had only just been set up when he and André were on their way to visit their second potential customer. They didn't get very far though, because of a truck drivers' strike just around the corner from the office. Of course, arriving late was not an option so they called the office. Without hesitation, an employee jumped in his car, drove to the congested road, parked and swapped cars with Martin and André. Thanks to the quick reaction of that employee, they could use an alternative route and get to their appointment on time.

This is one of the many stories from the early days of 4PS and it's almost unbelievable that this happened 20 years ago. A lot has changed in those 20 years, but a lot has also stayed the same.

This interview with André Overeem, Martin Westerink and Wim Jansen is about doing what you love, about trust, partnerships and about gratitude.

André, Martin and Wim have known each other for a long time. They worked together along with the co-founder of 4PS Tom Bakker at another software company called Baan. That was back in the 1990s. "It was a really crazy time", started Wim. "I think I was the 250th employee when I started there. When I left the company there were 6,000 staff members. Baan was a company where entrepreneurial thinking was highly praised, and we did some fantastic things there. We were encouraged to be creative and to demonstrate a can-do attitude. The customer always came first. It was really dynamic and inspiring'.



Follow your heart, be innovative, take the lead

In many respects, the time together at Baan laid the foundation for 4PS, continued Martin. "The idea of having a standard implementation method is a good example of this. When you implement software, there are several thousands of options. Baan said to its customers: 'We'll take care of it; we know how you work and what you need.' Of course, that's what we did at 4PS too and it's what we still do today. We developed a sector model."

Martin admits the business culture at 4PS was inspired by their experience at Baan. "There, we saw how you can create a huge family culture within a company. The church was the uniting factor then, although that's not the case at 4PS. However, caring for each other and helping each other are the backbone of our core values at 4PS: follow your heart, be innovative, take the lead." Wim added that Baan's international character was also a good training ground. "At that time, we learned how to handle a variety of country-specific issues. We still really benefit from that now."

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Focus on construction, M&E/specialised works and civil engineering

When Baan's shares plummeted on the stock market, a lot at the company changed. That's when Martin, André and Tom felt the need to start something for themselves. The most important reason was that they wanted to do what they really enjoyed. "That's still one of our company's strongest drivers", explained André, "doing what you love."

"We understand the construction, M&E/specialised works and civil engineering industries very well and knew that this was a difficult market for global ERP suppliers", continued Martin. "It is a specific line of business and the construction world is geographically limited. Regulations differ from country to country. That's why construction businesses were mainly served by local IT companies, which we thought were not sustainable in the long run. They would simply struggle to keep up with the

technological advancements. There was a niche in the market and that's how we came up with the idea for 4PS. We reviewed thoroughly multiple platforms and finally decided to base our solution on Microsoft Navision. We developed (and we still do) sector specific functionalities based on Navision (now Microsoft Dynamics 365)."

You don't forget your first time

Developing our solution sounds easier than it was. In the early days, André, Martin and Tom were busy programming all day long. But it was fantastic! André still vividly remembers his first working day at 4PS. Their first task was to buy computers. But 20 years ago it wasn't common to pay by card. Therefore, they first had to go to the bank and take out cash. They managed that but finding the right computers proved to be more difficult. After looking at all Tech shops in the area, they couldn't find anything that met their requirements. So the men ended up at a bar to round off their first working day with a beer.

Their first customers are also still close to heart. Martin shared that they would 'never forget that first customer who trusted [them] to do something. That was Van Straten from Eindhoven. The company does not exist anymore but we're still in touch with these people. The person who took the decision to work with us at that time has remained a close friend."

"Our first corporate customer, Kropman, was also an important milestone", added André. "It was hugely disruptive. Just like it was when Imtech decided to work with us. At that time, we had just 20 employees. That an international company like Imtech would choose such a small company was unheard of."

Large computers vs Laptops

"When we started, software ran on servers. At that time customers always used to come to the software companies for presentations, because it didn't work the other way around. 'Our software was based on Navision and it already ran on a laptop even back then. So in a pitch to customers at that time we said: 'It's less convenient for you to visit us with 15 people, we'll come to you and you should ask the other suppliers to do that too. Invite everyone to visit you!'"

And then the other companies arrived literally with huge computers and a lot of equipment. At the same time, we arrived with a small laptop and with the question: 'Where can we plug it in?' That meant that we already had an advantage."

From Microsoft to 4PS

Things have moved rapidly with 4PS over the past 20 years. Around eight years ago, Wim succeeded Tom Bakker when Tom decided to take things more slowly and resign from his role as senior executive.

André, Martin, Tom and Wim had been in contact the whole time. "One evening in 2011, I was talking to Martin in Paris", explained Wim. "I told him that I was considering leaving Microsoft where I was working at the time. 'Ooh, if you do that, make sure you come and talk to us at 4PS', Martin said. In the end, I started work at 4PS in 2012."

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Martin Westerink and André Overeem working in the garden.



Martin Westerink, André Overeem and Peter Schoenmaker at a Product Presentation in 2001.

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Consistent strategy for 20 years

We now operate in some twenty countries with 250 employees. And yet, as we mentioned at the start, a lot has remained the same.

Martin: "We stayed close to ourselves all these years. We have never been tempted to become a huge company. Or rich. We wanted to protect our culture and do what we love. And that's what we say to our employees too: you should do what you enjoy. We are extremely proud that our customers almost always stay loyal to us. We build strong relationships. The same applies to our employees. There's hardly any staff turnover. We have a lot of our very first employees still working here."

Wim: "We've also had a consistent strategy for 20 years. We focus entirely on this market and translate Microsoft technology to the construction business. And we develop this continuously. For instance, in recent years, more and more functionalities have moved from the office to the construction site, which enables everything to be arranged on site - retyping things at the office is a thing of the past. Everything being available in the cloud is also fantastic for companies. The Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence are now making business processes easier and we're delighted to be able to help our customers in this."

Grateful for the trust

"It all comes down to trust," concluded André." We're really grateful that our customers and employees place their trust in us. This is what makes our collaboration so special. Business is something you do with people and that's what all our memories are about. About people. That employee who didn't hesitate for a second to jump in the car to 'rescue' us standstill on the road; that first customer who is still a friend; the decision-maker at Imtech who laid the foundation for our international expansion. At 4PS, we're grateful to every employee, every customer, every supplier, every partner we've had over the past 20 years. And that's not something that will change in the future either."

