

SME in the spotlight

CogniStreamer: Social and collaborative technology as innovation enabler

“Introducing innovation is not just a matter of buying a good tool and then getting started but it is essential to have the right prerequisites, resources and attitude to develop a sustainable environment in order to pick all the fruits of this investment. And people.” Wim Soens, Director of Innovation, Research & Development at CogniStreamer, is a strong believer in the power of people when it comes to successful innovation.

Four years after joining Point X, an internet company specialised in multimedia and web development (currently the Indie Group), Wim Soens started the CogniStreamer project in 2000. In 2008, CogniStreamer became a fully independent software company and is now market leader in collaborative innovation software and services.

Wim, double Master of Science in Industrial Engineering and in Business Engineering, explains how it all began. “We started as one of the first web developers back in 1996 and four years later we got a request from one of

our clients to develop a corporate intranet application to support the R&D department in their stage-gate innovation process. The purpose of the web application was to make this process more efficient and transparent to their research community. Our client’s customers saw this application and they too became interested. It was then that the CogniStreamer idea was born.”

At the time, CogniStreamer, as a naked software product did not appear to signify any kind of major turning point and indeed since it was a completely different business model to the core business – project-based web development – it



stayed quite modest for a few years. The software was initially licensed with just technical support and maintenance, but after a while the business opportunities for additional innovation services became too attractive to ignore and Wim devoted himself to turning CogniStreamer into a self-sustaining and scalable business.

People as catalyst

“CogniStreamer is now one of the top five companies worldwide in its domain,” Wim says. “We are now establishing country offices around the world and continuously investing in next-generation technology. We realised very quickly that our solution was not, in fact, naked software but innovation ecosystems – communities of people that share knowledge, generate ideas and collaborate to build great products and services, powered by social software. These days there is a growing need to accelerate innovation and open innovation ecosystems are a great way to achieve this. So the people aspect has become very crucial. For instance, our software can help to search and find subject matter experts, but you also need the people – we call them hubs or connectors – that do the scouting and act as intermediaries to initiate the conversations between those often isolated experts. It is also

equally important to create an environment of trust because the kind of knowledge being shared is sensitive and normally related to intellectual property issues. So, no trust, no sharing. Our software can help create this environment of trust – providing tight control over who gets access to what, where and when.”

Powerful ecosystem in microcosm

It is in this role as technology developer that Wim realises how difficult it can be to grow a company on a standalone basis, and therefore public funding and project programmes like ITEA can give the vital boost that is necessary to acquire the means to do this. “We needed to build knowledge – about semantic technology, social science, big data analytics and algorithm development – all stuff that was completely new for us. Such projects allow one to collaborate with knowledge centres and universities to access the fundamental research knowledge. For us in Belgium the ITEA programme is a kind of an add-on, coming on top of the national programmes. But this extra component is a real added value because of the people aspect again. A good international consortium mobilises a broad mix of experts centring on a single research theme or topic. And if it also comprises a good blend

of use cases from large and small companies, research institutes and universities, then you create a very powerful ecosystem – a kind of microcosm of what you would see in a Silicon Valley ecosystem, with the funding agencies replacing the venture capitalists. For example, in the ACCELERATE project we are involved in, everyone is doing different things but with the same goal: accelerating innovation. I find all the different concepts, uses cases and prototypes that are brought in during consortium meetings to be inspiring. ITEA is the glue that holds the consortium together as well as a catalyst for validating the results, like the Nimble Bee programme, developed during the course of the project and already commercialised, which assists in solving product & package design challenges with an international community of university students.”

More info:

www.cognistreamer.com
www.nimblebee.university