

Name It, We Measure It!

How Young Surveyors Can Start Their Own Company

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SUMMARY

As it is an impossible mission to be a specialist in all different facets of surveying and to cover a region of about 11.500 km² in Flanders, Belgium, three recently graduated surveyors, decided to work together. The key was to found a partnership, called MEET HET, which is Dutch for 'Measure it', and still keep three individual offices. The three entrepreneurs worked individually for over one year before uniting. This structure allows every individual surveyor to have its own specialty and the ability to perform together a wide range of services. MEET HET offers all types of industrial applications, private, archeological and architectural measurements, property valuations and inventories. This way, no job should be refused, as it can easily be passed on to the specialist in the particular matter. The structure furthermore gives the opportunity to handle bigger projects, requiring more than one surveyor and to help each other out during peak times. Whereas the profession of surveyor used to be a 'lonely' job, because of the use of robotic total stations, this partnership creates collegiality.

MEET HET is now ready to expand and open more offices in Flanders. Quite a large proportion of students feels that courses at a bachelor's or a master's level insufficiently prepare young starters for the profession of independent surveyor. Therefore, MEET HET will allow surveyors to run their own MEET HET-office, a package which includes guidance, juridical and technical support, internal training, marketing and the ability to rent topographical material. The know-how and expertise of the three founding members, the MEET HET name and the network can be used to found a new office. This growth strategy will allow young starters to set up their own business in a controlled environment with minimal risk.

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1. INTRODUCTION

After running their own survey practice for about one year, three independent surveyors decided to unite their forces. Certainly, one of the most beautiful aspects of the profession as a surveyor is the wide variety of tasks he can perform. However, it is nearly impossible to be a specialist in all different facets of surveying. A surveyor who most of the time derives digital terrain models from laser scanning data, will probably not be a first-rate editor of property valuations. Likewise would the architectural measurements of a GIS-consultant leave nothing to be desired. Furthermore, one surveyor cannot handle large projects at big yards. On your own, you are simply forced to keep handling relatively small projects.

The solution appeared to be simple: the founding of a partnership amongst three friends and colleagues. MEET HET, Dutch for 'measure it' was born (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The founding members of MEET HET. From left to right: Jonas Van Dosselaer, Jonas Van Hooreweghe and Bram Van Londersele.

2. THE LEGAL ASPECTS OF A PARTNERSHIP

In the early stage of the partnership, MEET HET was founded as an association of surveyors. The only bond between the partners is a three pages long deed. This document states the rules and the do's and don'ts of the cooperation and regulates the financial flows. In this phase, MEET HET does not invoice their clients, but the underlying companies do so, on behalf of the association. The next step is putting a structure in readiness so the association can invoice in the near future.

3. BENEFITS

The three founding members of MEET HET each have their own specialty, allowing the coverage of a wide range of services. Together, this allows us to handle all types of industrial applications, private, archeological and architectural measurements, property valuations and inventories.

The work of surveyors is often crucial in industrial applications, for example control measurements of storage tanks, engineering of the tracé of subsurface pipings and conduits, outlining of redlers and conveyors and the positioning of factory structures. One of the most ancient roles of the surveyor are private measurements and assignments with reference to real estate transactions, such as the division of land into parcels, border transfers and the marking out of terrains. In Belgium every archeological discovery, whether it concerns a whole ancient foundation or just one splinter of a vase, needs to be inventoried by a surveyor. Before architects can start making creations, they appeal to surveyors to get as-is plans, cuts and faces. The surveyor is as well the real estate professional to obtain an objective property valuation. As he is not directly involved in the property transactions, he is able to maintain an independent position and make an accurate value of the good. As a professional with a technical background and building knowledge, a surveyor can be asked to perform an inventory of buildings and infrastructure. This could be for renting purposes, so that the owner of the property can claim new damage and that the tenant is covered for previously caused damage; or this could be for reconstruction, where damage can be caused to the properties of the adjoining owners.

Several larger projects require different specialties. As an association, we are able to support our clients with a total package. This is certainly the case in planning applications for excavations and nourishments. In a first stage, the as-is situation of the terrain needs to be surveyed. These measurements need then to be transformed into a digital terrain model. Based on this model, a new model of the future state is generated. Finally, relying on the new model a request for authorisation is written and handed over to the relevant authorities. The cooperation between several surveyors allows furthermore the ability to cope with bigger projects at larger yards. The polder board of a region in Flanders for example gave us the assignment to measure a several kilometers long dike in a very short period of time. As we

worked together as a team, we were able to manage this, while a surveyor on his own would not be able to accomplish this.

A final, however not less important advantage is the collegiality between the members of MEET HET. The profession as an independent surveyor is no longer a lonely profession. Previously a survey crew counted at least two people, one behind the tripod to serve the tacheometer and ~~one~~ one walking around in the field with the reflector. Since the rise of robotic one-man stations, the robot has become a surveyor's best friend. With our partnership, we can easily consult each other for guidance and advice and assignments can be passed on to the specialist in that particular matter or to whoever has time to handle it.

4. EXPANSION

Quite a large proportion of students feels that courses at a bachelor's or a master's level insufficiently prepare young starters for the profession of independent surveyor. For instance, Ghent University, the sole university in Flanders offering surveyor studies, only foresees an obligatory internship of twenty days, and another optional internship of the same duration. The focus of a master education still remains gathering knowledge and not practice, leaving young starters with a large gap.

When we started our business after completing our master studies, we have never been in the archives of the offices of the land registry. We were also not educated how to manufacture documents for real estate transactions, which is after all one of the prior tasks of a surveyor. The result is that the gap between education and the working field is enormously wide and that the threshold to start your own company as a young graduate is too high.

The solution may lay in the growth strategy of MEET HET. The goal is to found several more offices in Flanders, and even in Belgium, covering wider geographical regions. This will allow young starters to run their own MEET HET-office, a package which includes guidance, juridical and technical support, internal training, marketing and the ability to rent topographical material. Before running their own bureau, the young grads will be introduced to the wide variety of tasks a surveyor can come across. The do's and don'ts of each segment will be trained so that the quality of every MEET HET-office is guaranteed. We furthermore provide structures and tools to discharge the administrative and accounting tasks. As the attraction of new and the keeping of existing clients is relatively time consuming and expensive, MEET HET reserves budgets for marketing and public relations.

The know-how and expertise of the three founding members, the MEET HET name and the network can be used to found a new office. This growth strategy will allow young starters to set up their own business in a controlled environment with minimal risk.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Bram Van Londersele (°1986)

MSc in Geomatics and Surveying – Ghent University (Belgium) (2010)

Self-employed since: 2010

Additional working experience: managing Bluetooth tracking projects at Ghent University dept Geography (2010-2011)

Specialties: private sector

Member of: Royal Confederation of Surveyors (Belgium), Flanders Maritime Cluster

Jonas Van Dosselaer (°1986)

MSc in Geomatics and Surveying – Ghent University (Belgium) (2009)

Self-employed since: 2010

Additional working experience: B.I.T.S. nv – survey company (2009-2010)

Specialties: industrial sector

Member of: Royal Confederation of Surveyors (Belgium), Flanders Maritime Cluster

Jonas Van Hooreweghe (°1985)

BSc in Geomatics and Surveying – Ghent University (Belgium) (MSc expected in 2012)

Self-employed since: 2010

Specialties: architecture and archeology

Member of: Royal Confederation of Surveyors (Belgium), Flanders Maritime Cluster

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