



Cleaning the world

Professional cleaning services have seen a boom in their business in recent years as more and more enterprises outsource this activity. For cleaning services, logistics can sometimes be complicated and a major source of expense. Often they must haul supplies from central warehouses to the actual project. For this reason, the cleaning supply wholesaler Boma NV delivers its supplies directly to the site of the cleaning job, eliminating a source of hassle and expense. Such customer-oriented services, in combination with its huge product programme, encompassing some 3,500 different products, have made Boma the Belgian market leader. Drawing on this strong position, the Belgian enterprise has established a subsidiary in Luxembourg and has plans to do the same in the Netherlands.

Boma makes it home in an impressive glass and steel building in Antwerp that reflects its style of business: modern and transparent. To store its vast assortment, the company has built a state-of-the-art 10,000 m² automated warehouse. The facility is part of its well-oiled logistics programme that makes 4,000 shipments per month. The 3,500 products in the programme are divided among ten product groups. "Our philosophy is to carry such a wide spectrum of products

that we are capable of covering all of the needs of our customers," explains Stijn Wildiers, marketing director. "We have everything from cleaning fluids and cleaning towels to mats and cleaning machines. For almost every product type, we work with a single supplier, which is an 'A' brand. In addition, we carry our own private label products. This allows us to build a lasting relationship with our customers. We strive to deliver high quality and unique products."



Boma's headquarters in Antwerp

Boma goes beyond offering just cleaning supplies. A new profit centre provides government certified professional training of employees of cleaning companies. This is part of the Belgian company's plans to push both service and consulting. The 3,500 products are available in Boma's catalogue as well as from its e-commerce site. According to Mr. Wildiers, the Belgian cleaning supply specialist derives more than half of its revenues from the sale of its products via e-commerce. The site relies on a software programme called dosdob that was developed and refined in-house over the course of ten years. This allows it to stay lean and keep overhead costs to a minimum. Little wonder that it realised EUR 22 million in sales with just 80 employees. Revenues are on target to climb to EUR 25 million in 2004.

In addition to the catalogue and e-commerce, a 15-man team of sales representatives sells the products to existing and new customers. Another two are specialists in the sale of cleaning machines. Once the sale is finished, the relationship continues through the company's five after-

sales employees and four in the maintenance department. Boma also operates its own cash & carry businesses.

Over 30% of sales is generated from large cleaning specialists, the largest being ISS, a globally active enterprise accounting for 2,000 shipments per month alone. "This is only one of the companies that appreciates our delivery service to their customers," adds Mr. Wildiers. "This saves them time and money, making them more profitable." In fact, primarily because of ISS, Boma opened up a subsidiary in Luxembourg in 2000.

In addition to the cleaning contractors, Boma supplies major health-care providers, airports, shopping malls, and public administrative facilities with its comprehensive one-stop-shopping concept. Some of these include the Belgian postal service, which relies on Boma for supplying its 6,000 locations, and Belgacom. The Belgian company is also responsible for delivering supplies to the 55 EU buildings in Brussels. Boma has been serving a wide range of companies since its founding in 1974. At that time, Walter Bresse-

leers and Frank Wildiers established the enterprise whose name is a combination of the Dutch words for brushes and mats, which were the original products in 1974. An MBO brought in a new management team in 1996. The big news at the Belgian company is that Gevaert acquired a 70% stake in the enterprise in July 2004. The other 30% remains in the hands of the management.

GEVAERT NV is the investment holding within the Almanij-group and is active as investor in small & mid cap and private Equity. "The move provided us with more financial know-how and capital for further expansion," explains Mr. Wildiers.

The infusion of cash comes right as Boma is expanding into the neighbouring Dutch market.

"This market is still very much in the nascent phase. The Dutch market is lacking a player that is capable of serving the entire market like we do in Belgium. We believe that our chances are excellent. Nevertheless, we are taking a systematic approach and building step by step." Boma is not only expanding into new markets, but also into new sectors

through diversification. Biotechnology engineers are advising the company on how to break into the food & beverage industry. This means creating specialised tools to fit the unique needs of the branch. "Our new product R&D team is working around the clock to develop new products. Furthermore, we have formed a new sales team for this area."

More and more, the motto looks true: Boma cleans the world. ■

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