

Brecon Group | Geerd Jansen

The integral member of Brecon Group and co-founder of the PP4CE initiative discusses his legacy of strategic planning for the company and how this is pushing it forward even today

Written by Sophie Bullimore

The wide umbrella of uses for cleanrooms requires a jack of all trades mentality. Geerd Jansen fits that bill, with varied experience over the years. For the last six, he has been an active member of the cleanroom designs and build specialist, Brecon Group, now serving as General Manager of Brecon International, Sales and Marketing Director of Brecon Group, and Co-Initiator of the PP4C / PP4CE initiative. After all this, his passion for the business is only growing. "As a generalist, I am interested in every discipline within Brecon, nevertheless I am fundamentally a strategic marketing and sales specialist and therefore I am most enjoying thinking about new concepts for products or markets segments."

Jansen describes himself as a workaholic, which he sees as necessary for being a board member of a globally operating group. "You get used to working hard and long hours, being willing to learn new things every day, and thinking strategically in order to succeed." Jansen quickly learnt that competition in cleanrooms is based more on available experience and knowledge in a specific segment or availability of specific product systems, not just price. "Unfortunately there are also still many smaller companies with less knowledge," he says. "Although the website of them looks like it is the best cleanroom builder there is, in the end, it is a one-man company with lots of hired people and not enough knowledge to advise customers."

A clear voice

The sector fits Jansen like a glove, "It is a sector where quality still counts, that is what I like personally and business wise," he enthuses. Jansen particularly enjoys that the sector has a number of industrial or caretaking segments, each with their own specific dynamics. This means that the people who serve the sector have to be very innovative and are often very interesting to work with.

The strategic specialist believes communication is essential to success in these areas, "You have to deal with all kinds of people from all different cultures. You don't have the luxury of spending a lot of time on different issues and decisions have to be made! For me, this is expressed in a very open but also direct way of communicating." He says many people have to get used to that, but it has enabled him to deal with many difficult situations. "Whether it is a business partner, a relative or an employee, people always value honest and direct communication."

This direct communication style has served

Jansen well as one of the founders of the PP4CE initiative. The alliance brings many partners and specialists together to collaborate on cleanroom projects. PP4CE is one of Jansen's proudest achievements and has played a significant strategic role in the success of Brecon. In 2013, Jansen was asked to write a long-term strategy for the group as a strategic marketing consultant. After studying the market he was surprised by the number of small companies, each with specific disciplines, in the entire process of designing and realising a cleanroom. "There was no all-round supplier designing and building turnkey concepts," he explained. Jansen knew how important it was to deliver the total solution and to use the same conceptual design and products on a global scale from a business and technical point of view.

Once Jansen identified that Brecon had to gain ground in these different segments, it only reinforced the idea of pursuing a strategic alliance. This was supported by the company's need to diversify its customer base. "Brecon had to gain ground in the different market segments, as turnover was nearly 90% dependable on only one customer. It didn't take a rocket scientist to know that this was far too risky and entering new market segments was necessary," he said. An alliance with specialists was the most logical way to create opportunities. The goals of the alliance were achieved as together the partners created quite a number of successful reference projects, not only in the semiconductor market but also in the GMP-related market. "We think we have a leading position on the Dutch market as a controlled environment supplier. In the last three years we have been active on an international scale," he says.

Hi-tech manufacturing

Speaking to Jansen, it would be a waste not to pick his brain about hi-tech cleanrooms, as this is one of Brecon's greatest strengths. He believes there are some outdated practices in semiconductor manufacturing, such as the use of air showers, "From a cleanroom design point of view it is questionable if the use of an air shower is still the best investment," he says. "The use of a drop seal in a door is also getting banned more and more because of the collection of contamination."

Rather than thinking about outdated practices, Jansen believes in focusing on new developments to help fulfil the more challenging demands in cleanliness levels. "I do think the actual change towards Molecular Airborne Contamination is one

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of the important and emerging developments,” Jansen suggests. “The actual technology in the semiconductor segment is more sensitive to this kind of contamination and the development of special filter technology by our PP4CE partner Camfil is an upcoming product segment.”

Jansen thinks the development of cleanliness grades on an international (ISO) standard level will create more understanding of the difficulty in achieving a specific product result in a cleanroom. Current guidance is too simplistic for the complicated projects that are normally taking place and as Jansen says, “Building the right concept and designing the correct HVAC installation is not the only way to succeed.”

The oversimplification of projects can lead to problems. This is exactly what PP4CE was created for and when discussing vibration isolation, Jansen reinforces that these specialist jobs require specialist engineers. “It is a subject more often handled by an engineering office specialised within this territory,” he says. “But I do know there is an interesting challenge with outgassing of vulcanised products that are often used as a shock-absorbing material in a surrounding where molecular contamination is becoming a bigger problem.” This is something he knows as it informed decision made by his team. “We are using vulcanised products in our doorframes without plasticisers.”

Surviving a pandemic

Construction projects have been a high profile topic as a very important industry, but one that doesn't lend itself easily to social distancing. Like most construction companies, Brecon had to delay and even stop some projects for a period of time. “After three months, all projects are back in progress and all of our people are active again,” he says. “In the last month, we closed three assignments for international pharma companies, to be realised in the coming 8 to 10 months,” Jansen adds.

The variety of sectors covered by the PP4CE partners means that many of them have been hit in different ways. “Within the PP4CE alliance, some partners had a very busy period with extra demand. On the other hand, some are working in a wider range of market segments, with some totally disrupted,” Jansen says. “I think in the end we will all have some losses and perhaps also opportunities.”

Jansen also tells *Cleanroom Technology* that some of Brecon's colleagues had some nice ideas and tried to sell soft-wall based cleanrooms or innovative concepts for entrance technology in buildings, but that is not the strength of the Brecon Group, where the focus is more on the

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Princess Máxima Pharmacy Center for pediatric oncology in Utrecht



complex projects. He said, “It is clear that the pharma industry will invest a lot of money in extra activities to find, first of all, the vaccine as soon as possible, but also in extra development facilities.” He adds that Brecon has already got its first project to build such a facility for a pharma customer. Jansen also expects the gowning and cleaning regimes will have more attention on the market.

Another industry to gain a boost as a result of the pandemic is rapid microbial detection methods. This is a growing technology, and Jansen believes the pandemic will only spur acceptance of new initiatives. “Although I do not want to profile myself as a specialist, I have of course read some articles about development of innovative methods of microbiological detection in the last decade,” he says. “A quick confirmation of presence or absence can help us to speed up industrial processes faster than traditional methods. Clearly that is an advantage. On the other hand, I do still read of specialists advising traditional methods.” Though he stresses that he is not capable to make a judgement, Jansen does say that as the FDA is accepting RMD more and more as a good alternative, this is a good sign.

Looking forward, Jansen is excited. “We will invest in our Brecon Clean Furniture service unit and change the business from a trademark into a legal entity,” he explains. “We are also working on a new concept for leasing cleanroom technology. Nothing new on first sight, but we will supply this concept ‘as a service’! Specifically for stock market listed companies, so definitively an interesting concept without consequences of the IFSR 16 rule in your balance sheet.” Jansen says the company is also interested in the healthcare market. “We kept a certain distance until now, but we do think this is the right moment to change our passive attitude into a clear focus with the right partners.”

Taking a retrospective on his career, Jansen says, “I have now reached an age that allows me to look back on a life full of work experiences in a large number of disciplines. Starting in a smaller construction chemical company, which I expanded into an international player, then a long time as CEO of a business unit, gives me a broad spectrum of knowledge. I am delighted to be given the opportunity to share this experience as a generalist with a younger generation.” ■