

Putting People First



As featured in
The CEO Magazine
For more info visit
theceomagazine.com

As a specialised provider of employment services, USG People is a mediator between people and organisations in the job market. The company's unique approach is aimed at connecting the right person with the right job.

Images courtesy of USG People

Rob Zandbergen, CEO of USG People, started his career in the military. After secondary school he went to the Royal Military Academy in Breda, where he received five years of training and education before serving the following seven years as an officer in the army. "After 12 years in the military I left the army and started work with Dutch telecom operator KPN. I stayed there another 12 years, five of which I was based in Jakarta with responsibility for Asia. I held several financial management positions.

"Then I moved to Solvus, which is half of the company I now lead: USG People. Following a period of severe restructuring, Solvus was sold to USG People in 2005. I was first appointed CFO of the newly formed combination before becoming CEO in 2010. What I learned in the military is that you need to have a clear goal,

a clear target, and discipline—and these are exactly the things that I use to this day. While you do need to have a good strategy, in my opinion the key to success lies in thorough and disciplined execution."

During his time with KPN, Rob watched the company change from a government-owned monopoly into a private company faced with growing competition. It was a long and arduous process that helped shape Rob's management style. "I learned to become more international. The army was not that international. It was my work with KPN, especially in Asia, that taught me that what is normal in a Dutch context is not always normal in a more international context, and that there is more to the world than just the Netherlands."

Before Rob joined USG People the company enjoyed some notable years of success. In 2005, the organisation was growing and

"In my opinion the key to success lies in thorough and disciplined execution."

- Rob Zandbergen

there was a steady stream of work. "Then the economic crisis hit Europe; things turned sour and it became more and more difficult. The year 2009 was an extraordinarily tough year, 2010 was a bit better, but then 2011 to 2013 was again a difficult time in the European markets. We responded by changing the company's strategy and increasing its focus. Perhaps that is the real challenge: you can't do it all, you can't be successful at everything that you do, so you have to concentrate on the areas where you can make a difference. That is precisely what we did, not just talking the talk but also walking the walk.

"We divested some of the activities in countries where we did not have sufficient scale, where the scale of the respective business units was too limited to be able to add value in their market segment. We stopped those and focused on the things we're good at. We also put a >





lot of effort into attracting the right management for our operating companies, finding people who are able to sail in stormy conditions, and encouraging teamwork. I would say that a large part of my time is spent on assessing and selecting the right team, because I believe in teamwork.”

The employment services sector is growing increasingly complex as new players enter the market, particularly in the online arena. “We are used to competition in the more traditional business—we know the players and we know what they are capable of—but now we are seeing a lot of new entrants and potential new entrants, including virtual agencies and online propositions. The landscape is changing and those who are best able to adapt to these changes will win the war. More than ever before you need to adjust your business to be fit for the future. Throughout the tough economic conditions of the last few years we have demonstrated our ability to adapt. We have redesigned our strategy, adjusted our organisation and invested in ICT and internet. In so doing we have laid a new foundation for the future, a future in which USC People can achieve sustainable growth.

“USG People’s corporate identity is defined by its business principles. These business principles form the core of the culture and identity of USC People. We strongly believe in our segmented market approach and the responsibility we give to the operating companies. Together, this enables us to develop and grow successfully. I am proud to be at the helm of this ambitious organisation and every day I am passionate about motivating and facilitating the managers and directors to do the work that forms the basis of our success. I certainly do not see myself as the company; I only represent the company. The company is our management and our employees collectively. I really believe in teamwork and am convinced that we owe our successes to working closely together to achieve common objectives.



“When times are easy, it’s also quite easy to work together, but we also stuck to our guns in the difficult years, in 2009 to 2011. In the past year this has paid off. For example, our share price has increased by more than 100 per cent—that’s thanks to all the hard work we did together. Setting an example is very important to me, so I don’t ask things of people that I don’t ask of myself. Again, this is something that I learned in the military. As a commander, you can’t put yourself in the back row; you have to lead from the front and you have to set an example. I think this is one of the core values that makes a good CEO.”

The company principles also highlight the importance of collaboration both internally and externally. “I believe in long-lasting partnerships. It is not that difficult to outsmart somebody every now and then but you can’t outsmart someone forever, so you have to build long-lasting relationships and you have to build them together. Once you have earned each other’s trust and respect, then you can achieve a lot.”

Rob is pleased with the company he has helped to build but notes that there is still more to be done to improve the company’s reach and online profile. “In the countries where we currently have a presence we can make a difference. We hold good, sizeable and profitable positions. In the coming years we want to concentrate on helping our clients win in the changing landscape, and making things better for our candidates.

“The organisational changes have enabled us to improve our time-to-market and our commercial effectiveness. Now we can achieve new growth and create innovative solutions that will help our clients improve their organisations. A great deal of attention will be focused on product and process innovation. Furthermore, ongoing improvement programs will result in continued operational excellence. We will continue to invest in innovation in ICT. We will use the concepts that have proved successful in the countries we are in to achieve expansion. Not expansion in the traditional sense, but by making more use of technology and the internet. So we will not open a large number of branches in

countries where we do not already have a presence; we want to expand in our existing markets using various innovative concepts.”

With Rob at the helm of the business, USC People aims to be recognised by its candidates and clients as a world-class provider and by its staff as an employer of choice. Rob hopes that his employees truly enjoy working in an environment that is value- and results-driven, as he aims to cultivate a team of people who recognise the importance of USC People’s work in discovering, deploying and developing talent. Furthermore, the industry has frequently acknowledged USC People’s strength as an organisation, with the company having won numerous awards in the categories of best workplaces and top human resources and recruitment agencies.

USG People’s social responsibility lies in being the go-to employer for putting the growth and development of all people first. The operative word for USC People is ‘all’, expressing the company’s commitment to inclusion and diversity. USC People takes ‘all people’ to mean not just its own internal and external staff, but also those who are, for whatever reason, at a greater or lesser distance from the labour market, such as people with a disability or those on benefits. USC People wants to make an extra effort on behalf of these

“The organisational changes have enabled us to improve our time-to-market and our commercial effectiveness.”

- Rob Zandbergen



groups to enable them to play a part in society.

The nature of USC People’s services—helping people find a suitable job—means that the company serves a vital social purpose. Having a job means generating an income and having a meaningful daily pursuit. Having a suitable job challenges people to grow further. It ensures that people are active participants in society and makes them feel part of society. This social commitment means being willing to make an effort and invest in it. A job also provides independence and self-esteem. The organisation believes that its role goes beyond merely matching people and companies, and aims to achieve the right balance between people, planet, and profit.

The human resources sector is changing with the proliferation of online products and services. Like many other industries, recruitment has changed dramatically with newcomers entering the market via online platforms. Rob has identified the opportunities that lie in the virtual world and is introducing new initiatives to ensure USC People’s place in the future of online talent management and development. “As things continue to shift towards online, USC People will increase its capacity in this area in order to offer its customers and candidates a modern and streamlined approach. This will allow us to continue to contribute to healthy dynamics in the job market and improve the functioning of society and the wider economy.” •



A Helping Hand

USG People is working together with Cappgemini to develop innovative IT solutions and initiatives for its operating companies in the Netherlands.

When USG People decided to outsource its IT infrastructure management in the Netherlands two years ago, the HR service supplier had quite a list of requirements for any potential partner. Besides the usual business criteria, elements like the human factor and the right cultural fit played a role as well. Albert Jan Frankfort, Director of Information Technology at USG People in the Netherlands, says the selection was a lengthy process: “After drawing up a shortlist we organised a beauty contest.”

Edgar Willemssen, Vice President and Director of Infrastructure Outsourcing Services at Cappgemini, says the beauty contest was a perfect way to show USG People how Cappgemini and its people work. “We were pleased with the beauty contest approach. It gave us the opportunity to present ourselves face-to-face in addition to all the paperwork in the formal RFP process. It was a great opportunity to differentiate ourselves from our competitors. That’s the uniqueness of this particular approach.”

“At Cappgemini, we strongly believe that there’s only one way to be successful in this business and that is to set client satisfaction

“At Cappgemini, we strongly believe that there’s only one way to be successful in this business and that is to set client satisfaction as your top priority.”

- Edgar Willemssen



as your top priority. As a result, the client will grant you opportunities to supply and develop your services. By providing excellent services and being proactively innovative we aim to unburden our clients. That’s our most important goal!”

Albert Jan states that USG People wanted to outsource its IT infrastructure management to make its cost structure more flexible and at the same time ensure a future-proof IT infrastructure and expertise in this particular field.

“With the outsourcing, more than 40 colleagues had to be transitioned to Cappgemini. This process was handled very carefully, and in a few months we managed to transfer all the former USG People employees to Cappgemini. This was quite a good starting point for our relationship. Cappgemini has in-depth experience in transferring people and executing outsourcing assignments. USG People’s core business revolves around people. It speaks for itself

that we find our people an important asset in our relationships with our partners as well.”

Often, people at USG People and Cappgemini remark upon the unique relationship of the two companies. Albert Jan states, “When we faced some technical challenges during the transition to the new infrastructure, Cappgemini promptly stepped in and adequately helped to solve issues and keep things running. These are the situations in which the outsourcing partner can add value.”

Edgar adds, “During that period there was a lot of pressure on the client’s business, which made it even more important that IT support kept running smoothly. It is one of the examples of good partnership and helping your client win.”

“Now that we have successfully implemented the outsourcing, our IT infrastructure works efficiently and we have the flexibility to scale up and down as our

business evolves,” Albert Jan says. “Right from the beginning it was a solid partnership. The core of our working relationship is exceptional service satisfaction.

“There is actually no difference between an internal infrastructure management operation and an external one. Only the interaction in the way that we work together is different. We have regular consultation meetings with Cappgemini and we invest in our relationship to ensure that service satisfaction remains on that high level. That’s a permanent cycle.”

Edgar agrees that it’s a continuous process. “We’re not yet finished. Yes, we have a strong relationship but we cannot rest on our laurels, because we think there is room for improvement from a business perspective. There’s still some hard work ahead.”

Cappgemini and USG People will tackle this hard work together on the firm foundations of their strong partnership and cohesive collaboration. ●