


The AZBox Champions from Holland

It really helps to not only have a good product but to also have a very ambitious sales team. A perfect example of this is the company Smart Innovations in northeastern Holland. The three owners of the company are very much involved with its operation and have helped make the AZBox receivers one of the top selling brands not only in The Netherlands but also in Belgium and Luxemburg. For these three countries, Smart Innovations has taken over distribution of the AZBox.



Zutphen
(Amsterdam)



AZBOX

■ At the moment, Smart Innovations still resides in one of the apartments in this house in the town of Zutphen in northeastern Holland. The move to a new office is coming very soon.

AZBOX



The three-man company currently resides in a residential area in the small town of Zutphen, not too far from Apeldoorn and roughly 100 km from Amsterdam. At the moment the warehouse is in the founder's garage but this won't be the case much longer. The company will shortly move to a larger building which will include a warehouse.

We found out how it all started from Herbert Verheijden; he's really the founder of Smart Innovations. "I started the company in 2005", he explains to us. He's been involved with satellite reception since 1995. "My first receiver was the PACE 500 G4. Back then it was one of the first digital receivers available", he remembers. His first satellite dish was 80cm in diameter.

He is a software engineer by trade and thus was especially interested in digital signal modulation technology. Via the Internet it didn't take long for him to find people with similar interests with which he could exchange ideas. "We still use the www.sat4all.com Satellite Bulletin Board today to communicate with our customers", explains Herbert Verheijden.

He met André Pelgrim



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through this satellite board and found out that he didn't live all too far away from him and was therefore able to meet up with him in person on many occasions.

Over the years the two of them worked closer and closer together. The third member of the team is Rinus Lindoorn. He's the founder and chairman of the 'De Transponder' satellite club which provides extensive information for satellite enthusiasts via its web site www.detransponder.nl.

In 2007 the three of them became equal partners in Smart Innovations with each owning exactly one third of the company. Their jobs are all very clearly defined: Herbert Verheijden is responsible for the company's vision, Andre Pelgrim handles the technical side of operations while Rinus Lindoorn watches over the small company's finances. All three of them have a dedication to satellite technology and above all the AZBox.

Herbert Verheijden explains how the connection to the AZBox came about: "We met Hugo Condessa, the head of

AZBox, at ANGA 2005 and learned about his products. We recognized right away that his boxes were ideal for our market because of its quality and price." The Smart Innovations team immediately began translating the receiver manuals, receiver menus and promotional materials into Dutch. "We also started our own support forum at www.azbox.nl", adds Herbert Verheijden.

The start of the company didn't go all too smoothly at first: "In our first year 2007 we managed to sell only 500 receivers and our second year 2008 wasn't much better", explains Rinus Lindoorn, responsible for the financial side of things. The three agree that the main reason for this weak beginning was that AZBox only offered SD receivers at the time.

In 2009 however, sales increased dramatically: "In 2009 we sold 1400 high definition receivers and in 2010 we expect that number to climb to 3000", Rinus Lindoorn says confidently. The increase in sales is also due to some other factors. Rinus Lindoorn regularly visits the dealers in Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg to highlight the advantages of the AZBox:

■ The smart idea from Smart Innovations: they are working on a box to convert Infrared to Bluetooth. This would make it possible to control the AZBox and a state-of-the-art TV system from a single remote control.

■ Herbert Verheijden is the founder of Smart Innovations.



■ Rinus Lindoorn is responsible for the financial side of Smart Innovations.

■ André Pelgrim is responsible for the technical side of things.



antennas with a total of 31 LNBs plus one LNB on a rotary dish.

As it turned out, the AZBox had a software bug in its DiSEqC control that allowed the receiver to access 30 LNBs without any problems, just not the last 2 LNBs. They would never have found out about unique problems such as this if they didn't make themselves available to answer everyone's questions.

At the moment Smart Innovations wholesale dealer network is made up of 25 active dealers in The Netherlands, five in Belgium and one in Luxembourg. We want to know what sales are like for the individual AZBox receiver models; Rinus Lindoorn looks at his books and says: "The AZBox Premium Plus makes up 50% of our sales, the Premium model accounts for 30% while the Elite box makes up for 20%." Those are all high definition models.

The actual tuner selection is rather interesting: "60% of AZBox receivers are delivered with satellite tuners, 30% come with combination satellite and cable tuners and the remaining 10% are strictly cable boxes."

We noticed that terrestrial tuners are not in the mix at all. Rinus Lindoorn confirms, "There's hardly any demand for terrestrial reception in Holland." When the subject turned to the future, André Pelgrim finally had the opportunity to present a surprisingly new idea: "The AZBox is the only receiver with a real 1080-line picture and therefore is the perfect match for top-of-the-line TVs."

What conclusion can be drawn from this? "One of the absolute best brand names available is, for example, Bang & Olufsen. But when you check out the remote control, you find out that it operates via Bluetooth while the AZBox works with Infrared." The trio has thus come up with an interesting idea: and that would be to work with a supplier of converters on a box that could convert Infrared to Bluetooth. "In this way we're trying to make the AZBox recognizable with high-end TVs."

"I visit roughly 30 firms every year", he explains.

The other two colleagues don't sit idly around either; they are actively promoting the AZBox in satellite forums as well as in their own support forum. "We quickly answer every question we receive", comments Herbert Verheijden adding that the customer is never alone.

The three of them actually enjoy answering questions. "We are regularly surprised ourselves! For example, recently a customer told us that he has 32 LNBs but could only access 30 of them." A satellite viewer with 32 LNBs? That was new to them. Sure enough, satellite enthusiast Gerard van den Braak in Eindhoven has two multifocus

Smart Innovations is making quite a name for itself. All three business partners are satellite enthusiasts who are intimately familiar with the AZBox's every detail. They keep coming up with new ideas to make the AZBox even more popular. With such a dedicated sales team AZBox should continue to move upward in the marketplace!