

Recyca: At the Core Of The Empties Business

by Katie Fernelius • Recharger Magazine

For Mike Van Der Weyde empty cartridge collecting started as just a hobby — something that made him a couple bucks while he was finishing up his law degree at the University of Antwerp, Belgium. Today, however, cartridge collecting has become more than Van Der Weyde's leisure pursuit, it's his livelihood.

"To be honest [I thought law school] was quite boring and at that point there weren't many great opportunities as a future lawyer," Van Der Weyde said. "Since my father's relative informed me on the unique opportunity in collecting empty



Left to right: General Manager and Founder Mike Van Der Weyde, Dimitry Van Raamsdonk, sales and purchasing manager and Recyca employee Tom Van Sichem exhibited for the first time at World Expo 2010.



Recyca's barcoding system has helped in its everyday business. After each cartridge is checked in and goes through extensive quality control procedures, it is stored in the Recyca "wine cellar."

cartridges, I took this chance and the rest is history."

Recyca bvba, based in Malle, Belgium, opened its doors in 2001 with very modest beginnings. Taking what he learned and the contacts he made from his side job days, Van Der Weyde opened his own company and as its general manager, eventually grew the empty cartridge collecting business into what is now a successful e-waste collection company and one of the biggest empties collectors in Belgium.

Cartridge collection has evolved from simple core collection for Recyca. Since its beginnings, the company has continually seen areas of the business where it could develop.

The company's first move was to Zoersel, Belgium into an approximately 650 square foot warehouse. At the time, the company had only three employees, but they worked hard and continued to grow the business.

In 2005, Recyca moved into a new warehouse in Malle and doubled the team to six employees. It also contracted a programmer to build a custom-made, customizable barcoding/scanning software system. "The programmer said the job would last 50 hours," Van Der Weyde said, "but he ended up spending an entire year."

Recyca's barcoding system has helped in its everyday business. The ability to track every cartridge that comes in and goes out of Recyca has made a huge difference in production. Knowing how many cartridge models are in stock and the condition they are in has made filling orders seamless and efficient.

"The barcoding/scanning system helped us organize our ERP system very thoroughly. The advantage is that we register any cartridge coming/going through/leaving our system. This way we have a real time view of the stock situation at any moment of the day," Van Der Weyde said. "We no longer have to speculate or assume quantities/availability etc. Furthermore, after a certain time period, we are able to extract all kinds of information from the system in regards to trends/quantities/availability, which is a great tool to help us. This way we are able to inform our clients correctly and make forecasts."

"All the hard work we put in here has really paid off now," Van Der Weyde continued. "We are now able to track the entire process."

Although this process helped efficiency, there were other areas Recyca had to adapt to provide the best cores.



Above: A Recyca employee sorts through incoming cartridges as the first check point in Recyca's QC process.

Right: Part of Recyca's philosophy is providing a clean and safe environment for employees including a container for extra toner particles.



"You can just put [a core] in a box and ship it out, or you can do it like we do. It doesn't take an engineer to collect cartridges, but it's all in the way you do it."

Recyca's way of doing it includes an in-depth cleaning and quality control process. When the cores come to Recyca, the outsides are cleaned and checked for outer damages. Upon that first inspection and cleanup they are transferred over to the second check point, where they are further inspected and separated depending on toner or inkjet, company and model number.

Quality control was another area Recyca sought to improve. Earlier this year, the company went through its second facility expansion and introduced its third quality control team with its fourth QC team is in the works, Van Der Weyde explained.

"We are completely dedicated to checking and double checking our cores," he said.

Once the cores have gone through the extensive quality control check points, it is transferred to Recyca's "wine cellar," where the cartridges are stored until they are ordered and shipped out.

The Recyca team calls the storage area the wine cellar because the warehouse is lined with crates that are labeled by company, model and cartridge type. Every cartridge has a specific place and the warehouse team knows exactly how many cartridges can fit in a crate, how to store them so they don't get damaged and how to package them so the cores arrive to Recyca customers in the best possible condition.

Every process at Recyca has been streamlined as efficient and effective as it can be. "These cartridges are our business, our money," Van Der Weyde said. "And it's all just lying around, so we want to ensure that everything is done correctly."

For Recyca, part of correct processing is creating a healthy working environment. The company invested in a filtration system to keep the facility clean. Because cartridges are dirty and have chemicals that can potentially be hazardous to people and the environment, Recyca employees take precautions when cleaning them. They are required to wear masks and coats for their

own safety, and the filtration system helps keep the air and the environment clean and safe.

"Our installation consists of a filtration system which filters/refreshes the air in the working area on a constant basis. This way we provide our employees fresh and non contaminated air. The installation has a HEPA filter which filters above 99 percent of the smallest air born particles," Van Der Weyde said. "We feel it is extremely important in taking good care of Recyca's most valuable assets: our employees."

This eco-friendly philosophy has carried through Recyca's core business, and the company has strived to become a zero percent waste company.

"We try to separate waste as much as possible," Van Der Weyde said. "Cartridges come packed in several ways which means we have quite a high volume and

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different sorts of waste from simple paper to batteries. We have presses for paper/cardboard/plastic; we collect toner dust; we have collection boxes for batteries, foam, anti-static bags, etc. Since we emphasize the importance of protection of the environment we need to set an example of course. We try to motivate our clients (schools, companies, private persons, etc.) to do the same and what is a better way to start by letting us collect their empty cartridges."

In addition to its own recycling efforts, a recycling business, is located just down the road from Recyca. The company takes waste and breaks it down for reuse. Most of Recyca's trash goes straight there so everything coming in will eventually be recycled or reused.


Consistent with Recyca's green philosophies, last year the company took over the activities of New Emco, a successful e-waste collector on the Belgian market. Recyca took over Emco's activities making it a "one-stop-shop" for the Belgian recycling market. Through this acquisition, Recyca now offers a full service collection of empty cartridges, used cell phones and e-waste.

Through its hard work and dedication to providing the best quality products, Recyca is today a successful e-waste collection company and one of the biggest empties collectors that services all of Belgium. The company now has 33 employees and is continuing to mature, Van der Weyde said. And although they do have many of their processes perfected, there are still challenges for the company.

"There's always competition," Van Der Weyde said. "There are other empty brokers in the area, however, they do not do things how we do things."

Fortunately for Recyca, OEM take back programs don't pose as much of an issue for the European market as they do for U.S. brokers. However, Van Der Weyde explained how different expectations provide the biggest challenges in this industry.

"When a customer goes to the store to buy a cartridge, it's pretty clear what they are going to get. However, when one of our customers comes to us for a core, there are different expectations. Some expect a drum, but I'm not selling you the drum. I'm selling you the core. This raises the question, 'What is an empty?'"

It's these challenges that keep Recyca open and ready for change. "You have to be able to evolve and perfect your business," Van der Weyde said. "It's the only way to have a lasting successful business." 

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