



Press release

Brussels, 20 November 2013



KBC stimulates start-ups

Today, together with Accenture, Flanders DC, the University of Antwerp, Cronos and Mobile Vikings, KBC is launching Start It @kbc, an incubator that not only gives start-ups a roof over their head but above all provides them with support and advice to enable them to inject lasting growth into their businesses. At the KBC Tower in Antwerp's Schoenmarkt, KBC is making seven floors available to accommodate the partners and start-up businesses.

Figures from research agency Graydon have recently shown that the number of start-ups in Flanders has dropped sharply. Besides the economic crisis and the unfavourable climate, one of the frequently cited reasons for people not venturing into business is a lack of a suitable location and the attendant start-up costs. Start It offers start-up entrepreneurs a solution to these issues, allowing them to concentrate fully on developing their businesses.

The aim of Start It @kbc is to give encouragement to start-up businesses and to guide them during the initial phase and the subsequent development period. The presence of other partners will help them get to grips with various aspects of doing business, including establishing contacts and building networks. These other partners are all firms that have a tradition of renewal and that will all be operating in the same environment. The team comprises **Mobile Vikings**, with experience in the field of social media and telecoms; **Accenture**, not only offering consultancy but also working on mobility; **Cronos**, a technology firm with a focus on integration and innovation; the **University of Antwerp**, which, in addition to product development, also nurtures students in putting their ideas into practice; and **Flanders DC**, a supporter of innovation. **Peter Hinssen** has also been drafted in as permanent consultant on the advisory board. On top of this, a number of patrons are also supporting the project, such as Microsoft, which is providing free Office software.

The project is directed towards start-up businesses engaging in innovative work that will contribute to an enduring local economy. The prime candidates in this respect are start-ups in fields such as mobility, clean-tech, demographic change, the ageing population and the digital society. Today sees the first two start-up businesses moving into the KBC Tower. For at least one year, start-up entrepreneurs can use the logistical facilities for free and call on the assistance of the partners, each of which will lend support based on their individual expertise, whilst providing use of their knowledge and networks.

Start it @kbc itself qualifies as a start-up and will therefore also be located in the building. Starters and the partners are each free to fill in the specifics of how they want to work with one another. The programme is far from being set down in tablets of stone. In addition to a calendar setting out a choice of workshops, lectures, informal discussions, blind dates, meets and greets, and consultancy opportunities, the Start It partners will also offer the new starters personalised assistance and the benefit of their networks. This will help budding entrepreneurs develop their businesses, so that they are then able to go on and conquer the market more quickly under their own steam.

KBC's E-Business teams will likewise be working on site in interaction with the Start It partners. KBC's aim in all of this is to work out ideas and exchange experience with the other actors that are playing a role in the project. Experience shows that revival and improvement often come about through cooperation and exchanges of ideas.

Today, StartIt@kbc kicks off in Antwerp. Depending on its success and the level of interest shown by start-ups, a review will later be done of how the initiative might evolve on into the future. And consideration will also be given to perhaps rolling the project out at another KBC location, or even on a virtual platform.

Interested parties can put their ideas forward by going to www.startit.be.

Erik Luts, Senior General Manager of Direct Channels & Support at KBC's Belgium Business Unit sums up why KBC is launching this initiative: *'For many long years, KBC has been the bank-insurer of choice for business, a place it has earned by working in close conjunction and growing along with local entrepreneurs. KBC is embedded in the local economy and has thorough, detailed knowledge of the business market. 'Local responsiveness' is an essential component of KBC's strategy and, for KBC, this means gaining a better understanding of local clients, being alert to the signals they emit and the needs they voice, responding pro-actively to these signals and needs and offering tailor-made banking and insurance products, all of which help build and entrench lasting, long-term client relationships with business (whether sole traders, SMEs, midcaps, or, indeed, firms of any size). With its geographical locations, the expertise of its staff in Flanders and Brussels and its close-knit network of bank branches and insurance agencies, KBC is ideally positioned as a bank-insurer to gain a feel for the needs and wants of start-up businesses and to deliver appropriately, in the mould of a true partner.'*



European Week for Business

It is no coincidence that Start it @kbc is being launched during the 'European Week for Business', an EU initiative to promote entrepreneurship and invoke a sense of enterprise. Start It forms just part of a whole range of initiatives that KBC is organising for the benefit of entrepreneurs over the course of this week. KBC wants to bolster its engagement with its business clientele. During this week, KBC's relationship managers have invited 10000 or more businesses to take part in a series of local events that KBC is organising. These could be speed-dating sessions with reputed business leaders or information sessions, right the way to inviting well-known keynote speakers to share their professional experience. All of these events are aimed at inspiring business people and enabling them to meet with other entrepreneurs in order to exchange information and experience. The week will conclude with after-work drinks at a number of locations in Flanders.

For further information on Start It @kbc

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