



# Press release

Brussels, 29 January 2014

## KBC gives 28 start-up businesses free accommodation and support at the KBC Tower in Antwerp

# Start it @kbc broadens its activities

On 20 November 2013, together with Accenture, Flanders DC, the University of Antwerp, Cronos and Mobile Vikings, KBC launched Start it @kbc, an incubator that not only gives start-ups a place to set up operations but above all provides them with support and advice to enable them to inject lasting growth into their businesses.

Today, just two months after its launch, 28 start-ups have already moved into the KBC Tower in Antwerp. Those chosen to do so are developing innovations in the fields of high technology, e-platforms, sustainability and mobility.

Start it @kbc has been so successful since it launched that KBC is currently looking into providing extra space to deal with the demand, both at the KBC Tower in Antwerp and elsewhere. Hasselt is being looked at by KBC along with Mobile Vikings, one of Start it @kbc's partners, as one location that this unique concept might be expanded to.

All of the project's partners are also working flat out with KBC in creating a virtual community for start-ups. The first phase of this will be tested in the middle of February.

In the meantime, agreement has also been reached with Startups.be and iMinds.be to further strengthen ties with the start-up tech community throughout Belgium. Erik Luts, Senior General Manager of Direct Channels & Support at KBC's Belgium Business Unit sums it up: '*We're just two months into Start it @kbc, and it's already clear that KBC and its partners, Accenture, Mobile Vikings, Cronos, the University of Antwerp, Flanders DC, Startups.be and iMinds.be, are meeting a real need among start-ups. With it we want to support innovation and enterprise and highlight how important that is.*'

## **Start it @kbc gets off to a flying start ...**

KBC launched Start it @kbc on 20 November 2013 in association with Accenture, Flanders DC, the University of Antwerp, Cronos and Mobile Vikings. At the KBC Tower in Antwerp's Schoenmarkt, KBC is currently making seven floors available to accommodate the Start it @kbc partners and start-up businesses.

No fewer than 270 enquiries to participate were received within three weeks, 90 of which turned into actual applications by start-up businesses and 34 of which were invited to present their business plans. This ended up in 28 businesses being given a space in the KBC Tower: the 10 start-ups already there plus 18 new ones. In terms of gender distribution, 30% are women and 70% are men, with ages ranging between 20 and 50.

### **... both physically and virtually**

The Start it @kbc partners made a joint selection of the 28 start-ups currently based at the KBC Tower in Antwerp on the basis of their original ideas which will contribute to the development of a sustainable society. Those selected are developing innovations in the fields of high technology, e-platforms, sustainability and mobility.

Start-ups who applied to participate but were not selected didn't go home empty handed though. They now receive individual feedback, with access to a virtual community where they get advice from the scheme's partners on how to fine-tune their business model and get their project off the ground. Indeed, a number of the start-ups that didn't make it through the selection process have already been taken under the wing of one of the other partners, added to which they can take part in any of the Start it @kbc activities that are being organised, including events, informal discussions and workshops.

## **Start it @kbc is just getting going**

Interested start-ups can still apply on the [startit.be](http://startit.be) website. All applications are examined carefully and short-listed applicants will be invited to present their projects, with a chance to join the Start it @kbc community, whether physically or virtually.

Great interest has also been expressed by various parties in this innovative concept, which brings together start-ups and experienced entrepreneurs and backers. This includes joining forces with Mobile Vikings in also developing this unique concept in Hasselt. Vlerick Business School has also offered its support in bringing the project to Ghent, another avenue which is currently being explored. Furthermore, KBC is looking into whether additional space can be provided for more start-up businesses at the current KBC Tower location in Antwerp.

Startups.be and iMinds.be have meanwhile joined up as partners, allowing Start it @kbc to fully plug into the best start-up tech communities in Belgium.

## **KBC positions itself as the go-to bank and insurer for businesses**

KBC's aim in launching Start it @kbc is to further bolster its key role as the reference when it comes to business banking and insurance. KBC has worked very closely with local businesses for years, firmly embedded in the local economy with an unrivalled 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 proactively to these signals and needs and offering banking and insurance products tailor-made for them, 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). KBC aims to work even more closely with its chosen partners and other initiatives, giving intensive guidance to start-ups and helping them in every possible manner to smooth their way to getting a successful business off to a flying start.

KBC not only provides financial expertise through Start it @kbc, but also technical advice and opportunities, as well as logistical support facilities and access to its network. KBC's aim in all of this is to cultivate a flow of ideas and innovation with start-up businesses that will be mutually beneficial.

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