

Nomadesk Constant innovation propelled by the market



Nomadesk is a leading provider of secure cloud storage, file sharing and synchronisation software, co-founded in 2004 by Filip Tack, Peter Geldhof, and Miguel De Buf. The product enables users to access, share, synchronize and safeguard files from any location, online or offline. We spoke with Filip Tack about Nomadesk, venture capital and innovation in Belgium.

What is your competitive advantage in the field of document management solutions?

Filip Tack: As a file sharing and synchronisation solution targeted to business professionals, Nomadesk is the story of how to become successful in a market where the household name gives the service away for free. We're able to charge for our services by virtue of our two-fold competitive advantage: 1) we're very flexible regarding the deployment of our technology – we allow our customers and partners to install our software in their own data centres; 2) with regard to deployment via our partners (which are telecoms, large hosts, system integrators, etc.), we allow them to re-brand our product. So you might have already used Nomadesk, but under a different name.

Another aspect of the market plays to our advantage as well, and that's the very success of our competitors. In 2004, we had to evangelise about our product. But since then, our competitors have grown and created popular awareness of file sharing and synchronisation solutions. So today, our sales task is much simpler: we just go out and explain how we differ from the competition.

Your rapid growth has attracted a private equity player. Can you share some of your experience of the before & after of investment fundings?

So far, we've experienced the A and B rounds of investment funding, which spur a company's growth. In our case, in our very competitive market, we secured B funding in 2010, in the middle of

the financial crisis – so that was a sign that we had worked out our product differentiators to the investors' satisfaction.

The first thing that hits you when you win a funding partner in the early stage of your company is the reporting rigour. As an entrepreneurial start-up, you are scrambling to build and market a product, just to survive. Structuring figures neatly is not your highest priority. But once a VC joins you, of course, you need to structure everything, especially the financial reporting. On the one hand, this feels like a burden; but on the other hand, it instils discipline.

I would always recommend having more than one VC, if you can afford that luxury. Because that makes running your company easier – in the sense that there is more brain-power around the table, more views on an issue, and more healthy debate and balance.

Nomadesk is constantly innovating its product-service offering as the market evolves.

Do you feel that there is a supportive climate for innovation in Belgium?

With regard to financing, yes. Certainly for start-ups, there is a subsidy framework via the IWT in Flanders that is very helpful. And once you start to grow, there are tax benefits for R&D personnel, and so forth. And furthermore, I don't sense any lack of innovation in our country.

The real issue is: do we have an environment that helps us become successful. And that's where I have my doubts. Fundamentally, it's a cultural phenomenon called 'the tall poppy syndrome' (a tall poppy is a successful person who, as a result of his/ her achievements, is the target of jealousy and criticism). As a society, we need to get to where we want people to become successful.