

AGFA'S TALENT SCOUT



For a number of years “Discovery,” an intensive talent-scouting programme, has been in progress at Agfa. Each year, Agfa selects some sixty students and offers them an apprenticeship project in the areas of material research and technology development. Attracting the right research talent nowadays is not a simple task, yet it remains vital for a modern commercial enterprise. To stay successful, companies must continually renew themselves and be able to force definitive breakthroughs in research. This ongoing process is occurring at an ever-increasing pace. In the current environment, time-to-market—the time available for product development and launching—is indeed becoming shorter and shorter.

Discovery programme attracts the right research profiles

The talent you are seeking for your company will not be found through an advertisement. For this, you must actively network with universities and polytechnics as well as the Flemish, national and European authorities. René De Keyzer, manager External Research & Development in RDM, has been intensely busy with this issue for several years. “Scouting and attracting talent is no longer a local matter,” he says. “Belgium has become too small to find all the research profiles we need to continue to innovate. It also has to do with the orientation of education. In Northern Europe—and we may safely place Belgium among this group—there has been less interest in the beta sciences for some considerable time. Yet you still need the disciplines of mathematics, physics and chemistry if you want to perform in-depth material research. In France, among other countries, you are able to find a greater diversity of new educational profiles in these disciplines.”

Attracting external knowledge

If we wish to make a successful transition from analogue to digital, we must be able to replace the current cash generating unit—film—as quickly as possible with a fully-fledged alternative. Inkjet can fulfil

in the computer-to-plate sector. Everyone knows that analogue printing technology is in its final phase and that the battle for profitability is being fought in the CtP printing plate sector. To differentiate yourself in this market you must innovate, and must therefore be able to rely on networks with the centres that have the relevant knowledge.

René De Keyzer: “Via Discovery, we attempt to attract external knowledge in an efficient way, by initiating research projects with mainly European universities and polytechnics, and also by making use of local and international government support. This allows us to limit many of Agfa’s financial and technical risks by making use, for example, of the highly specialised, expensive infrastructure of the research centres.”

Human potential for innovation

In 2004, some 60 internships or apprenticeships were in progress at Agfa from various support projects: the Leonardo apprenticeship programme for masters in sciences (apprenticeships of 4 to 12 months), IWT Flanders’ doctorates and post-doctoral grants (apprenticeships of 48 and 36 months), industrial apprenticeship programmes (DRT and DESS) from French

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this role. In doing so, Agfa places itself in a very different arena, with completely new core skills, and with more and larger competitors: every one a world player with very large budgets, which they are able to allocate in a highly focused way. Much of the new research talent we need is also being intensively pursued by our competitors. The pressure to innovate is also very high

universities (apprenticeships of 12 and 18 months) and the European Marie Curie post-doctoral programme (apprenticeships of 24 months).

René De Keyzer: “Supervising 60 interns per year is quite a task. But the advantage is that you receive access to a great potential in high-tech knowledge that must be deployed in an industrial environment and



From left to right, part of the truly international Discovery Programme team: coordinator René De Keyzer, manager External Research & Development RDM, supervisors Peter Slabbinck (assistant BGGG Inkjet Inks) and Frank De Voeght (project manager BGGG Inkjet Inks), and interns Cyril Jean Francois (FR), Raphael Flores (FR), Caroline Meslin (FR), Aurelien Dierckx (FR), Hanane Ifrir (FR), Gianluca Turco (It), Elodie Siekiera (FR), Cedric Marchessoux (FR), Alessandra Menicucci (It) and Florica Mindru (Rom).

made profitable. The Agfa Discovery programme is tailored specifically to this. The interns learn to develop social skills in young, dynamic teams in an international environment. They also learn to develop a large number of language and communication skills: reporting, presenting, discussing ... the entire spectrum. Discovery is the marketing instrument par excellence

extra trump card that Agfa can play against the competitors. René De Keyzer: "Students value the excellent logistics with which they are provided, allowing them to concentrate fully on their projects. The proximity of Antwerp and the central location of Belgium in Europe are certainly plus points that are talked about and passed on among the students. The most

effective: Agfa being able to attract the right talent, and the student being able to discover and develop his or her own talent."

"... but with Discovery we have the instrument we can use to persuade candidates to choose Agfa"

RENÉ DE KEYZER, MANAGER EXTERNAL R&D RDM

to convince the candidates within the various educational and knowledge centres to develop their talent further in the innovative environment of Agfa R&D. Thus Agfa is able to develop its expertise flexibly and more thoroughly in the new technology domains, and secure the human potential needed for its innovation projects." Our geographical location is certainly an

important benefit is perhaps the professional coaching by our own R&D people that quickly brings the potential of the apprentices to the surface. When the projects must be presented or the dissertations defended, you can see that the students have undergone a major evolution, both intellectually and personally. And in the end, this is what makes the Discovery project

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