

General

Preface February 2018

Each month our CEO reflects on the events in his (professional) life and discusses some of the articles featured in the magazine.

“Our unique collaborative model is the rock on which imec’s success has been built”

When imec’s very first CEO – Roger Van Overstraeten – founded imec, he strongly believed that working together would be the key to success for our research center, which at the time was still a small operation. Initial responses from the industry and the world of research were somewhat skeptical: how could imec ever become a success in such a small country as Belgium without any infrastructure or industry specialized in semiconductor technology? Yet imec’s ambitions were brought to fruition. First by Roger Van Overstraeten, then by Gilbert Declerck. And since 2009 I have been at the helm of what is now a 3500-strong team of leading scientists from all around the world.

In January, I was awarded the ‘SEMI Sales and Marketing Excellence Award’ during the Industry Strategy Symposium held in Half Moon Bay, California. My first reaction was one of surprise that we were receiving this specific award. Normally, we receive recognition for our scientific excellence or technological expertise.

But I soon came to realize that this award was a wonderful appreciation from the industry for the way we join forces with our partners (our ‘customers’), as well as for the many years of effort we have put in to developing a unique collaborative model in which all of the parties in the supply chain may partake, whether they are big or small, whether they compete or not.

Our current ecosystem of companies originally consisted of the chip industry supply chain, ranging from the suppliers of devices and equipment makers, through to the chip and system manufacturers. But in recent years, it also increasingly includes companies that produce applications across a wide range of industries, from auto manufacturers right through to medical companies. It was a major challenge to keep our collaborative model intact along the way – especially during the period of consolidation in the chip industry – but we managed!

Our secret recipe? Listening! We visited our partners regularly and listened carefully to what they needed, what they were concerned with and what they expected from us. And then we pulled all that knowledge together, analyzed it, and tried to apply the conclusions to our own ideas and those of other partners. Sometimes we had to adjust or cancel some interesting research programs and start new ones. It was all about making the right choices. For each of our partners, our research has to be of at least equal value – or even greater value – than the research that they are able to carry out individually, within their own company.

In the February edition of our magazine, you will read about just such a new program that we embarked on recently: high-speed analog/RF, with the aim of developing 5G RF front-end technologies for mobile handsets. Also the article about 3D batteries demonstrates just how important collaboration is – across the whole supply chain – when it comes to producing a compact, stable and efficient battery. In the end, though, it is not awards (such as ‘SEMI Sales and Marketing Excellence Award’) that are the most satisfying accolade for our collaborative model, but the success of the technologies and products that we develop together with our partners.

Luc Van den hove,
President and CEO of imec