

General, Internet of Things

Preface November 2017

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

Successful products are made at home!

October was busy at imec. 3,000 people visited our Leuven headquarters for the open company days. We showed them how a day in the future might look like. The same day, I flew out to San Diego to attend the Imec Technology Forum (ITF) that would focus on a subject that is close to my heart: how to improve health care with nano- and digital technology. Also this month, we welcomed more than 600 experts from our partners network to give an update on our research in the frame of our half-yearly Partner Technical Week.

But what was really 'new business' for imec, was the opening of our HomeLab in Ghent, which you can read about in our cover article of this month on imec's 'Smart Spaces'.

HomeLab opened its doors on October 18th. An initiative of imec and the University of Ghent, it is a real home where companies may test their smart living products and services, together with the temporary occupants of the house. Behind the screens, HomeLab contains all the infrastructure and knowledge needed to make this possible.

Isn't that the best way to create successful products? Looking for needs and problems that people may have, test concepts and prototypes to fill these needs, ask feedback and adapt the prototypes accordingly, and finally: test the products in an environment that is as close as possible to the real home.

And that is even more so for Internet of Things applications, where the magic is in the smart use and the interaction with other appliances. Imagine you'd make a smart refrigerator that is so complex to use or has so many useless options that users only use it as a simple refrigerator – to keep food cold. That would be a pity, wouldn't it?

But if you include users from to start, let them think about solutions that would make their life really easier, let them look at the first concepts and let them play with prototypes, you'll make much more progress. Then test the refrigerator in a real house – HomeLab – and look how it may be used on a normal day by a family that comes home from work ... and you'll have new insights that will make your product even better.

On top, HomeLab allows to test applications and services that require interaction with other appliances: a freezer, television, tablet, maybe even a robot (in this magazine: an article about stereovision, a useful technology for robots). Because each of these run other protocols and are made by other companies, it would be cumbersome to test this interaction yourself. But at HomeLab it can be done.

HomeLab also enables working with several partners around a common theme, quite interesting for IoT-like applications. During the HomeLab opening event e.g., Televic talked about the power of collaboration with other companies and research centers, a collaboration that allows them to keep ahead of their competition. Our magazine article on Televic Rail includes a nice illustration.

Imec offers quite a number of test environments to try out promising technology, ranging from a house, office space, public space to a sports stadium.

Here, prototypes of products may be tested by potential users selected from imec's livinglabs panel, in a realistic environment. This will allow us to bring useful innovations much faster into the market, and to make the Internet of Things a real part of everyone's life!

Luc Van den hove,
President and CEO of imec