

File name: spotlight_on_benelux_-_angoka___invest_ni (720p).mp4

Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

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Daniel Ruiz: I'm Daniel Ruiz. I am the director for Smart Cities and Land Mobility for Angoka. Some of you may be aware of Angoka. It's a start-up specialising in cybersecurity, and in particular, in the flow of information from machines to machines, so anything that is Internet of Things enabled will benefit from what we do. And what we do effectively is create data security systems for high-value assets and processes. We try to take a step forwards and future-proof what already exists, in terms of things like public key identification and other simpler forms of, of cybersecurity, but making sure that when we get the full performance out of quantum, for example, that we are ready for that, that, and can make sure that our critical systems are protected. Angoka has been going for three or four years now. We're based in Belfast in Catalyst, and really enjoying being based in Belfast because of, the resources are there, the kind of the backing, the kind of commitment to this whole field of cybersecurity, the resources, the skills that are being created from the universities there, and just the, the energy that we feel from being in Ireland. That said, we have also set up a base in the Hague in Holland, and that's really why I'm here today, to tell you a bit about why we're doing that, what we're doing, and what's helping us grow in the Netherlands.

The reason why the Netherlands is an interesting market for us, and, and with the Netherlands, I kind of cluster the whole of Benelux countries, so Belgium, Luxembourg as well, is because there is a high degree of investment by those governments in the kinds of infrastructure that we believe benefit from our proposition. In particular, in traffic systems, but in also defence, in high-value manufacturing, and interestingly enough, in agriculture. In the Netherlands, the kind of, the technology that's going into growing flowers and fruits in the Netherlands is, is astonishing, really, for someone who comes from the Midlands of England, where that kind of activity is not quite as advanced. There's an understatement. So defence, agriculture, high-tech, transport, and transport is my personal background. A bit about me. I have done various things, including a running graphic for London. I set up the transport system's innovation centre that could be a catapult for the Department for Business in the UK. And more recently, I was chief executive of a company called Zenzic, which is the hub coordinating the testing and development of connected and autonomous vehicles, and all the mobility issues that sit around them, which again, is prime candidate for cybersecurity, because there are effectively three areas that are critical to the future of mobility. One is the telecommunications to enable the data to flow, for decisions to be made, whether by machines or by machines and people. The second is investment in public perception, public awareness, so the understanding of what these technologies can do, and making sure they're steered in the right direction. And in order for that all to happen, there has to be a flow of data, and that is where the exposure comes to kind of the factors that could put the whole system at risk, and above all, mean that the public loses confidence, or users lose confidence, and that's where cybersecurity comes in. So it's a critical path item for transport, for mobility, and that applies not just to vehicles, but for the infrastructure as well.

Speaker 2: So what's our strategy for expanding into this market? It's, it's fairly straightforward. We know that the market comprises of about four critical areas for us. Defence, traffic and transport, high-tech, and agriculture. We know that there is investment in all those areas by a number of the regions within the Netherlands. We're, we're very well-positioned to talk to people in South Holland in, in particular, because we've, we've established our base at the Hague, but also, we have decided that, we've taken on a board member who's extremely critical. He's very well-positioned, very well-connected, former director general for NATO specialising in cybersecurity, which is clearly a little relevant. And that means that we can, we can make connections at the highest level within the Dutch industry, within Dutch government. We're also using our collections because, for example, I used to run a company called Dynniq, which is, has its parent company in the Netherlands, in Amersfoort, and therefore in traffic in particular, we're well-connected. So, so try to weave in as many of those established connections and relationships as possible is always going to be beneficial. But then identifying, for example, funding sources, including Innovation Quarter, which is similar to Innovate UK in some respects. Innovation Quarter, we've made inroads with, and they're supportive and, and helping pointing us in the right direction. We, of course, are benefiting from our support from Investment Northern Ireland, in, in encouraging us to get out there. I mentioned Innovate UK. Innovate UK have had some funding competitions for companies like ours to invest in, in expanding into other markets. We went to them and said, well, we have some plans for the Netherlands. This is the, kind of the timeline we're looking at. These are kind of the activities we're looking at. And they have funded us to the tune of about £30,000, which inevitably, well, would have been very useful for travel to and from the Netherlands, and organising face-to-face meetings. That is one of the things I'll come back to in a second, because it's inevitably been, it's obviously been tricky. But in summary, with networks, alliances, with funding sources being identified, and with a presence in the country with that registered office and the Dutch board member, that, that kind of encompasses our strategy.

What progress are we making? Well, because of COVID, it's been a little slower than we would have liked. It's been impossible for us to either go to the Netherlands, or for our board member to come over to Belfast. And that's been frustrating, it has to be said, but we have used audiovisual means and videoconferencing and so on. That, that, that's great, but it is limited, and we're hoping that things are going to start to open up over the coming couple of months. All, all signs are moderately positive that we will be able to get over there and actually organise some round trips to sit in front of our already maturing relationships with companies like KPN, the telecommunications company in the Netherlands, with the future mobility park in the Hague, and the future mobility network, to mention but three. So over the next couple of months, we're going to be doing that. We already have engagement with some of the European projects. One in particular is the 5G blueprint. That's a, a collaborative project, which is looking at how tele, teleoperations of, of autonomous vehicles and semi-autonomous vehicles can be made secure and can be optimised. Putting the cyber layer that we bring on top of that will add a lot of value, and that's recognised by the current participants. So we've got a way into those companies, which will go faster when we're face-to-face, but is already moving.

One thing I haven't touched on is the cultural aspects. Having worked, as I say, for a Dutch company for a while, where I was the only non-Dutch member of the board, and, and having worked with our board

member now and the companies I mentioned previously, it's a very interesting country. And it was once described to me as a country where they speak perfect English, but it's a very different language from our own English. And that is because of the culture. They are generally, they. It sounds a bit rude, but Dutch people, in my experience, are exceptionally open, very frank. And English people sometimes struggle with that degree of frankness, but actually, we should, we should welcome it, because it saves an enormous amount of time. If you have a question, you can ask it, and you will get a straight answer, even if it's an uncomfortable answer. And I, I think that's fantastic. So that's something to embrace. The fact that they, the generally Dutch people, especially in this industry of course, do speak exceptionally good English makes it easy, again, to, to work in the Netherlands. So culturally, linguistically, it's a fantastic place.

I'm going to start to draw things to a close. And, and in summary, we have benefited from the support we've had from Invest Northern Ireland. In establishing ourselves in Belfast, the encouragement we've had to, to build bridges elsewhere is also very welcome. The bridge we've built to the Netherlands is helped by that foundation in Belfast, coupled with funding, of course, from Invest NI and from Innovation UK, Innovate UK. We are now deriving further funding from Innovation Quarter and some other funding sources that I can expand on, along with other aspects of this stream of consciousness presentation. If you want to contact me by email afterwards, Invest NI have my details. So the funding has, has been lined up. The presence in the country, we have, and building those networks, those alliances is something that we're working on very hard now that we're, we have a presence. There is an enormous amount of opportunity, because they are a forward-looking country. They have an increasing interest in cybersecurity, as does the UK, but I know that there have been some policy changes or policy evolution in the Netherlands recently, which mean that investment in AI and cybersecurity and similar technologies are very much on their radar, front of mind. So I would encourage any other cybersecurity or tech companies to, to look into the Netherlands. I can't unfortunately attend the Q&A, but as I say, Invest NI have my contact details. I would be very pleased to answer any questions you have afterwards. Thank you very much for listening.