

THE NEXT WEB

Boris Veldhuijzen van Zanten

In Amsterdam, the start-up scene is booming. The leading character in this world? Mr. Boris Veldhuijzen van Zanten, a dandyesque man, serial entrepreneur and social media genius. He didn't finish an MBA, but went to circus school when he was fifteen and studied art. In the nineties, he started to get into the internet business. Needless to say, he likes to play with the rules and have some fun. He has also been called the best-dressed entrepreneur in the Netherlands.

In the TQ building, right above the flower market and across from the Munttoren, he enjoys breakfast on the balcony. Van Veldhuijzen van Zanten: "I always like to sit here and start my day. It's the best view of Amsterdam right here. The story of The Next Web (TNW) is this: It all started out with me and my friend. We were looking for a tech conference to pitch our idea for a start-up and realized that there was none here. So, we created our own. We realized that we had nowhere to promote it, so we also started a blog. That was about 11 years ago and now we are hosting the leading tech conference, have a tech hub here at the TQ building and we have Index, a place where we connect start-ups. My final project in art school was starting up a fake company. That was so much fun that I started doing it for real. There is not much of a difference anyway."

Why is Amsterdam the best place for tech?

"Since Brexit is happening, we see more and more techies coming to the mainland. They go to Berlin, Amsterdam and Paris. Amsterdam is cheap, very accessible, taxes are great for business and it's, of course, the best city in the world to live in. You can hike everywhere. If you have appointments, that's not possible in London of course. It's a great place to reach Europe for the American companies. I love the buzz of this city. Even with the increase in tourism, I teach my daughters to always be nice to all the tourists. They are part of this city too."

"When I first heard about bitcoin, I thought: 'Oh god, this is way too complicated. I'm too old for this shit.'"

Can you describe the Amsterdam tech scene?

"Ah, it's still quite small but it is growing like crazy. But up till now, almost everyone knows each other. There is a lot of good competition, but in a friendly way. I would say we like to help each other out."

I think because the Netherlands is such a small country it is more focused on going outside the borders. We don't have as much venture capital problems. Maybe that's because of the Calvinistic background of the Dutch or maybe because everyone knows each other. It's bad for your

reputation to do stupid things. So, it's cheaper, efficient and Dutch start-ups know how to stand on their own feet. It's not such a big hype that people just invest in anything without even blinking twice. So, it grows a bit slower, but steadily, which is good for business."

And very important: We have some great parties together. At the TQ building we have a lot of start-ups in the building together. We have a really small disco hidden in the building. It's called the World's Tiniest Disco, but I have to disappoint the tourists. It is an invitation-only place. If you bring your business here, you might receive an invitation."

What is the next thing in tech?

"If you think we are smart now, think again. We are still at the very, very beginning. Artificial intelligence will be the next revolution. In a few years, we will look back and think: remember when we had to do everything on the computer ourselves? In the future computers will do your thinking and you will have all the information you need immediately."

Neural technology is moving rapidly these days. Apple is already trying to learn what app you will use next. So, it will start to do your thinking for you. Before you open up your phone, it will have the app that you need opened up for you. That might be magical for our generation, but completely normal for people who grow up with it."

What was your most awkward moment in business?

"I'm absolutely horrible with names and faces. I really don't remember anyone, especially all these guys in the same blue suits. So, one time we had a meeting and I introduced myself to one of the blue-suited men. Apparently, he was one of our most important clients and this was the fourth time I had introduced myself to him. So, now I just keep my mouth shut. My business partner forbade me from ever introducing myself to anyone again."

What are your goals for The Next Web?

"We don't believe in millennials; we believe in Generation T - a group of people not defined by age but who all work with tech professionally. We think we currently reach about 30 million people, but that group is around 300 million people and it continues to grow. Our goal is to be the biggest guide to that Generation T community."



"I thought Google was ugly and Uber was boring."