



## St Gobain Weber Beamix

### Summary:

Read how the adoption of Bitsing transformed departmental focus and cooperation, resulting in increased market share. “Our growth rate is at least twice that of the market” Bas Huysmans, St-Gobain Weber Beamix

### **Interview with Bas Huysmans, Managing Director of Saint-Gobain Weber Beamix, Building Products division**

Saint-Gobain employs 190,000 people in 64 countries. The business has four divisions, each with its own area of expertise. These complement each other in such a way as to make this a global top 100 industrial company, in terms of both innovation and size. The business has seven general and twelve specialised, research institutes, and around a hundred development departments. These resources are used by each of the company’s four divisions – innovative materials, building distribution, packaging materials and building products.

### **How did you use the Bitsing method and what can you tell us about growing at a multiple of the market growth rate?**

Bas Huysmans: “You have to keep moving, always. Standing still means you’re going backwards. To keep moving forward you sometimes have to let go of the security of the old way of doing things. Not easy for some people. In fact, for many in our business, using the Bitsing method was a journey into unknown territory. So, people were of course a bit hesitant in the beginning, wondering what’s going to happen. You always have to take this into account – so it pays to be patient and take things step by step. You don’t have to get it 100% right the first time. People will take you seriously in due course.

“What one discovers in this process is that many still use the ‘I think that ...’ approach. And indeed, people are used to working on the basis of assumptions. What we’ve now done is make things far more fact based – how things are, rather than how we think they are.

There was previously a mentality of, ‘OK, I have a task, so it’s up to me to do it - the way I think best’. People understood the Bitsing method well enough; the challenge was to get them to work according to it. So, we integrated it into our daily operations, step by step. We started by creating awareness of the *Turnover Goal* and that everything we did should result in turnover. This was quite ambitious.

“Five years of recession had resulted in a damaged, unstable construction market. A closer look revealed that people were a bit numbed by the negative experiences of recent years. So, we

immediately started shifting the focus of the organisation – using the *Pencils Philosophy* of the Bitsing method. It emerged that we had invested a lot of time and money in markets, target groups, and products with less than significant shares in our turnover. It was inconceivable, but the vast majority of our turnover derived from 1.3% of our product range.

“Shifting to a realistic focus resulted directly in 20% growth. The *Pencils* are a fantastic tool for convincing everyone in the organisation of the need to change focus.

“This corrected focus led directly to active engagement with the market. We did this by developing an *Uncopyable Proposition* reflecting our leading position as the pioneer of the DIY market: ‘Lead by Origin’. Each of the involved departments took control of their own segment of the Bitsing programme to independently yet consistently deliver programmes around this proposition. It was extraordinary to see how the awareness thus created integrated these previously independently operating departments, and a feeling of togetherness and collegiality emerged as a key element in our organisation.

“First impressions were often negative – and old habits die hard. Initial reactions to new things were often, ‘I’m already so busy’, or ‘Yes, but my approach is very different’. However, as the system and the role of the departments within the model were better understood, acceptance became easier and is now almost automatic.”

### **Can you describe what Bitsing has done for you – in one word?**

“Streamlined! That’s the key word. You came here telling us that everyone within an organisation is busy doing their own thing, while not one of them is involved, from beginning to end, in the entire process. And yes, at Saint-Gobain Weber Beamix we had a Strategic department, Marketing department, a Sales department, an R&D department and a Production department – all doing their own thing. Of course, they engaged each other and had points of contact, but nothing about the interplay was streamlined. So, they weren’t really working with and for each other. Indeed, it was this word, ‘streamlined’, that actually triggered my reaction, which was, ‘This is music to my ears!’ We can do something with this, I thought. The structured approach inherent in Bitsing forces an organisation to also adopt a harmonised, structured approach in order to achieve its common aim. Which is why I then adopted the Bitsing system – a decision that has validated itself in practice.

“The language of Sales is totally different from that of Marketing. Both departments endure a lot of pressure, do a lot of activities and suffer a lot of stress. However, they experience different types of pressure, action and stress, and express this in two, different languages. So, it is difficult to have enough empathy with each other, given this barrier. It’s difficult to engage with each other’s opportunities and problems.

As a result of the Bitsing process, the organisation now shares a common language to a much greater extent. Everyone now knows how to identify an important product; that you can only get a client to buy once he likes you, and so on. It actually doesn’t matter anymore whether you’re on the marketing or sales side, or in production and innovation, you all speak the same language, you understand what is meant and you also see the effects of the work of others on your own part of the business. The interactions between the various disciplines are suddenly far more linked to each other and have become almost visual for the people in the various departments, particularly in Sales, Marketing and After Sales.”

### **Does this give them more respect for each other's work?**

Bas affirms, "Yes. Because you have a better, shared understanding of what the other person is doing, and why you are doing these things. There is also more readiness on all sides to work with each other and help each other. So, what we deliver is now seen as the product of everyone's efforts, which also has a motivating effect. This, in turn, creates more commitment and better performance – and so you have almost a virtuous cycle."

### **And what you're now doing is raising this to the next level?**

"Yes, It's like learning a new language. In the first phase you really do your best to learn the words, the conjugations. So, you get to know the language, but you don't yet speak it. As a company we are in that phase. We can get by with the language – perhaps on holiday, but when it comes to conducting business, we are not yet fluent enough, which is why I took the decision to become more fluent in the language."

### **What other effects have you noticed?**

"Internally, I can see we're beginning to get more insight into the short term – our plans are better. Where we once operated on gut feel in terms of product development and promotions, we are now more planning orientated and therefore can also prepare our internal operations better. So, as regards development – we are more focused on developing. And in Marketing and Sales we are more targeted in our approach. We've experienced distinct advantages in both these areas. Now that Marketing and Sales give more consideration to what we have to do, it's become noticeably easier to communicate their expectations to Production and Logistics.

What's really difficult is not doing the things that we've always done. People have a tendency, in the first instance, to do Bitsing in addition to what they used to do. They see it as increased workload – 'Now they've thought up another one'. But as they take the first steps and start to make progress, they become more enthusiastic and more aware of the fact that Bitsing actually reduces workload."

### **Are you growing at the moment?**

Bas: "Yes. Our growth rate is at least twice that of the market. Which means that we are grabbing market share. And, of course, there's a reason for that. It's partly due to the organisation itself, with its well-structured management. And that, in turn, is a function of the fact that we are more highly focused. And that the decisions we have taken are far more based on facts than feelings. We do still follow our gut feelings, but the decision process has been speeded up enormously by the fact that we've looked at the Bitsing plan. And this, in turn, has given us a far better understanding of the numbers. When you first arrived, Frans, we had just survived a five-year crisis. Things were just lightening up again. We were able to breathe again. You came with a positive message, a very simple message. One that I, as a technical guy, could easily understand. That was very important. It's as simple as it can be. And you presented it in such a simple way that everyone that heard it said, 'Yes, of course, we knew that all along – so yes, let's do it!' It's so logical, it must work. Yes, you arrived at the right moment, with the right message. One that appealed to my need to shake up the internal organisation, organise it better and tighten up the processes. Your logic appealed to me – as did the simplicity of the system. It's what persuaded me to adopt Bitsing!"

Every entrepreneur wants results. There is no shortage of people who invest millions in projects while having no idea of what the investment will produce – as strange as this seems. The success of Bitsing stands or falls in relation to how strictly one executes the Bitsing plan. If we were to partially apply it, it wouldn't work. Of course, you can do other things alongside it – one has to retain a bit of individuality – but I really am convinced that half doing it makes absolutely no sense.

The system is complete. The ‘Lead by Origin’ message is everywhere. On our fleet, our videos, in our promotions and TV commercials, our online presence and so on.

We have delivered so many solutions in so many areas that we have built up really extensive experience over the last 50 years. In principle, we’ve already executed a solution for virtually every problem that arises - and it’s in our records. We can do anything that’s required. Which is why the whole Saint-Gobain Weber Beamix enterprise is designed around flexibility – it’s an important pillar of the organisation. So, everything that we do and everything that we invest in must increase our flexibility – and certainly never limit it.

There will always be ups and downs, but a good mix ensures that you can operate comfortably in your market. Bitsing helped us to focus and concentrate – and sometimes to drop a few things. Things which didn’t generate turnover or weren’t profitable. We did that, and we didn’t go unrewarded. We are currently growing at a rate of 22%.”