



“This is much more than a customer–supplier relationship.”

Fluvius manages infrastructure that is essential to daily life in Belgium. The company provides the distribution of electricity, natural gas, sewage, and heating. The societal shift towards electrification is increasing the pressure on those networks and making robust digital infrastructure more important than ever. For years, Fluvius has relied in part on spotit for that. Kurt Ceulemans, Head of Systems and Operations, and Wouter De Clercq, Head of Central Infrastructure, sat down with Steven Vynckier and Frederik Rasschaert, founders of spotit.

“Outsourcing, with the right partner, is not a weakness, but a strength.”

Wouter De Clercq
(Head of Central Infrastructure at Fluvius)



Fluvius is a large organization managing critical infrastructure. That creates specific challenges in the area of network management.

Kurt Ceulemans: “Absolutely. Society is clearly in the middle of a major shift. Electrification is everywhere today, and Fluvius plays a key role in that. The electricity grids as they were known in the past are no longer sufficient. Of course, they are being expanded and more cables are being added, but that alone will not be enough. Electrification also needs to be supported in another way: by making the IT network smarter. We need to be able to capture, analyze, and respond in real time to large quantities of information coming from the electricity grid. As a result, the networks that transport that information and control are becoming increasingly important. Flexibility is a key concept here.”

Wouter De Clercq: “Our infrastructure is becoming more and more crucial, and our IT network must evolve along with it. Especially in a highly automated environment, it is essential that the organization is already ready today for what tomorrow will require.”

What fundamentally makes Fluvius's IT and OT environment different from that of a traditional organization?

Wouter De Clercq: “First and foremost, I'm thinking about the importance of continuity: the availability of electricity and gas is crucial for society. That is exactly why it is so important that digital components are under control and can be actively steered. It is a fundamental evolution the company is going through today and whose importance will only continue to increase.”

Kurt Ceulemans: “That availability and continuity are now closely tied to convergence. Whereas in the past, clear walls could be built between IT and OT systems, those boundaries now have to be deliberately dismantled. That evolution is necessary to enable flexibility and also to commercialize it. Think of battery parks or companies willing to temporarily reduce production. For that, the link between IT and OT is crucial. Information must be able to flow safely, reliably, and quickly from one domain to the

other so that it can be acted upon immediately. Only then can the electricity grid be kept continuously in balance. A temporary outage of the IT network used to be inconvenient, but the impact remained limited, whereas today a disruption can have direct consequences for the electricity grid and end users.”

Frederik Rasschaert: “An additional challenge is that more and more availability is needed while at the same time more security has to be added. That means the network has to be maintained continuously. And to avoid shutting it down, the network needs to become increasingly redundant.”

Kurt Ceulemans: “Redundant and smarter. In the past, it might have been enough to add an extra component to the network, but today that is no longer sufficient. Now careful thought has to go into the right architecture. That is exactly where the big challenge lies. To support Fluvius in that, strong partners are needed, including spotit.”

The ideal moment to briefly look back at the beginning of your collaboration, in 2017. Why did Fluvius decide at that time to work together with spotit?

Kurt Ceulemans: “For that, I will go even further back in time, to the liberalization of the energy sector, about 20 years ago. At that time, electricity and gas production and distribution were gradually separated from one another, and different organizations emerged, which also meant the IT services had to be separated. It was then decided to outsource a number of IT elements, including parts of server management and parts of digital network management. In an iteration of the tender in 2017, spotit applied for that latter lot.”

Wouter De Clercq: “We were looking for deep technical expertise and operational maturity. Reliability within those specific domains was crucial. At the time, spotit was still a relatively small company. That represented a certain risk, but we saw that the company had the right expertise and a strong operational model. We very consciously took that leap and chose spotit.”

Kurt Ceulemans: “Although spotit was still relatively

young at the time, it fully embraced the challenge and grew along with Fluvius. Over those eight years, a strong track record was built, and the collaboration worked well.”

Last year, after a new tender, the partnership was renewed. Why?

Kurt Ceulemans: “Spotit emerged as the best candidate from the tender. Apart from that, trust is a key element for me. Knowing that we can truly rely on each other.”

Steven Vynckier: “We can truly speak of a partnership here, in good times but also in bad. In IT, problems arise from time to time. It is the way you deal with them that makes the difference. By resolving issues quickly and with as little impact as possible, you demonstrate real collaboration, even in difficult periods.”

Can you consider the collaboration with spotit as a true partnership?

Kurt Ceulemans: “Absolutely. Recently, for example, we were dealing with an organizational challenge and asked spotit how they could support us in that. We greatly appreciate that openness and willingness to think along with us. That is the extra step that makes one plus one equal three.”

Wouter De Clercq: “We work together on a daily basis as one integrated team and communicate openly. Of course, we make the final decisions, but spotit actively thinks along, looks for solutions and opportunities together with us. So this is much more than a standard customer-supplier relationship.”

How are you preparing for the future today?

Which projects are on the roadmap?

Wouter De Clercq: “There are quite a lot of projects underway. We are strongly focusing on further automation of network management and on continuous lifecycle renewal within data and telecom communication. That connectivity with new systems and devices is essential to keep everything online and

operational. The challenges do not stop, so we must continue to invest in digitalization and in the maturity of our organization.”

Kurt Ceulemans: “In the electricity grid alone, we will invest more than ten billion euros over the next ten years. That is a massive operation. Our switching stations are becoming digital, just like other parts of the network. Many people do not know that we also manage a large part of the sewer network. There too, we are fully investing in digitalization, with measurement points in the sewers and digital monitoring of buffers and basins. The same applies to heat, for example in the distribution of residual heat from incineration plants. Everywhere, we are taking steps towards a data-driven organization. Our IT/OT network is the foundation for that.”

Nice to be able to work on that as an IT professional, right?

Wouter De Clercq: “Absolutely. Fluvius is a large organization with a great deal of IT. That is very rewarding, because you can work both broadly and in depth. The new evolutions are an additional challenge that naturally also brings pressure. That requires strong partners to make the right decisions and to continue to grow in maturity.”

Steven Vynckier: “The people who work with us want to continue challenging themselves. And Fluvius offers that challenging environment where they can continue to develop technically and technologically. They also contribute to building various utility services. In addition, there is the one-team feeling, with a symbiosis between two teams, and a partnership in which people truly listen to one another.”

Frederik Rasschaert: “One of the strong points in our relationship is that Fluvius has many challenges within our area of expertise. That is exactly what we deal with on a daily basis. As a result, there is strong involvement within our organization, from senior management to the people on the work floor. That engagement is what helps define our partnership.”

“We need to be able to capture large volumes of information from the electricity network, analyze it, and respond to it in real time. The networks that transport that information are therefore becoming increasingly important.”

Kurt Ceulemans (Head of Systems and Operations at Fluvius)



What should readers especially take away from this?

Wouter De Clercq: "For companies that are also considering outsourcing IT, I want to emphasize that outsourcing with the right partner is not a weakness, but a strength. You bring in someone who thinks along with you, invests alongside you, and takes responsibility."

Kurt Ceulemans: "When choosing the right partner, trust is essential, as well as the certainty that in case of a problem or an opportunity you can rely on that partner. That you can pick up the phone, call each other, and sit down together at the table, with the necessary seriousness and commitment. That is key. Ultimately, you want the network to keep functioning and to be ready for the future as well. And in that, today we have found a strong partner."

Steven Vynckier: "In any case, we are grateful to Fluvius for the trust. At the time, it was a courageous decision to work with a smaller party. Thanks to that trust, we have been able to grow. That is a real win-win situation."

Kurt Ceulemans: "On our side, we are also proud that we have contributed to the growth of a strong Belgian company. That is certainly something worth mentioning."

And how do you look ahead?

Kurt Ceulemans: "Expectations remain high. The challenges continue to evolve; our network will never be 'finished.' It is a continuous collaboration in which we take the next steps together. And in that, we continue to rely on spotit."

Wouter De Clercq: "Spotit has by now clearly positioned itself as an expert and as a driving force behind innovation. We count on them to continue to take the lead in the future within their domains and to keep deepening that expertise."

Steven Vynckier and Frederik Rasschaert: "Challenge accepted!"

Who is Fluvius?

Fluvius is the utility company responsible for building, managing, and maintaining distribution networks for electricity, natural gas, sewer systems, and heating.

Fluvius also manages the municipal public lighting infrastructure. In total, the company manages 230,000 kilometers of utility lines and 7 million connections. Fluvius is active in all Flemish cities and municipalities.