

A man with grey hair, wearing a blue and white plaid jacket over a dark blue shirt, is smiling and looking towards the camera. He is standing on the deck of a ship. In the background, there is a large white radar dome and other ship equipment against a clear blue sky. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

Sjors van Ruiten leads Praxis Automation Technology to world top in maritime technology in 40 years

From zero to 6.000 ships sailing with our equipment

Superyachts, naval frigates and the largest container ships in the world: all of these vessel types feature hardware and software produced by Praxis Automation Technology. The company from Leiderdorp, the Netherlands develops innovative systems for the maritime sector. Owner, and creative mind, Sjors van Ruiten has been at the company for 40 years, though he's the last person to boast about it.

Sjors (64) prefers not to be the centre of attention and you won't find him on social media, either. According to his wife, however, there are plenty of reasons to put the major shareholder of Praxis Automation in the spotlight. "Sjors started out as an employee in a small company that had zero influence in the maritime market. We are now a global top three player in maritime technology. This is largely due to his creativity and perseverance."

Driving force

Florina van Ruiten-David is proud of her husband's successes. Since the 1990s, he has been the driving force behind the Dutch company that specializes in navigation, ship automation and electric propulsion. Florina: "We design and produce everything independently. We've made this into an efficient process at Praxis Automation. We have a broad product range, are constantly innovating and have a fantastic team of 150 colleagues.

In addition to our head office in Leiderdorp, we have three locations in China, Singapore and Vietnam. Sjors has built all that up in 40 years." The owner himself thinks all the fuss about his 40th anniversary is over the top. But, according to his wife, that assessment does not do justice to his many years of hard work. This is the reason for this – a joint interview about what drives Sjors van Ruiten, the results the company has achieved and his dreams for the future.

Sustainable propulsion

The discussion takes place in a meeting room featuring various demonstration models. With its large screens, the room has the appearance of a ship's bridge. The computers have electronic charts and alarm and control systems providing an overview of operations and ensuring safety at sea. The company's latest innovation is also there; a battery tower with an electric motor for sustainable ship propulsion.

'Sjors' strength lies in his ability to continually reimagine electronic solutions.'

To being, we take a look at the chronological development of the company. The timeline starts in 1965. This was the year Italian company Praxis Instruments opened a Dutch branch in Leiden producing alarm systems for the shipping and petrochemical industries. The company was taken over by the Carlo Gavazzi group in 1980. Sjors has been working as an electronics developer in the maritime department since 1983. He developed the Mini-Guard: a small alarm system with eight channels that experiences great demand in the maritime sector. But the other branch within the company, petrochemicals, is less successful. "At the end of the 1980s, petrochemicals had a much larger share in the company than the shipping branch. However, three large petrochemical customers suddenly switched to competitors, leading to numerous redundancies. After that, only the maritime branch remained." Sjors still experiences pain upon remembering the redundancies. It was, however, part of a learning curve. It taught him that a business with only three or four clients is not successful, and that to stay afloat it is necessary to continually innovate. This knowledge was to be the foundation for his success. Eventually, the Italian owner lost interest in the company and began, gradually, to divest his shares to employees. In 1999, Sjors acquired a majority shareholding.

Chrysanthemum grower

From his father (a horticulturalist from Roelofarendsveen) Sjors learned a wise lesson at an early age. Since childhood, Sjors has had to help in the greenhouse, growing chrysanthemums. With this, Van Ruiten the Elder taught his son the importance of entrepreneurship and standing on your own two feet financially. When he gave his son an electronics construction kit as a gift, the 12-year-old Sjors didn't know what to do with it to begin with. He quickly learned, however, to build radios and amplifiers. "I learned very quickly that my passion was not for flowers, but for electronics. This passion for technology has stayed with me to the present day."

Sjors van Ruiten hopes to remain involved with the company for another 20 years. "The demand for our products is increasing. We have been making a profit for years and the working atmosphere is good. I am proud of what we have achieved. We have built this all up ourselves."



Sjors' strength lies in his ability to continually reimagine electronic solutions. The result of this is a complete automation and navigation product line for international shipyards, vessel owners and installation companies. The Mini-Guard was followed by the Maxi-Guard and then the Mega-Guard lines – increasingly comprehensive alarm and control systems for seagoing vessels, backed up with the guarantee of years of support.

Years of product support

“The latter point in particular is what makes us unique,” says Sjors. “We have a global network of service and maintenance points and guarantee 20 years of product support for ship owners. This is not always easy, particularly in a dynamic digital world, but we make the hardware and software ourselves. This puts us in a good position to extend the lifetime of the systems for the long-term. This is an important selling point; after all, the life of a ship is long and owners like to be able to work with equipment they are familiar with.”

All electronics are produced and tested in the company's production department in Leiderdorp. 40,000 printed circuit boards roll out of the machines each year. “All tailor-made. That also makes us unique,” says Florina. “We have everything in-house and, as a result, can produce better and more efficiently. This ensures a competitive price.”

‘This allows us to equip larger ships with electric propulsion.’

Florina has been the financial and marketing expert in the company for 20 years. She first met Sjors in her native Romania in the late 1990s. They sat next to each other during a dinner and couldn't stop talking. Florina has a background in economics and maritime law and was a bank director in Bucharest at the time. Eighteen years ago, she left Romania for love and married Sjors.

TechCraft-Strategic Duo

The pair are a mix of technical skill, craftsmanship and strategic thinking: Sjors as a creative innovator, Florina as the driving force in the background. “When I started here, we had 25 employees. Now there are 95 colleagues in the Netherlands, and around 55 in Asia,” she says. “Our company has grown organically. The software engineers in Vietnam and Singapore work closely with the draftsmen and project engineers in the Netherlands. We can easily do our work remotely.”

The Praxis team has a lot of high-quality knowledge and experience. For example, in 2006, the company developed its



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own dynamic positioning system that keeps seagoing vessels in position, independent of wind and current. Initially Praxis encountered a lot of scepticism; such a system is, after all, very complex to develop.

The team, however, persevered, having confidence in its own power of innovation. The DP system was tested extensively on an 18 metre electric yacht – the company’s very own floating innovation laboratory. Praxis managed to convince clients and insurance companies and the system was approved. Today, numerous vessel owners, particularly in the offshore and yachting sectors, are using the DP1, DP2, DP3 system.

Environmentally responsible shipping

Providing a boost to environmentally responsible maritime operations, the company’s development of electric and hybrid propulsion in 2017 followed a similar pattern. “We began with relatively small propulsion systems with lithium batteries up to 750kW for sustainable shipping. This was followed by the 2.5 megawatt project: the development and production of a 2.5 megawatt electric motor with associated frequency controller and a battery container with a capacity of 2.5 megawatt hours.

This allows us to equip larger ships with electric propulsion. This was quite a challenge, as developing an electric motor is very different from producing printed circuit boards. However, because we make everything in-house, we also know how to fix the errors.” While the company has received a lot of recognition internationally for this innovation, the Dutch market appears to be somewhat reluctant presently. “It always takes a little longer here than elsewhere. But the port authorities in Singapore and South Korea are already using our hybrid system. I am convinced that the Netherlands will follow suit.”



Praxis Netherlands head office, Leiderdorp



Strengthening the future

From February 2024, Benjamin van Dam is the new director of the company. Sjors van Ruiten will, however, remain in the picture as strategic thinker behind new products. He wants to pass on his knowledge to the new generation, saying, “Shipping and electronics are still my hobby, why should I stop?” Sjors still travels around the world for the business, recently ordering two new machines in China, for example. However, together Florina and Sjors are now making more time for family, friends and sports. Sjors is a sporty entrepreneur: “It’s while I’m skating, cycling or running, that I get the best ideas for new products.” He hopes to remain involved with the company for another 20 years. “The demand for our products is increasing. We have been making a profit for years and the working atmosphere is good. I am proud of what we have achieved. We have built this all up ourselves.” As such, there is no question of a takeover at the current time, as Florina explains, “In recent years we have received good offers and rejected them, because a bag of money does not make us happier. We also feel too responsible for our staff. And we have seen too often that a takeover turns out wrong.”



Praxis Automation Technology with its main office in The Netherlands, and branch offices in Singapore, China and Vietnam has more than 150 experienced and skilled employees. Taking in consideration the 44 global service & sales locations, Praxis has more than 450 people worldwide experienced in Praxis systems.

By being at the helm of our own innovation, production and service, we deliver consistent, verified quality and security. We guarantee the availability of spare parts and support for at least 20 years after purchase. A one-time investment is sufficient for our customers. Our products are designed to last the lifetime of a ship.