In the picture

Limecraft - Powerful workflows for video production

By Nico Deblauwe

If you've never heard of Limecraft, you're clearly not working in the media sector. Their SaaS platform provides integrated workflows for media management, scripted and unscripted TV, and subtitling and localisation. It is used by leading broadcasting companies – such as BBC, VRT, NPO… – and production firms of which De Mensen or Hotel Hungaria might ring a bell (at least if you are Belgian). NCP Flanders went to Ghent to interview Maarten Verwaest, CEO and cofounder, about how he sees Horizon 2020.

How did Limecraft get involved in a Horizon 2020 funded project?

We were contacted by YLE, the Finnish public broadcaster, who is one of our clients. Together with ambitious researchers from Aalto university, they were involved in drafting the MeMad project, and noticed that our technology could fit nicely within the project scope. We had licenses for some of the IP that could bootstrap some parts of the project, and as our development roadmap is partially driven by client needs, YLE knew that we were also open to research collaborations.

How important is research for Limecraft?

Let me give an example using one of our key features, speech recognition in media management. The idea was already there in 2006, and it took 6 years to build a

working prototype. By 2014 we had a unique product on the market but it's only recently that we saw similar functionalities appearing in competitors' products. But always only a shim of what our product has to offer. We have thus acquired a unique market position, because we allowed ourselves to dream (vision), created a roadmap to implement the different key aspects (research) and kept listening to the end-user needs (close-to-market). So, research certainly is a core part of our DNA.

How does Limecraft fund its research?

All of Limecraft's offering is very technology-intensive, and supports the most demanding workflows in the production of audio-visual media. To achieve the right product-market match, we faced a significant development effort, funded by early adopters (50%) as well as by regional and European research grants (30%), complemented with paid-in equity (20%). The key benefit of such a financing strategy is that the solution a priori matches the customer's requirements. Given that we successfully contracted some of the largest broadcasters, producers and post-production facilities worldwide, this clearly was the right approach.

When clients have specific needs or feature requests, we propose a project; this client-driven innovation finances about half of the R&D budget. The remainder is funded by Flemish and European subsidies. This mix is healthy, and

protects us from becoming too dependent of subsidies. Limecraft will only join a project proposal if it is in line with our roadmap.

The average success rates of Horizon 2020 are rather low (10-15%). What made the MeMAD project score so high, and thus get financed?

The focus. The original idea was already good, but in the draft phase we removed a lot of non-essential features to make the core idea really stand out. It's a consistent consortium where each partner is needed. Industrial partners, like Limecraft, have a more commercial focus which helps in fine-tuning the project impact, which in turn provides good feedback for the project goals. Besides focus, a good final editor is essential as the proposal needs to communicate the vision, ambition and impact it will have.

Once the project is funded, how does that affect the "normal" activities at Limecraft?

It doesn't really change things for us. We are in the habit of developing both features and core aspects in close collaboration with clients and we treat the MeMAD project partners similarly. This week we even have a hackathon going on – half of the people you see are Fins working on the integration of different modules into a working demo. And yes, there is some administration done of – e.g. some deliverables should be written, and financial reports need to be ready – but that's not impossible if planned well.

This clearly is joint research – how do you deal with the generated IP?

Actually the way of dealing with it as proposed in the template consortium agreement (e.g. DESCA) is quite good. During the project all partners have access to the

needed components through free development licenses. After the project, when we go to the market with (parts of) the results, a commercial license must be negotiated for those components that we continue to use. This kind of negotiations needs to be done with "normal" suppliers too, and so they are part of the normal business game.

Limecraft has an international footprint. What does your European network look like?

As the media sector is fairly international, the main events and organisations have large-scale too. At fairs like IBC, we dominantly aim at targeting prospects, speaking with clients (quality feedback is always welcome), scouting new suppliers (as we integrate third party components) and even potential resellers. So we are pretty visible within our niche. A bit less commercial are the events and technology workgroups (e.g. on the potential of AI) of the EBU –originally the European network of European public broadcasters, that are now also open to suppliers. These touchpoints are important, but it wouldn't work without our clear focus and strong value proposition in our market. Having that, it is true that partnerships with FIT (that supports the joint participation of Flemish enterprises to IBC) and VRT (that is one of the lead Belgian partners within the EBU) leverage our potential.

Limecraft offers a comprehensive collaboration environment for film and video production, designed for maximum productivity during the shooting, story editing and post-production processes. Production facilities, producers and broadcasters build their private cloud with our workflow solution that seamlessly integrates with existing storage and media asset management services. Our unique proxy-based approach increases productivity and allows the producer to explore new creative avenues.

Limecraft was founded in 2010 by Maarten Verwaest and Nico Oorts. Currently it employs 10 persons; they expect some more growth as there are open vacancies… More information can be found on https://www.limecraft.com.

MeMAD – Methods for Managing Audiovisual Data Combining Automatic Efficiency with Human Accuracy

This 3-year project unites 8 partners (4 from Finland, 1 from Belgium, 2 from France and 1 from UK) and has a budget of almost 3.5 million EUR.

Europe is very open about the projects funded with public money under Horizon 2020. Facts about the MeMad project can be found in CORDIS (database with info on all EU-supported R&D). In addition, there are tools that build on these raw data and present visualisations, see e.g. the Vinnova tool. More interesting probably, is the project's website, https://memad.eu/, where you find more concrete information about the research challenges and partners.