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Image courtesy of Havenwerk.

At work in the port

Havenwerk has been a constant presence in the Zeeland part of North Sea Port for 20 years. What started as a simple domain name has since grown into a specialised personnel service provider for ports and industrial logistics.

That domain name naturally requires some explanation, and director Ton Veraart is happy to clarify. "The name Havenwerk was initially created as the domain name havenwerk.nl. This domain was registered for the Transferpunt Haven project. This project, for which I was the lead applicant, was set up to connect education and employment in the port sector. The project ended in 2004, and I decided to take over the business and the domain name. That same year I launched the current company Havenwerk."

Flying start

"We initially focused on seconding forklift drivers to various terminals in the port and to port-related industries. Although

we no longer exclusively supply forklift drivers, the core of our work remains the same. We had quite a flying start in 2005, partly because until 2011 we were responsible for the entire raw materials logistics at the aluminium factory Pechiney and its successors in Vlissingen-Oost. This established our name and allowed us to expand quickly. Today, the company, which still has its headquarters in Zeeland, has grown into a successful organisation with 160 skilled professionals in the field."

Flexinuity

Over the years, some things have changed, according to Ton Veraart. "A term that has always characterised Havenwerk is flexinuity. This stands for flexibility, continuity, and quality. Due



Director of Havenwerk Ton Veraart (l), and manager Niek Mast (r) in front of Business Center Seaports.

to the currently tight labour market, flexibility has somewhat receded into the background, and clients now value long-term commitments more. Still, there are nuances. In port logistics, flexibility remains essential, since loading and unloading vessels requires quick responses – vessels do not always arrive at the planned time and often need to depart quickly. Also, some branches, such as heavy lifting and rigger work, still ask for flexibility and ad-hoc planning.”

Niek Mast, manager at Havenwerk adds, “That’s why it’s important to have people on standby and ready to work. In industry, however, there is more need for continuity, since processes generally follow a fixed and predictable pattern. Yet even here, current geopolitical and economic developments are creating a certain demand for flexibility.”

Permanent contracts

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with us”, Niek Mast continues. From this position, they work for various clients. This guarantees continuity, something valued by both our clients and employees. It’s not surprising that we now have many loyal and satisfied clients, as well as employees with long service records. One example is Rob, a true figurehead of Havenwerk. He has been with us for eleven years and, thanks to his experience, can work for at least ten of our clients. Each year he typically works at around four different companies. For him, the advantage is the variety combined with the security of a permanent job, with all the associated benefits



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Image courtesy of Havenwerk.

and conditions. For our clients, it ensures they receive a skilled professional who knows his way around and doesn't require additional explanation. In that sense, he is no different from their own permanent employees."

Portschool

"Rob is a great example of our approach and the role our employees play in it", Niek Mast states. "I want to emphasise this, because while flexibility is seen as a positive in business in general, flexible labour is not always considered equal. This unfair perception has been created by certain agencies that are less conscientious and focus mainly on short-term gains, paying little attention to skills and reliability. It should be clear that we are very different from that, and the market recognises this. All our people are skilled and motivated. With our Portschool project, we even train people ourselves, together with various clients, ensuring they can get started quickly with the necessary basic knowledge."

Safety first

Ton Veraart continues, "In addition to permanent contracts and the expertise of our people, another key aspect that sets Havenwerk apart is the importance we place on safe working. All our employees are professionally trained and hold valid VCA certification along with all other required work-related certificates. Regular toolbox meetings, proper PPE, and a modern certified safety management system keep our people up to date with the safety standards and requirements in both industry and port logistics. We take safe working so seriously that we even select our clients accordingly. We want to be sure our people end up in safe workplaces, because we believe that craftsmanship and safe working go hand in hand."

Feeling at home

Of the people working for Havenwerk, about half are employed in the ports of Rotterdam and Amsterdam. The other half work in the Zeeland region, mainly in the ports of Terneuzen and Vlissingen. "Zeeland is still important to us. Unfortunately, due to legislation, it's not possible for our people to work in the Ghent part of North Sea Port," says Ton Veraart. "That's quite odd, really, and it would be great if arrangements could be made for this. It would only strengthen the success story of North Sea Port. It remains strange that we can place people in Amsterdam or Groningen, 200km from our base in Zeeland, without any problem, but not in Ghent, just 50km away. We feel at home here and have no intention of leaving."

Relocated

Recently, Havenwerk moved to premises at the Engelandweg in Vlissingen-Oost. "For the past few years, we rented the Witte Huis in Vlissingen, a landmark building in a beautiful location," says Ton Veraart. "That lease has ended, and although we've been considering several building sites in Vlissingen for some time, nothing concrete has come of it yet. That's why we're pleased to have been able to rent space at Business Center Seaports in Vlissingen-Oost. We actually started out in this part of the port, and it feels good to be back. It's also very convenient, being so close to many of our clients. So actually, we are very happy with this recent move and new location."

[HAVENWERK.NL](https://www.havenwerk.nl)