

## **30 years of constant growth**

**Not many products manage to satisfy customers' needs day in day out, year after year – without major modifications at least. Or to achieve a sustained increase in sales. Container Centralen, however, has succeeded in doing just that with the leading product on the market for plant transport in Europe.**

Most businesses now realise that it is important to listen to customers so as to be able to meet their needs in the best possible way. So when the business and its most important core product have been created by the customers and users anyway, it should be possible to get it right. This is no doubt an important factor in the international and ever increasing success of the Dutch/Danish company Container Centralen (CC).

### **A common European standard**

It all started more than 30 years ago, when a group of Danish flower exporters joined forces to create a common standard for flower transport. The cost of transport and waste caused by damage to pot plants in transit had quite simply got out of hand. So if the Danish flower industry wanted to hold its own in the face of increasing international competition, something would have to be done.

Sampot, the trade association for pot plants at the time, therefore set up a project aimed at finding a joint solution to the transport problem. GASA Denmark was in charge of the association's administration and secretariat, with other participants including the major GASA companies that existed in 1976, Exposa, Bøg Madsen and Jakobsen & Jokumsen A/S (later Lemflora A/S).

A flower trolley with adjustable shelves, the CC Container, was developed in cooperation with a Danish manufacturer. The CC Container was designed to fit into the refrigerated trucks used to transport flowers in Europe and took account of the requirement that the empty containers should take up as little space as possible on the return journey.

### **Flying start**

The first CC Containers were ordered from the manufacturer in early September 1976, with the new business becoming a reality on 20 December 1976, when the first customer contract was signed. By the end of the year there were already 10,000 CC Containers on contract in Denmark. However, this was not just the birth of a new product, but, more importantly, the advent of a whole new system – now known in the industry as the "CC Pool System".

The CC Container in itself represented a minor revolution in the flower industry, but the system to which the container belonged was the real landmark. When someone signs a contract for a certain number of CC Containers, that number is at his disposal and he can exchange them one for one, e.g. a grower hands 20 full CC Containers over to the hauler and can receive 20 empty containers in return. If he wants, he can also "bank" the containers and withdraw them at one of CC's many depots in Europe. This is known as the Transfer Service. Nor does he have to worry about repairs and maintenance, as they are covered by the contract.

### **The system spreads**

To begin with, of course, there were no depots abroad, but the system spread rapidly in Europe through the Danish flower exporters' customers. First in Sweden, then in Germany, Norway and Holland. As activity increased, it soon became necessary to set up a separate organisation to take care of the administration and management of CC Containers, so Container Centralen A.m.b.A. was born in 1980. The first Dutch customers in the form of auctions and exporters began using the CC Pool System with the CC Container at around the same time. In 1989 CC became a limited

company in collaboration with VGB, the Dutch Association of Wholesale Trade in Horticultural Products, which has a 50% shareholding.

Now development took off with a vengeance, and in 1990 there were half a million CC Containers in circulation in Europe. CC offices began to spring up in Europe and, more recently, on the other side of the Atlantic too. As a result, CC colleagues are celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> birthday of the CC Pool System and CC Container in offices in Denmark, the UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Holland, Poland, the Czech Republic, Latvia and the USA. Quite a few cakes will be needed, not to mention candles!

### **Still going strong**

Although Container Centralen itself has not changed much, a great deal has happened in 30 years. The CC Container has been joined by a number of other products, including roll cages, rolling pallets and returnable crates. And a number of services have been added to the CC Pool System, with the Transfer Service still growing and retaining its importance. Meanwhile, the Dutch/Danish company is continuing to expand – as ever with the CC Container, which is still going strong, as its driving force.

[Picture caption – 'CC\_Container\_in\_use.jpg']: The CC Container, which, together with the CC Pool System, has become the European standard for flower transport. Still going strong after 30 years on the market.

[Picture caption – 'ccc\_storefront\_300dpi.jpg']: In the open CC Pool System empty containers can be exchanged for full ones – or vice versa. But it is also possible to obtain empty containers somewhere else entirely and on a different day. This is known as the Transfer Service.

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