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Down2Earth Capital Invests in Contraload

Venture capital fund Down2Earth participates in Contraload



Down2Earth Capital is investing into Contraload, an Antwerp-based company specialising in the rental and management of plastic pallets and a range of intermediate bulk containers.

Contraload is one of the biggest European players in the ‘pooling’ of plastic pallets and containers, involving rental, retrieval and cleaning of this equipment. The company, based in Niel, owns in excess of 650,000 units.

Sylvain Naets and Jesse Sels, the two managing directors of Contraload, founded the company about 10 years ago with the help of a business angel. Kloosterboer came in as the majority shareholder two years later. With the Dutch logistics group on board, Contraload launched on a European scale. Since then, they have established offices in the Netherlands, France and the U.K.

To ensure further growth, at the end of last year Contraload went in search of a new partner. Eventually, they settled on Down2Earth. Within the framework of the deal, the venture-capital fund put 5 to 10 million euros on the table. They bought out Kloosterboer and, in the process, obtained just under 50 percent of the shares. Sels and Naets, before minority shareholders, now own the rest of the shares and thus hold a small majority.

Among Contraload’s clientele are consumer goods giants such as Unilever, Procter & Gamble, and Nestle. “Almost 90 percent of our turnover comes from food companies. The raw materials they use – such as fats, starches, spices – are transported on and in our carriers from their suppliers to their factories”, explained Naets.

“Sustainability is an important argument in our offers to customers because, thanks to our services, they can effectively reduce their carbon footprint (CO₂)”. This year, Contraload are targeting revenue of nearly 20 million euros and an operating cash flow (EBITDA) of more than 6 million.

The goal, with Down2Earth on board, is for the company to assert themselves and take new steps via internationalisation by offering new services and tapping into new sectors. Contraload will thus strive for more than 20 percent growth over the next few years. In recent periods, turnover has increased by 15 percent on an annual basis.

Contraload is the third and largest investment Down2Earth has made since the fund was established a year ago. The first transaction involved Conteyor, a company specialising in reusable textile packaging, mainly for the automotive industry (mirrors, spoilers, and so on). This was followed a few months later by an investment in Hertecant Flanges, a manufacturer of stainless-steel flanges for the petrochemical and energy sectors.