



VANMOOF makes urban cycling safer with Vodafone M2M

VANMOOF is a Ready Business

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Empowering smart cyclists in a smart city

There are cycling enthusiasts, there are anti-cyclists. Between these two extremes sit the majority: people who would quite like to cycle but find something puts them off. For some, it's safety. For others, it's the risk of their bike being stolen. Some may see cycling as too fast or too technical. Whatever the excuse, if transport chiefs and urban planners are to unlock city gridlock, more commuters need to be encouraged to swap the car for the bike.

A young, ambitious company from Amsterdam may have the solution.

The challenge

Creating the world's first urban commuter bike

If you want to build a commuter bike, there are worse places to start than Amsterdam. The city is home to one of Europe's most sophisticated bike cultures. From the perspective of a cyclist, the town planning and transport infrastructure, while not perfect, puts most cities to shame.

Amsterdam is home to VANMOOF, a Dutch start-up that hopes to transform the urban bike market. VANMOOF pursue one goal only: helping the ambitious city dweller to move around town faster, more confidently and in utmost style. It removed all the fancy functions and re-designed the bicycle with inner city use in mind. Producing maintenance-light, weatherproof and hassle-free urban commuter bikes to discover cities all over the world. The company was founded in 2008. Like many entrepreneurial businesses its founders had spotted a gap in the market.

"We were 25-27, the age when most buy their first serious bike, and there was no attractive option out there," says Niels Bark, VANMOOF's Sales and Marketing Manager. "We saw plenty of product development in the car market, but nothing meaningful for commuter bikes.

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Niels Bark, Sales and Marketing Manager, VANMOOF

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He says the company started with the mission "to build a beautiful bike". There are four elements to this. Firstly, include only the functionality the rider needs – anything extra adds weight and complexity. Secondly, maintain a minimalist design. Third: "Make it appealing," says Bark. "The bike is a status symbol. People have to want it."

Finally, it has to be affordable. "€2,000 is not a price most people can afford. We needed something nearer €600," explains Bark.

Six years on and VANMOOF bikes can be found worldwide, from Japan to the US. They are sold in bike shops and online, through VANMOOF's website. The company plans to open its own branded retail outlets.

"I think we've created a new market segment," says Bark, "the urban commuter bike."

Its latest target is the electric-bike market. "E-bikes are traditionally sold to 'granddads'," says Bark. "Our challenge was to bring this technology to a whole new market. To do that, we wanted to hide the technology – make an electric bike that didn't look like an electric bike."

The VANMOOF e-bike design includes a small battery, integrated in the frame, a small power unit on the front well, and GPS connectivity. "We realised if we could add GPS connectivity, we could create a means to track a stolen bike," says Bark. "Bike theft is a major deterrent in people buying and using a bike."

The solution

Improving the cycling environment

VANMOOF uses Vodafone Global M2M SIMs, integrated in the bike frames, to provide connectivity for all its e-bikes. It means VANMOOF can manage all SIMs from one platform, with price consistency, for bikes shipped anywhere in the world. Vodafone connectivity, and the Global SIMs' ability to roam to a secondary network if needed, makes for a more robust tracking solution.

VANMOOF

“Connectivity means we could monitor distance covered, send service alerts or lock the bike remotely. Things become even more interesting when we mesh this data with other transport data. If we can map the routes of thousands of cyclists, could we help urban planners develop better cycling infrastructure?”

Taco Carlier, Co-Founder , VANMOOF

“We work with Philips on lighting because they’re the experts – the same reason we work with ABUS on the locks. It made sense to work with Vodafone on mobile technology. Vodafone has the expertise and the brand power,” says Taco Carlier, VANMOOF’s co-founder.

Partnering with market-leading brands brings more than just a technology edge, he says: “We’re a start-up, with a small marketing budget. We need to work with partners who can bring something extra. It is an asset to us to have Vodafone’s credibility and long-term vision.”

Long-term thinking is a big part of the VANMOOF ethos. It aspires to be more than a bike manufacturer; it sees a day where it provides insurance, service schedules, the full care package.

“The urban bike of today will not look like the urban bike of five years’ time,” says Carlier. “We’re always evolving. There are many more ways for us to create a connection with consumers.”

Connectivity, he says, can be so much more than bike tracking: “The options are unlimited. If we can convince more people to take up cycling because they see their bike is safe, great, but there is more we can do with this data.”

The future is smart bikes, connected to a city grid, feeding bikes live data. For now GPS connectivity is only available in the VANMOOF e-bikes with their built-in batteries. Carlier expects Vodafone Global SIMs to be on standard bikes as soon as the design team figures out a power solution.

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This creates a positive loop. More cyclists create more data, and more data creates better conditions for cyclists. “We believe people will use bikes more often if they offer an advantage,” says Carlier. “For instance, a smart city could have traffic lights recognise cyclists: the lights turn green when cyclists approach. If a city is serious about improving its cycling infrastructure this is now a feasible option.

“We don’t hate cars, we own cars, but there is an ultimate urban transport solution where you don’t need a car all day. If we can help create an environment for cyclists where the bike is the most important transport in town, then we’ve done a good job.”

The bottom line

- Enables a robust bike tracking solution, combating bike theft
- Ensures global connectivity redundancy from one SIM, managed off one platform, simplifying worldwide go-to-market
- Boosts marketing and brand credibility, partnering with a global communications leader

About the customer

- Netherlands bike manufacturer founded in 2008
- Creates urban commuter bikes, sold in Europe, Asia and North America
- Its latest product, the e-bike, includes GPS connectivity, helping combat bike theft
- vanmoof.com



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