

By Lucia M.J. Geurts

# Marc van der Chijs: "Being an entrepreneur is great"

*The world is flat*, John Friedman's bestseller on the globalised world in the 21st century, is his favourite book. He loves the good life – which, for him, includes endurance sports and travel – as much as he loves the Internet and innovative business ideas, not to mention "smart people". Without a doubt he belongs to that category, given his magnificent success as an entrepreneur in China. Maastricht University alum Marc van der Chijs (36) is CEO of Spil Games Asia, international number one in online gaming; co-founder of Tudou.com, the world's biggest online video and podcasting platform; and angel investor in start-up businesses in China. A portrait of an innovative leader.

For Marc Van der Chijs, the Netherlands has always been too small. This may hark back to his youth, which he partly spent abroad. When he came to Maastricht in 1991 to study economics, he knew for sure he would go abroad to work once he graduated. He chose to study International Management for that very reason. Directly after receiving his degree, he left for Daimler-Benz in Stuttgart, and worked for that company for seven years as a controller in Germany, Indonesia, Beijing and elsewhere. He liked China, not only because he met his wife Grace there, but also because of its business climate. And over the years, Van der Chijs found that he had a nose for entrepreneurship. In 2002 he decided to quit his

job, study Chinese at the Beijing Foreign Language University and start his own business. Now, seven years later, he is a hugely successful entrepreneur and enjoys international renown.

### Games

It started with a consulting agency for entrepreneurs who wanted to settle in China. Two years later, in 2004, Van der Chijs had the idea of setting up a podcasting site together with a Chinese friend, Gary Wang. This was his second business: Tudou.com. "Podcasting was still in its infancy; we were the first company of this kind in China and were doing our thing even before YouTube came about. Now Tudou is the world's

largest online video platform. I'm no longer involved in its operations but I'm still on the board, involved in overseeing management and strategy matters."

Another two years later, in 2006, Spill Group Asia (now Spil Games) was established. "Tudou had become a true Chinese company, tough and fast growing. I didn't feel at home anymore. It had also become too technical for me. As it happens, I got a phone call from Spill Group, a games company from Hilversum. They asked me to help set up a Chinese branch. I realised pretty quickly that this had enormous potential and could develop into something big." And so Van der Chijs

became CEO of the now independent enterprise that deals in 'casual games', small games you can play for a few minutes at a time. "We make sure that there are new games every week. With 35 million 'unique visitors' per month in China alone and 100 million internationally, we're number two on the Chinese market and number one worldwide. We also operate in Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia and India, and publish in 20 languages. We have 80 people on the payroll and have still room to grow."

### Success criteria

His move from Tudou to Spill Group is an example of coincidence and luck, the latter being a crucial success factor for entrepreneurs. It is a question of "being in the right place at the right time", says Van der Chijs. And he adds: "But you also create your own luck. By being involved in lots of things, you increase the chance of the right one coming along."

Luck alone, however, is not enough. It is merely an accompanying factor. According to Van der Chijs, three basic characteristics are necessary to succeed as an entrepreneur: "First, self-confidence – a lot of self-confidence. You have to be convinced that you can do it. Related to that, you can't be afraid of risks. On the contrary, you have to consciously seek out risks. And the third characteristic is perseverance. Starting up a business and running it is very hard. Don't underestimate that. Just consider the horrendous competition. There are so many moments where you think: I'm going to quit. But you have to carry on. You have to see the challenge in each and every setback. Take the financial crisis, for example. Naturally, we're also struggling with it, particularly in terms of advertising, where we have 30 to 40% less



turnover. But that forces you to be innovative, to think up new concepts."

### Being an entrepreneur is great

In all discussions with Van der Chijs, the many interviews in print, on TV or for online publication, his great enthusiasm shines through. Do the things you like and never stand still. If you want to grow, you have to continuously reflect on the market and develop new ideas. This is the advice he gives to start-up businesses in China, of both locals and foreigners, which he supports not just with sound counsel but also financially as an angel investor (around €50,000 to €100,000 per company). "I like investing in new initiatives. Being an entrepreneur is great. It starts with a good idea and a good story. I have to be able to understand it and believe that the person in question will actu-

ally be able to pull it off. The advantage for me is not just that I can benefit financially. It also yields synergy. Through regular contact with young entrepreneurs I can expand my network, and I'm interested in the technologies they're using."

### Endurance sport

The comparison with a top sportsman is hard to miss. It is therefore not surprising that Van der Chijs is a passionate endurance athlete. He is a creditable marathon runner, and has cycled the 1200 kilometres through the Himalayas from Lhasa in Tibet to Kathmandu in Nepal. Together with his friend Gary Wang and his father. He also climbed the nearly 6000 metres of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. The 4000-metre Mount Kinabalu in Borneo (Malaysia) is next on his list. "It'll be fantastic, a great challenge. That's what makes life sweet."