



HUISMAN EQUIPMENT: LEADING A GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION OF SERVICISATION

Text: Frank Calviño // Photos: Huisman Equipment

It's almost poetic that Huisman Equipment, one of the world's leading brands in the crane industry, also happens to be an incredibly well-grounded and well-based company: for Huisman, their client's success is their measure of success.

And this is not only a slogan; they actually act upon this belief, putting their client's needs even above their own profitability. To top it all off, Huisman is a company that operates—by nature—on a global scale. And since 2018, the company has pursued the ambitious goal of digitalisation and servitisation but in a remarkably creative and innovative way. We talked with Martijn Reissenweber, Director of Huisman Global Services, to learn more about how market-leading companies that provide services all over the globe can successfully implement digitalisation processes and practices.



Martijn Reissenweber, Director of Huisman Global Services at Huisman Equipment

Can you tell us a bit about Huisman Equipment?

"Huisman is, first of all, a company that provides innovative and high-quality services and products to give our clients a competitive advantage. And we do that by designing,

manufacturing, and providing services for these categories of products: Cranes, Pipelay Equipment, Drilling Equipment, Winches, Vessel Designs, and Specials equipment. Our clients are mostly the world's leading companies in the fields of renewable energy, oil, gas, and construction", says Martijn.

“At first, Huisman started off as a workshop and was then combined in 1992 with an engineering company. And both companies have been led by a remarkable and energetic family, first captained by a father and son duo composed of the father, Ies Roodenburg, leading Huisman, and the son Joop Roodenburg leading ITREC, the engineering company. ITREC stands for International Transport Rigging and Engineering Consultants.

Cranes have always been the heart of our business. Smaller cranes in those first years when we had around 60 people working in Huisman, and later, we were able to produce and sell some of the largest cranes in the world, including the two 10,000mt Tub Mounted Cranes for Heerema's Sleipnir, a semi-submersible crane vessel, capable of lifting up to 70.000 tons.

And we also had some golden years in oil and gas equipment when we were the leaders in pipe laid equipment, and a big runner-up in oil drilling equipment, until the arrival of the oil crisis. And then, we thought that there was a great possibility of a future in renewable energies, so we shifted towards renewable energies, and now we are the market leader in wind installation cranes.

Furthermore, we have our own supply chain operation to offer our services globally. And something I want to emphasise is that we have a very firm mission: to make our client's operations successful. And to achieve that, we want to be the partner of our clients. We don't want to be the ad hoc service provider but rather a solution provider, a real partner to them.

We have been rather successful working with this approach. In fact, we have doubled revenues since 2018, from 32 million euros to 64 million euros yearly. Approximately 10% of that revenue is online, and that's why we are building myhuisman.com because we have a strong feeling that the service landscape will change to a more digital world”.

Which regional market has been the most complex for Huisman?

Martijn continues: “I wouldn't say that there is one particular regional market that has been more complex for us. Mainly

because we operate on a global scale, so for us, it is one single market. What I can say is that the oil and gas industry was a less competitive market than renewable energies. And this happens for an obvious reason. A few years ago, the oil and gas industry had a lot of margins. At that time, oil and gas companies didn't have the amount of pressure that current renewable energy companies have. For example, the wind energy industry has small margins, high competition, and a lot of legal requirements to operate within.

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This puts the companies under considerable stress. And henceforth, for us, it's far more complex because we cannot make even the slightest mistake, or we lose the client. That's why for us, the quality of our services will always be above

profitability. It is far more important for Huisman to provide our clients, which we see as partners, with a solution for their problems than to sell a service with high profitability.

Keep in mind that most of our clients operate machines that cost close to a million dollars per day of operation. So we can't be wasting time or offering half-baked solutions just to profit, because first of all, it is not in our nature, and secondly, we would be out of business pretty soon”.

The path forward: Drones, AI, and predictive maintenance

Imagine for a moment a swarm of drones flying over the massive cranes used to install a wind turbine, taking pictures and sending them to an AI system that compares those images with hundreds or even thousands of similar pictures taken from other cranes all over the world, and gives the drone a new flight route to hunt for possible problems.

It might sound too high-tech, or even a

bit like science fiction, but to be honest, with our current level of technology, this could be a thing. And Huisman knows it and wants to be a pioneer—like it has always been—in the use of innovative new technologies in their field.

Was it difficult to convince the management at Huisman to jump into a digitalisation process?

“Not at all. In fact, they are the driving force behind our digitalisation process. I think they actually selected me to pursue this process because I'm very customer-focused and

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cooperative with clients, which is precisely what we want to achieve with our digitalisation, to provide a better service for our clients. That's the goal. It is not about profitability for Huisman but about quality for our clients, who, for us, are truly our partners. Our CEO always says, "Let's fix the problem, and then we talk about money."

We feel that if we want to be relevant in ten years' time, we need to take the necessary steps right now. Huisman works like a group of companies because we are the same people in all our companies. That's why we always look at the big picture. Also, we believe that clients' success is Huisman's success".

What does the so-called servitisation mean for Huisman? Because everybody seems to talk about it nowadays

"For us, services are everything that happens after the sale of equipment: modifications, training, maintenance, etc. And the servitisation is to provide these solutions in the most efficient way possible to our partners and clients, not only from a cost perspective but also from a sustainability perspective".

That's why you are pushing towards digitalisation, correct?

"Yes. I mean, digitalisation has been in our company for a long time, since we installed the first POCs in our cranes to allow computer access to the equipment. But still, many things we do, many services, are done by sending an engineer halfway around the world to do the maintenance or modification themselves. If you think about it, it makes no sense. Especially if we want to work with the renewable energy industry.

It's absurd to send an engineer on an 8 or 12-hour flight to Singapore to fix a crane for a wind turbine that could be fixed in a few hours: It is a flight to Singapore, a taxi to the hotel, a taxi to the facility where the crane is—or any other combination of vehicles to get there—the apparel and equipment for the engineer to work in the crane, then another vehicle back to the hotel, a taxi to the airport and flight back home. The carbon footprint we leave behind is absurd when we could be doing all that with a drone".

How can you offer digital services? What does that even mean for a company that works with something so physical, so material, as construction equipment?

"Well, we know that we work with highly specialised personnel because we are working on high-quality rigs with high-quality personnel on board, chief engineers, and engineers on board, who are capable of doing any work, but they are not trained in the specifics of crane operations, modifications or maintenance.

But we are crane specialists. So by means of devices like drones or smart glasses, for example, we can check in real-time what they are seeing in the POC computer inside the crane and what is happening with the crane equipment and bring our crane knowledge on board. So they can focus on their tasks, and we can provide a better service.

Also, having access to devices like smart glasses or drones that can fly a predetermined path next to a crane and take pictures with AI to recognise corrosion, damages, or other defects or deformations, instead of sending an engineer that has to fly to the place, with scaffolding and other tools, is far more efficient and provides us with real-time information about your products and equipment. Information that we can later use in our digital platform for predictive maintenance or to develop new and better services or products".

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myhuisman.com: Designed to provide global services

In order to make all this wonderful technology work, Huisman needs a powerful digital platform. A digital customer portal to be the connective tissue that will

allow the drones to send, store and process the data collected, the smart glasses to stream their fee, their clients to shop online for spare parts or extra services, and in short, an online headquarters to service the entire world. Not an easy feat, is it?

But Huisman, alongside Intershop and Fenego, has already started this endeavour, and their first step is their website: myhuisman.com.

That's why you are developing the myhuisman customer portal with Fenego and Intershop?

"Yes. Because instead of sending an engineer, we can send a box with a drone, which is going to be more efficient, more secure even from a human perspective, more sustainable and environmentally friendly, and it costs a third of the price. Also, there is a matter of speed. For our clients to have the equipment operating constantly is vital. A piece of equipment from our clients that is broken or that has stopped working

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for whatever reason could easily cost millions per day. So, for our clients, speed is vital. With this digital platform of servitisation, we can predict possible damage or deploy ten drones to do inspections at the same time, when we can only have six or seven engineers doing the same job”.

What trend do you think will define the future of servitisation?

“I think there is no such thing as a single trend. One client might want to focus more on operation time and another client will prefer to have a sort of subscription. Servitisation is about customisation. We need to provide each client with the specific things they need to increase the efficiency and value of the services we provide to them”, says Martijn.

“An enterprise management service system because we work with very big clients and we have noticed that their teams are also big. For example, one client could have 20 vessels, with chief engineers that change between the morning shift and the night shift, so could easily be communicating with 80 people from that specific client.

When we interviewed a client, he told us, “you don’t prioritise properly”, so that’s why we want to have an enterprise management system to help us and the client channel requests properly using a ticket system. This will also allow the client to have hierarchical control over this request by placing the authority to actually send the tickets in the hands of someone—or a team—that will be able to properly indicate what is the most urgent demand from the client’s perspective.

The second pillar is a technical library. So our clients can access the manuals, documents, and certifications. What we will have in the future is a technical library where the client will have all the same documents in an online environment that will have the added benefit of being updated. And we can also add other things like drone inspections.

Number three is an online pawn shop. This online environment will allow the client to walk to their equipment in a 3D model and click on the part they need to get the references for from the online pawn shop.

Our fourth pillar will be a remote support page, where the client can request remote support in different formats: phone support, POC support, drone support, and smart glasses support, among others.

“SERVITISATION IS VITAL IN OUR BUSINESS TO MAKE THINGS MORE EFFICIENT AND BETTER, BUT NOT TO REPLACE THE HUMAN FACTOR”

The final pillar will be our remote diagnosis portal. Here we will receive all the data coming from the equipment, including the data we take from the measurements we take from the equipment. This is an incredibly powerful tool because, with this data, we can do many things to help and boost our

client’s operations. For example, we can predict future maintenance before it is needed, discover signs of possible malfunctions or problems, or even communicate with our clients and let

them know if they can push further the operational limits of the equipment to have an even more profitable or successful operation. In short, we can see how the equipment is behaving and how it’s being used and help our clients to make the most out of it”.

Finally, any piece of advice for brands, entrepreneurs, or companies that want to be industry leaders by providing services in their fields, as Huisman does?

“Keep in mind that if something is not good for your clients, if it’s not profitable for them, it most likely won’t be good for your company either. You need to make their lives easier, not the other way around. Secondly, a product company is not a service company, so be patient. Implementing servitisation inside a company that is product-oriented takes time. Don’t be shooting at the stars; take things one step at a time. And finally, never lose sight of the importance of face-to-face communication. Servitisation is vital in our business to make things more efficient and better, but not to replace the human factor”, Martijn concludes. ••