



The interview

Wideye by AGC, a corporate scale-up story made of business and human initiative

Wideye is a scale-up, part of glass group AGC, focusing on advanced driver assistance systems as well as autonomous driving. In the mobility market where needs are continuously evolving towards autonomous vehicles, the necessity to integrate in a reliable way high-performance sensors is increasingly important. Since its creation in 2016, Wideye has made solving these challenges its specialty by offering integration solutions based on its unique glass. Transparent to near infra-red and with high optical quality, this unique glass is proving to be indispensable for the seamless installation of optical sensors such as lidar and camera.

— **Quentin Fraselle**, Wideye CEO, tells us about this incredible journey.

It is said that “Every story starts with an idea”, what was this idea?

The birth of Wideye is the result of the combination of an event and an idea. The event was the establishment of the "Mobility Business Development Office" - see orange box p.4 - within AGC Automotive Europe, after we wanted to remodel the innovation process used by the group at that time. The idea was born from the identification of a new application for a slightly different glass: an infrared transparent glass. It inspired us to create a windshield that can accommodate lidar⁽¹⁾ modules as they use infrared beams to operate. Since these beams cannot normally pass optimally through traditional glass, installing a lidar unit behind the windshield was previously unthinkable, while lidar was a sensor that was beginning to emerge for ADAS (Advanced Driver Assistance Systems). We had our great idea! We tested it by meeting customers, partners, etc. The market was enthusiastic, but we noticed that we were too early in relation to the maturity of the sector. We therefore chose to strategically refocus our developments on the use of this glass to protect lidar sensors located all around the vehicle, by integrating them in an aesthetic and reliable way.

“ Today, a few years on, we are proud to have been able to achieve a double win: to prove the technical superiority of glass compared to plastic, and to have succeeded in integrating this application within existing glass such as the windshield. ”

(1) "Light Detection And Ranging" is a remote measurement technique based on the analysis of the properties of a beam of light bounced-back to its emitter.

So this is how Wideye started in 2016, with Yannick Sartenaer - currently Wideye CTO - who was the researcher and me who had the business hat. We then quickly deployed the team by structuring ourselves as a start-up, with a very aggressive patent approach and a team capable of managing the entire business model: commercial components, development and design, prototyping, operations and manufacture.

How do you develop as a start-up when part of a large glass group?

AGC Automotive Europe immediately understood that our pledge was strong and that we had the enthusiastic people we needed to carry out this ambitious project. We had access to the necessary resources to implement our ambition, in an atmosphere of trust, supported by Michel Meyers, head of European MBDO, and also by the European and Japanese management of the group. We had the advantage of having a stable and rapid source of financing, which was essential. This corporate environment also offered us easy access to tools, expertise and assets allowing us to free up more time and devote more energy to the development of the project, by concentrating on the aspects that bring value.

“ Becoming a scale-up in an industrial group requires being transparent in terms of communication with the group and, above all, explaining why the 'start-up' status will make it possible to approach the new business differently. ”

We inevitably take on a change agent role without assuming financial risk; however, having our entrepreneurial mindset, there is a moral risk linked to the success of the business.

Is identifying itself as a corporate scale-up perceived by the market as a strength or a weakness?

Having the name "Wideye by AGC" is definitely a plus. We give credibility to our business and reassurance to customers. AGC is a qualified and respected automotive supplier in its field. At the same time, our scale-up profile openly displays our strength to bring novelty, with different ingredients, a new value. That is particularly appreciated in the mobility industry today which is experiencing multi-level disruption.

What are the business ambitions of Wideye?

We have two ambitions. The first is linked to the market, having the desire to be a leader in the ADAS segment, and we are equipped to win: we have been fast with development, we have a solid patent portfolio, and easy contacts within our ecosystem. We obviously want to continue this momentum and gain market share. Then we can consider even more ambitious strategies, with globalization of our businesses, where we open up to a more inclusive approach in order to offer turnkey solutions, to stick as closely as possible to customer demand. The other ambition is to be an actor of change within AGC and to make ourselves available to the group to meet new challenges, in a changing and evolving mobility market.

**Those that talk about ambitious business, think about ambitious teams.
What are the profiles that make it up?**

There is a common DNA between us: the desire to change things. We are in a process of disruption, where entrepreneurial thinking is key. The team is made up with passionate people who have the energy we need to move forward. Our ambitions are greater than simply bringing to market a glass product that meets certain specifications. We have acquired new skills, such as design or system expertise where the customer comes to us for a solution, and no longer just for a component. Car manufacturers now delegate design to the suppliers, we must be able to respond to them. To understand the autonomous mobility sector, we have welcomed other families of profiles into the team: FUSA engineers, lidar designers, etc. There is now a total of twenty or so profiles that make up the core-team enabling our business model to address the market.

What about support for research and development?

R&D is managed by AGC, with whom we subcontract our projects as well as aligning our business activities. Research has radically evolved in recent years to diversify its profile. We now have experts in systems, electronics, people who have worked for major Tier 1 players,...

Can you share the team's outlook in terms of human resources?

I see two clear objectives concerning our evolution. The first is to strengthen our current team to help us gain market share, with Program Management, Quality and Sales oriented profiles. The second is to expand our expertise to be able to offer broader innovative solutions that will create value. We are talking here about mixed profiles such as glass expertise or 'system' skills. We plan to hire about ten people for the core-team, the same for the research component, in order to follow the evolution of our level of business, which nearly doubles every year.

What are the strengths of the Wideye team?

We have managed to position ourselves thanks to level of expertise recognized by the market, for the design aspect and the quality of our products, but also thanks to very strong branding.

“ We have become a credible player for our customers and partners, a first choice player. “

Our communication and our visibility are also consistent with our identity and our values, and allow us to attract interesting candidates when recruiting. Our other quality is clearly the existing team, which is led by enthusiasts, who enjoy challenges and have a very high level of knowledge and experience.

2022, a new year with new challenges... What are they?

There are many: launching the first ventures for which we have been nominated, implementing a growth strategy, capturing market share. We have great ambition, but we have to stay humble and sometimes admit that we don't know how to do everything ourselves. Why not enter into a joint venture with us? Let's see what the future can bring...

“ The objective of **MBDO** is not just an adventure of creating a new solution for the market. It is above all a human approach that aims to develop and empower our young talents in the process ” says Michel Meyers.

AGC Automotive Europe's “**Mobility Business Development Office**”, formerly called “Incubation Factory”, is led at European level by Michel Meyers.

It represents a new way of conceiving and developing innovation. The principle is to address an idea with market demand before starting its development. Suitability is verified via an iterative process, all in a fast and agile manner.

“Clearly it's great to launch a start-up in an agile way, but with the successes that Wideye is busy achieving, the question must be asked: how is this disruptive approach managed in terms of risk management. No pain, no gain: you can go faster and get added value, but you must know how to manage the risks. Major Tier 1 players are used to this risk approach since they are the ones who design for car manufacturers, they take on their responsibilities and the associated risks. We use this constructive approach, where co-design and exchange with the client are essential, this is part of Wideye's DNA”, adds Quentin Fraselle.

