

A man and a woman are standing in front of a blue wall. The man is standing on the right, wearing a dark blue shirt and jeans, with his hand on his hip. The woman is sitting on the left, wearing a white sweater and a patterned skirt. A neon sign on the wall reads "The only way is up".

The only way is up

'Language is the key to integration and success'

In the heart of Brainport, on Aalsterweg in Eindhoven, is STE Languages, a leading language institute that offers language training, throughout the Netherlands, in more than twenty languages to 5,000 students from approximately 95 different countries. Originally a Philips language service, STE has developed into an essential partner for both companies and individuals that want to establish themselves in the Netherlands or abroad.

TEXT: MARLÈNE VAN KUYK | FOTO'S: KEES MARTENS/DCI MEDIA

For many years, big names such as ASML, Jumbo, Vanderlande and NXP as well as small or medium-sized enterprises are among the clients that have found their way to STE Languages, not only for language training but also, for integration in the Netherlands. "We want to be more than a language school", say the enthusiastic owners Mathilde Lageman and Wilfried Gradus. "Our mission is to make internationals feel at home in Dutch society." STE Languages achieves this goal by offering tailor-made language training that also focuses on culture, organising accessible events and through intensive collaboration with local communities and companies.

A rich history

STE Languages started as a Philips internal department, where staff received language training for international business trips. Over the years, the department outsourced and grew into an independent institute, specialised in language and culture education.

In 2020, Mathilde - who has been associated with STE for 22 years, with a background in English and business-oriented language education - and Wilfried - who has expertise in business economics and marketing - took over the company. STE Languages has experienced enormous growth in recent years, but still not enough companies and people know about the institute. "Our network of companies such as ASML and Philips reflects our strong business relationships," Wilfried explains. "We are proud of these long-standing ties, but we also see that there is room for improvement in our brand awareness."

Customized language training

STE Languages offers a wide range of language training that is tailored to the specific needs of companies and individuals. "We deliver customised work by working closely with our clients," says Mathilde. "We walk in their shoes to understand what they need and design courses that really have an effect."

MATHILDE LAGEMAN AND
WILFRIED GRADUS



For all levels, from people on the shop floor to management, and at our training locations or in-company." In this customised approach, STE not only teaches languages, but also culture and the business context in which the language is used. Whether it is negotiations in English or presentations in Chinese, STE ensures that participants not only master the language, but also the associated culture.

Support for internationals and immigrants

In addition to business-oriented language training, STE also plays a crucial role in the integration of expats but also, for example, of refugees.

"Many of our students are newcomers who have to rebuild their lives here," says Mathilde. "Our courses in Dutch and the support in their own language that we offer in the beginning, help them to feel at home quickly and to communicate effectively." In addition, our programme includes much more than just language lessons; we also focus on cultural integration to better understand Dutch society. "We organise community events in which internationals and Dutch people can meet each other, so that they not only learn the language but also feel truly connected to our country and their fellow citizens and can expand their networks."

Innovative facilities

The former office buildings in Aalsterweg, where STE Languages settled a few years ago, are also all about connection and have been completely transformed to that end. "We now have wonderfully light spaces with fresh colours and wood. The main thing is that people feel at home here to learn and to connect",

Mathilde points out. "From carpets and walls to images and tiles, everything is aimed at creating a stimulating environment. We had fantastic help with this from the Van Eijk & Van der Lubbe Design Agency, which understood our vision very well. In addition to the classrooms, we also offer a pleasant communal area, a modern and flexible learning environment in which students can work both individually and in groups and where we can hold our events."

From 2,000 to 5,000 students in three years

Despite the rapid growth of STE Languages, quality remains the core of their services. "In recent years, we have grown from 2,000 to 5,000 students," says Wilfried. "In doing so, we never lost sight of quality. This is proven by our customer satisfaction score of 96% that we have achieved - even during this strong growth period." "We continuously invest in the improvement of our programmes and infrastructure," adds Mathilde. "This also includes the use of modern technologies and the continuous training of our team of teachers."

Extensive teacher network and effective cooperation

So many students, languages and nationalities require a multitude of teachers. Therefore, STE Languages has an extensive network consisting of more than 150 permanent and freelance teachers. This makes it possible to offer training courses at more than 90 locations throughout the Netherlands, at teaching locations in small groups, in pairs or 1-on-1, but also in-company and online. "Our flexibility and capacity to operate nationwide gives us a unique position," says Wilfried. "We can offer language training courses, regardless of where our clients are located. The diversity of teachers enables us to cover a wide range of languages and disciplines, from technical and business language skills to cultural integration and personal development."

STE Languages is a recognised language institute with quality marks such as Blik op Werk, Cedeo and NRTO. It also works closely with various organisations such as the Eindhoven Library, Expat Spouses Initiatives (ESI), Holland Expat Center and Huis naar Werk. "These collaborations are essential to our community approach," Mathilde explains. "For example, they help us to organise events such as the Housing Fair and cultural workshops, which benefit our students and the wider community."

"Our focus remains on delivering customised language training that can really make a difference to the lives of our students"

Vision for the future

The future of STE Languages looks promising. "We continue to focus on growth and improvement," says Wilfried. "Of course, while maintaining the high quality for which we are known." Mathilde adds: "Our focus remains on delivering customised language training, integration services, and intensive community involvement, which really makes a difference in the lives of our students. Language is the connecting factor, it gives life colour."