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Pictured: Luciad Chief Commercial Officer Christoph De Preter.

Christoph De Preter Maps New Success at Luciad

In 2009, Crowell & Moring counsel **Christoph De Preter** sat in a glass-walled office on the top story of a building overlooking the Arenberg IT Science Park, 15 minutes outside of Brussels. More than 20 tech companies have their offices there, ranging from startups to multinationals. He was at the offices of Luciad's global headquarters, interviewing with the CEO for a new job. This is just a few blocks from De Preter's alma mater at the Catholic University of Leuven, where the software company got its start.

Although he had applied for a senior in-house legal position, the role wasn't his first choice. De Preter was a counsel in Crowell & Moring's Intellectual Property and Technology, Media & Telecommunications groups, where he built a thriving European practice in online gaming—a first for the firm. He had been considering a career change from law to business management for some time but worried that making such a move would require him to return to school to earn a MBA. It was an unappealing prospect for De Preter who had already earned his J.D. and L.L.M.

De Preter was 20 minutes into the interview when the Luciad CEO asked, "Do you think you can sell?"

De Preter recounted his experiences developing business at the firm and the importance of listening to the customer in the process. He told the CEO, "I am a lawyer at a U.S. law firm that is growing rapidly, and I built up business at the firm. In other words, I sold myself. I sold my legal services to clients. So yes, I guess I can sell."

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The CEO offered him a job—but it wasn't purely an in-house counsel position. De Preter's answers had prompted the CEO to change the job description on-the-fly. The company had prestigious customers, such as NATO and the Federal Aviation Administration, with long-term contracts for mission-critical mapping software. They needed someone who not only had commercial acumen but could also navigate very complex regulatory and contractual environments. De Preter's legal background would be critical to negotiating the kind of long-term contracts that Luciad clients rely on to build complex systems.

Within three months, De Preter left Crowell & Moring to join Luciad as a strategic relations manager. Within four months, he was promoted to head of strategy. Now De Preter is the company's chief commercial officer reporting directly to the CEO, and a member of its board of directors.

If De Preter's career trajectory appears fast, it is fully aligned with the remarkable growth of the company itself. In less than a decade, Luciad has grown from a start-up funded by a university spin-off foundation to a global enterprise with offices in Belgium, France, Germany, Mexico, Singapore, Spain, Turkey, and the United States. Its clients include leading defense organizations, aerospace integrators, and governments of the world.

There's a Map for That

To understand how Luciad's mapping software helps customers, start with imagining how companies and governments use maps for their most sensitive, mission-critical endeavors. Pilots use Luciad to plan their flights. Warfighters, police officers, and emergency services use it to plan their missions. Coastguards use Luciad to detect suspicious behavior at sea and spot pollution. And utilities and petrochemical companies use it to monitor the security of their plants.

Take for instance a stationary petrochemical plant. Typically, such a site would have thousands of sensors mounted on valves, pipelines, chimneys, and installations. Each of them would be under 24/7 monitoring and churning out data at sub-second rates. Add to that a myriad of security cameras, thousands of mobile employees, and contractors that arrive on the site. There are overhead electric lines to avoid, and underground pipes to navigate around. Plant managers can see all of this relevant data in real time on Luciad's software and instruct their employees and contractors accordingly.

"With Luciad mapping software, our customers can pinpoint sensor information and asset or person information globally, within one-inch precision and with sub-second speed. And in case of an emergency, our customers will know exactly where their people are and how to protect them," De Preter said.

For clients, that knowledge is invaluable. The ability to see a current range of variables on the map and understand how they affect one another is something explorers have dreamt of for centuries, according to Luciad's CEO Marc Melvies in a [recent article for GIM International](#) in May.

By connecting directly to data sources, Luciad's software not only analyzes and visualizes what is happening but also helps predict what will happen next—allowing users to act quickly and safely. "Connect, visualize, analyze, act" is both Luciad's method and motto, according to De Preter.

Luciad was founded by a NATO researcher who saw a need for joining into a single software the static world of maps and the dynamic world of real-time data feeds from sensors. This need existed in the defense realm for decades, and that's where Luciad got its start. Today many other markets have a similar need. In a way, Luciad anticipated the advent of the Internet of Things by

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almost 15 years. This explains why Luciad is now moving rapidly into other markets.

Luciad serves the FAA, Department of Defense, and many of the world's leading companies, such as SAP, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrup Grumman, Airbus, BASF, Bayer, and Thales. Luciad also works with a subsidiary of Lufthansa that makes flight planning software for commercial pilots. That product runs on Luciad, and it is used by roughly 50 percent of the world's commercial airlines today.

"Although Europe and North-America remain our strongholds, we are now seeing very rapid growth in Asia and Latin America," De Preter said. His recent trips include Mexico, Singapore, India, Malaysia, and the United States.

With the widespread use of smart devices and the Internet of Things, Luciad software is gaining attention from general commercial companies as well.

"IoT is actually generating a revolution in the tech world. You used to have only so many sensors that would allow you to generate data. But today, we all have our cell phones and wearable technology and almost every electronic device is now built to share signals and information with the world. Luciad is developing the art of what will be possible tomorrow with all of these connected assets," De Preter said.

"Working at Luciad gives you the feeling of pioneering," he added. "We're bringing a very new and exciting technology. We're moving into emerging markets. And it's exciting because we just started conquering the world."



*Pictured: Crowell & Moring
Brussels partner Emmanuel Plasschaert
with De Preter.*

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A New Role

As chief commercial officer, De Preter serves as head of the sales department, and he is also head of the local offices that all have separate P&L responsibility, including Washington, Paris, and Singapore.

In his new role, De Preter draws from the lessons he learned at Crowell & Moring. "At Crowell I learned to work hard, have an eye for detail, and always think out of the box. That is something I use a lot in my job now. My job is still somewhat legal in nature because I have to negotiate deals and contracts across the role. I still use my legal skills from the old days, but I have moved on beyond the law," he said.

"As a counsel at Crowell & Moring in 2009, I struggled a bit to decide whether to continue to practice law or try something completely different. I chose the latter, and never looked back. I never considered moving to another law firm. I had a sense of belonging and community at Crowell that I have not experienced in many other places. I've been gone from Crowell for eight years, and I still meet up with people from the old days every two or three months."

De Preter has particularly fond memories of the Brussels office and U.S. partners, including **Jim Regan**, **Mark Supko**, and **John Macleod**. "What I really liked is that they were very professional, but at the same time there was so much warmth and human touch to things. And that was the reason that I joined Crowell in 2003. You had to work hard. They were not forgiving if you made stupid mistakes. But people always helped you to do your best. I worked at other law firms before, but I received my true training at Crowell & Moring," De Preter said.

De Preter continues to enjoy working with Crowell & Moring colleagues in his new capacity. After an introduction by De Preter, Luciad engaged partner **Emmanuel Plasschaert**. The firm now assists in litigation, corporate, commercial, and labor law.

Plasschaert said, "We are very pleased to serve Luciad because the company is in an exciting sector that is growing rapidly, and we truly enjoy our relationship with their team. We have had the privilege of supporting them in a wide range of their endeavors, and we're always working to help them anticipate the opportunities and risks that are ahead."

Crowell & Moring Transactions & Corporate Group counsel **Eric Montens** also serves the company. He was seconded to Luciad for one to two days a week in 2011 and 2012. Associate **Steven Verbeke** was also seconded to Luciad for a period of time.

De Preter recommends secondments to lawyers as a means to see the inner workings of an organization and to gain an appreciation of what it means to serve clients. "If you want to make a career as an attorney at law, secondments are a huge opportunity. If you can work in the trenches, it is really good because it will force you to be pragmatic and not only strive for legal perfection, but also take the interest of the business to heart," De Preter said.

"An excellent attorney typically strives for legal perfection. It's what makes the lawyers at Crowell & Moring so good. But when you come into a company that is driven by profit and business results, you'll see that, depending on who you work for, your perspective can and should be different. You sometimes need to make concessions and settle for something less than what may be flawless from a legal perspective to win the deal," De Preter said.

De Preter's time at Luciad has also helped him understand how clients like to receive advice. "A few days ago, a friend working in another company showed me a piece of legal advice that didn't even have an executive summary. You were literally forced to

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plow through 10 pages of legal spiel before understanding the point. Attorneys should always remember that these memos don't only get read internally by legal counsel. They are shared with a CEO or CFO who has not necessarily had legal training, and who doesn't have a lot of time," he said. "In the end, it's always about asking yourself, 'Who's my audience?' Your advice should be written keeping the reader in mind at all times."

"What a client wants to know from his counsel really is: what would you do if you were in my shoes? It's no different than when you go to a surgeon and you get the choice between immediate surgery or long-term treatment. It's the patient's choice in the end, but you're glad when the surgeon nudges you to one side or the other. Similarly, attorneys should not stop at giving the pros and cons of each course of action that could be taken. They should not shy away from recommending what they would do if they were in the client's shoes. The profession of the law is not an exact science, but companies are more and more moving to an exact science in how they conduct business and analyze their risk. So, lawyers need to adapt. Do an analysis of the likelihood of success and analyze the cost. That is key," De Preter said.

Even with a successful career, De Preter shares that his most important roles are that of husband and father. De Preter and his wife live in the Belgian countryside with their two children, a daughter who is 2 and a son who is 5. De Preter's wife works as a data protection officer for the European Aviation Safety Agency.

De Preter enjoys cycling, running, and swimming. In July, he will participate in the Bosphorus Cross Continental Swim, an open-water swimming event across the Bosphorus strait in Istanbul that divides Europe from Asia.

De Preter has shown how a lawyer can chart his own course, and sometimes that involves creating a whole new map.

For more information, visit www.luciad.com.

How Does It Work?

If you're wondering how Luciad technology works, check out these links to see more:

- Maritime Analytics – [See how millions of ship tracks can be intuitively analyzed with just a mouse click.](#)
 - People Flow Management – [See how Luciad helps building owners and architects analyze how people move around.](#)
 - Sensor Planning – [Where is the best spot to place radar and to have the best coverage of the enemy's operations?](#)
 - Air Traffic Control – Read Gizmodo's article about Luciad's app that lets you play at being an [air traffic analyst](#).
 - Drone Detection – See a demo of how LuciadLightspeed helps detect intruding [drones](#).
 - Ski Trips - Watch how a Luciad developer created a demo of a [ski trip](#) using GPS sensors in common smartphones and GoPro video footage.
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