



## Success Story: Umicore

Modern day gold miners see the riches in waste

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Old smartphones, broken laptops, dead batteries, and industrial scrap, all of this waste contains precious metals that could be used again. Sadly extracting such valuable resources isn't easy, unless you're Umicore, a Belgian waste company, which developed an innovative recycling approach that can also extract gold from trash.

Umicore began life as a mining company over 200 years ago, but over the last few decades it made more economic sense to recycle metal waste than dig up raw materials. Thanks to this approach the Belgian company are now experiencing stronger growth and recruiting more and more green workers.

"We shifted one big step up the value chain," said Egbert Lox, senior vice president of government affairs at Umicore. "Instead of starting in the ground, we buy materials that have already been mined and apply our combined knowledge of physics, chemicals and material science to make products that have a new function."

Through their deep understanding of metallic elements they can extract precious metals like gold, and other metals like copper and zinc from industrial waste, electronic scrap, old car parts and dead batteries. From circuit boards, Umicore can retrieve most of the gold content and transform it into 99.99% pure solid gold bars.

This approach is helping industries see the hidden value in their waste with more businesses looking to "close the loop" in their product lifecycles, meaning keeping resources in the supply chain as long as possible.

"In our plant in Hoboken, Belgium, where we recycle waste containing precious metals, like end of life smartphones and waste from industry, we have started a big upscaling and increased the capacity by 40 % – that goes hand-in-hand with having more people involved," said Lox.

Last year, Umicore reported revenues of EUR 2.7 billion and have plans in motion to add and improve new and existing plants which would see more employees join their 10 000 strong workforce of technicians, operators, chemists, administrative staff and scientists. In the coming years they also expect to develop their staffs' ability to handle the increasingly complex global waste streams.



“We are gearing up our actives in high demand areas like making the cobalt, nickel for electric cars, and that has translated into stopping job loss. Through these green activities we either add people or we save people,” said Lox.

**Green worker profile** - *Subject to change following feedback from Umicore*  
(To appear with profile image alongside text)

**Thierry Van Kerckhoven, Global Sales Manager Recyclables, Umicore**

Thierry has an eye for turning other people’s trash into profit. He specialises in precious metals refining at Umicore’s recycling facility in Hoboken, the world's largest plant for processing these kind of waste, and helps the company find new and valuable recycling opportunities.

“We receive scrap materials from Chile to South Korea and Japan and from Canada to New Zealand as well as practically all the countries located in between.”

Thierry leads his team in identifying and buying different sources of waste copper and zinc by-products as well as electronic waste like smartphones and batteries, all in an environmentally friendly approach. He also helps establish partnerships with businesses as a way to establish continuous sources of reusable waste.

“We process by-products from the non-ferrous industries and are, for example, a service provider for companies in the copper, zinc and lead industries.”

#### **Interesting facts & figures – social media**

- Umicore processes 400 000 tonnes of precious metals material per year and are aiming to increase this to 500 000.
- Umicore Hoboken recover 17 precious and specialty metals from over 200 complex input streams from all around the globe.
- Umicore Hoboken also has a total workforce of 1 648 while its worldwide operations employ 9 921 people.