# After 25 Years, Krol Learns to Think Big
## Bowltech has grown by sharing.

**BY BARBARA PELTZ**

DANIEL H. BURNHAM, the famous American architect and urban planner of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, once opined: "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood. Make big plans. Aim high in hope and work."

Meet Hans Krol, a man who could be called bowling's modern day Daniel Burnham. Like the iconic Burnham — whose visionary work helped shape much of the New York and Chicago cityscapes — Krol's vision has helped create a complex yet amazingly efficient product distribution system in Europe. There is nothing ordinary about this extraordinary man.

By age 22, the Holland native had already been working in bowling centers for several years. After traveling throughout Canada for a year, "to experience the new world," he returned home and started Bowltech, a company that specialized in resurfacing the bowling lanes of Holland.

Before long, Krol was acquiring companies, always seeking opportunities to offer more to his customers. Bowltech helped develop an export market for Italy-based scoring developer Steltronic. In 1993, the company opened the first major rebuilding factory for bowling capital equipment in Raamsdonksveer, close to Bowltech's



Hans Krol (left) forged a partnership with Nick Keppe that proved to be a boon for each company's business.

headquarters in Made.

Recognizing a need to offer more to his customers than computer scoring and lane resurfacing, Krol gradually added consumer products to the company's business-oriented products and services.

In 1996, Bowltech formed a joint venture with Nick Keppe's Complete Leisure, which specialized in pro shop equipment. Together, they were able to offer much more to their customer base.

By 2000, with the acquisition of additional companies, Bowltech's service area had grown to also include all of the Scandinavian countries. Central distribution centers then were added in France and Western Europe.

When the Brunswick bowling pin plant in Antigo, Wis., was shut down, Bowltech bought independent pin-maker Diamond Duramid to help assure the ongoing availability of wooden pins. Ultimately not interested in being a manufacturer, Bowltech sold the brand to Ebonite International a few years later, affirming Krol's belief in the importance of "the ability of independent marketplaces to obtain products from independent sources."

He recalls when it was possible to buy from 25 different manufacturers, compared to fewer than 10 today.

In fact, Krol says that the key to bowling's future is the challenge and responsibility for distributors and manufacturers to create new production platforms and distribution channels in order to introduce more new products to the marketplace. He sees the need for more strategic alliances — joining forces as an industry to reverse the direction of downward trends.

In "walking the talk," Bowltech has introduced the shared distibution center concept to provide major U.S. brands easy access to their European distributor customers. Participants include Ebonite, Kegel, Storm and, beginning June 1, Dexter.

"The future depends on innovation, and the evolvement of strategic alliances to create revenues and savings that can be best utilized for product innovation," Krol opines.

"Nick and I have been though a lot of changes in the industry, and we have placed ourselves in a strategic position to be a part of many things," he adds. "Sometimes we see an opportunity, we chew the fat, and if we like it, we go for it. That's a role we like to play."

Today, as the company celebrates reaching the 25-year mark, Bowltech is Europe's premier distributor with 1,927 accounts, offices in seven countries, and exportation to 32 countries — all serviced by 67 employees.

Just as Daniel Burnham thought "big," so does Hans Krol.

"I want to actively be a part of it — to constantly build relationships between manufacturers and customers," he says.

"I truly believe in the philosophy that if you can share, you will multiply."