



# ANNUAL REPORT 2022



*WE ARE  
MEDIA MAKERS*

We inform, inspire and entertain. Rock-solid brands that get into your head, touch your heart, enrich lives and bring people together.



# Meet our media makers

FROM THE COVER



**Robin Ramaekers**  
Journalist VTM Nieuws



**Gabriel Eisenmeier**  
Picture Editor de Volkskrant



**Birgit Herteleer**  
News Anchor VTM Nieuws



**Almer Veenendaal**  
Manager Broadcast & Distribution



**Maarten Vancoillie**  
Radio DJ Qmusic



**Karen De Vis**  
Managing Editor VTM Nieuws



**Ashwan Samoedj**  
Printer



**Mattie Valk**  
Radio DJ Qmusic



**Iffet Subaşı**  
Reporter AD Rotterdam



**Dorothee Dauwe**  
Radio DJ Qmusic



**Amke Rijkenburg and Annick Gielen**  
Stylists The Masked Singer



**Bret Hartman**  
Assistant Art Director Libelle



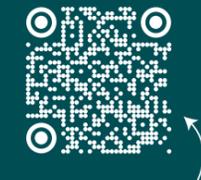
**Hanan Akachaou**  
Account Director



**Iann Castelein**  
Sound Engineer

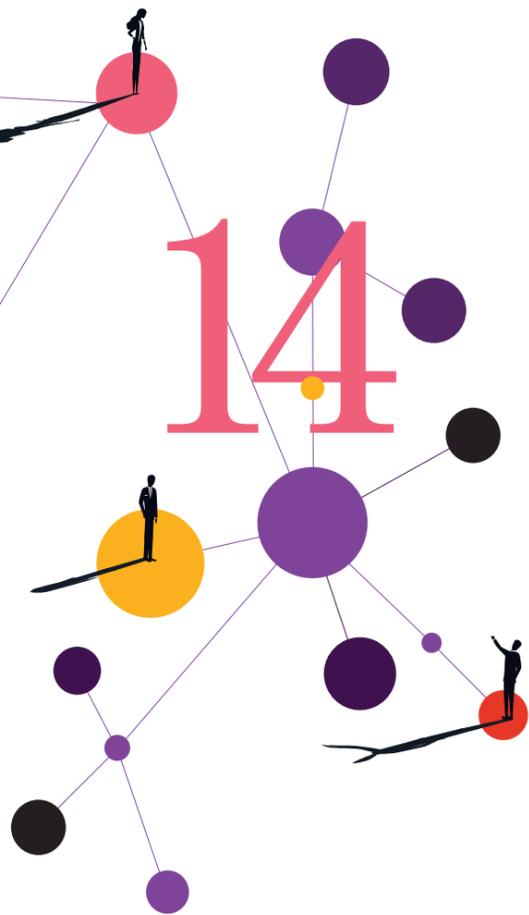


**Tomas Hochstenbach**  
Editor Tweakers



Watch these media makers in  
DPG Media's brand movie

You will find more stories of our media makers in this annual report.



# content

- 06 **Christian Van Thillo:** "Is there a magic formula for success?"
- 09 **DPG Media in 2022:** facts & figures
- 10 **CEO Erik Roddenhof:** "2022 was a year of two extremes"
- 13 **DPG Media in 2022:** facts & figures
- 14 **DPG Network:** visitors and advertisers both benefit
- 18 The success of **Sales:** meeting with clients face to face



## NEWS MEDIA

- 20 **Erik van Gruijthuijsen:** "We're listening to our audience"
- 22 **Journalistic highlights** of 2022: the journalists and their stories
- 26 **NU.nl & NUij** are borrowing readers' brains
- 28 **Excellence in journalism:** award-winning journalists on their profession
- 32 **Regional journalism 2.0:** regional is coming closer to home
- 34 **Service journalism:** news you can use
- 36 Digital only: **B.T.** focuses entirely on mobile
- 38 Hosting the **Russian free press**



## MAGAZINES

- 40 **Joyce Nieuwenhuijs:** "Honest and genuine brands"
- 42 **Entertainment journalism** in the front row
- 44 How **AutoWeek** hit the digital accelerator and broke all records
- 46 The Humo years of **Guy Mortier:** "Work hard and don't give up!"
- 50 **Women's brands** now reach all generations
- 53 **Promoting literacy:** reading support
- 54 **Kids' media** with a mission



## AUDIO & VIDEO

- 56 **Dirk Lodewyckx:** "Not air, but oxygen!"
- 58 **VTM GO Shorties:** spontaneous entertainment
- 60 Behind the scenes: **from idea to TV format**
- 62 **RTL Belgium:** entertain, inform and connect
- 64 The secret of **The Sound (Qmusic)**
- 66 More than a radio brand: "**Joe** is an experience"
- 68 **JEZ!:** forget the clichés about young people



## ONLINE SERVICES

- 70 **Felix Tenniglo:** "We tried to subdue that anxious little voice"
- 74 **Tweakers Pricewatch:** 61 million searches for the best price
- 76 **Comparison sites** are helping people through the energy crisis
- 79 **Campus 19** trains IT professionals: open 24/7, free of charge
- 81 **Melanie van Hemert (HR):** "Every talent should be seen and nurtured"
- 84 **Social responsibility:** "ESG must become second nature"



## FINANCES

- 86 **CFO Piet Vroman:** "A year marked by sharp cost increases"
- 88 **DPG Media annual figures 2022**
- 94 **Corporate Governance**
- 96 **Column Jan Segers:** "Gazzetta"



*“We need to stay relevant in the daily lives of our readers, viewers and listeners”*

CHRISTIAN VAN THILLO,  
EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN

*“Is there a*  
**MAGIC FORMULA**  
*for success?”*

**Just when we thought we could start enjoying our freedom again as the pandemic began to taper off, the world was faced with a horrific war. A war with far-reaching economic consequences, demanding skilful navigation and financial discipline from our company. Still, we will continue to chart our own course: our main strategic priority is a digital transformation with lasting success.**

**S**o how do we achieve that? First and foremost, we want to develop best-in-class digital journalism and entertainment, available on the most user-friendly platforms. But finding a future-proof business model is just as essential. And the search can be challenging. Not long ago, everyone thought that living in a digital world meant that content had to be free for end users. Business models relied solely on ad revenue. Now that these models have proved inadequate, the new consensus seems to be that paid content is the way of the future, either with or without ads. DPG Media has always been fully committed to developing a business model based on subscriptions as well as advertising, and this will not change. It's been a bit of a rollercoaster, but we've learned that media companies like ours need



**Christian Van Thillo**  
61, EXECUTIVE  
CHAIRMAN OF  
DPG MEDIA

*“The model of the future is a complex mix of many different elements”*

to search for a business model that best fits their portfolio and the market. That search is far from over, and perhaps it never will be. Because the way we consume media is constantly changing.

**COMPLEX**

This once again shows just how young the digital revolution still is. There’s no magic formula for success. Moving from a traditional model to the model of the future requires a complex mix of many different elements. And each of these elements needs to be optimised.

That’s why DPG Media is investing in all kinds of new skills, from excellent data analysis to the art of writing an attention-grabbing push notification. Our editorial, marketing, product and IT departments, which previously operated independently, must come together to deliver the best user experience within the confines of a smartphone screen. This will be a process of trial and error in which we consistently focus on user needs, while also relying on our creativity to be truly innovative.

**VALUE**

What really matters – content-wise and business-wise – is the value of our digital products, our digital journalism and our entertainment. If we manage to raise that value, digital subscriptions will become a solid new base for our media brands. And fortunately, we see plenty of opportunities to do just that, with journalism and programming that truly captivate readers and viewers, new narrative forms combining text and visual elements, more appealing designs and a more pleasant user experience. Perhaps we can make journalism and entertainment better than they’ve ever been before. As a publisher, I’ve always found it a privilege to brainstorm with our chief editors and programme directors on how to become even more successful with our audiences. In the digital era we live in, I believe this is more important than ever before.

**NECESSARY**

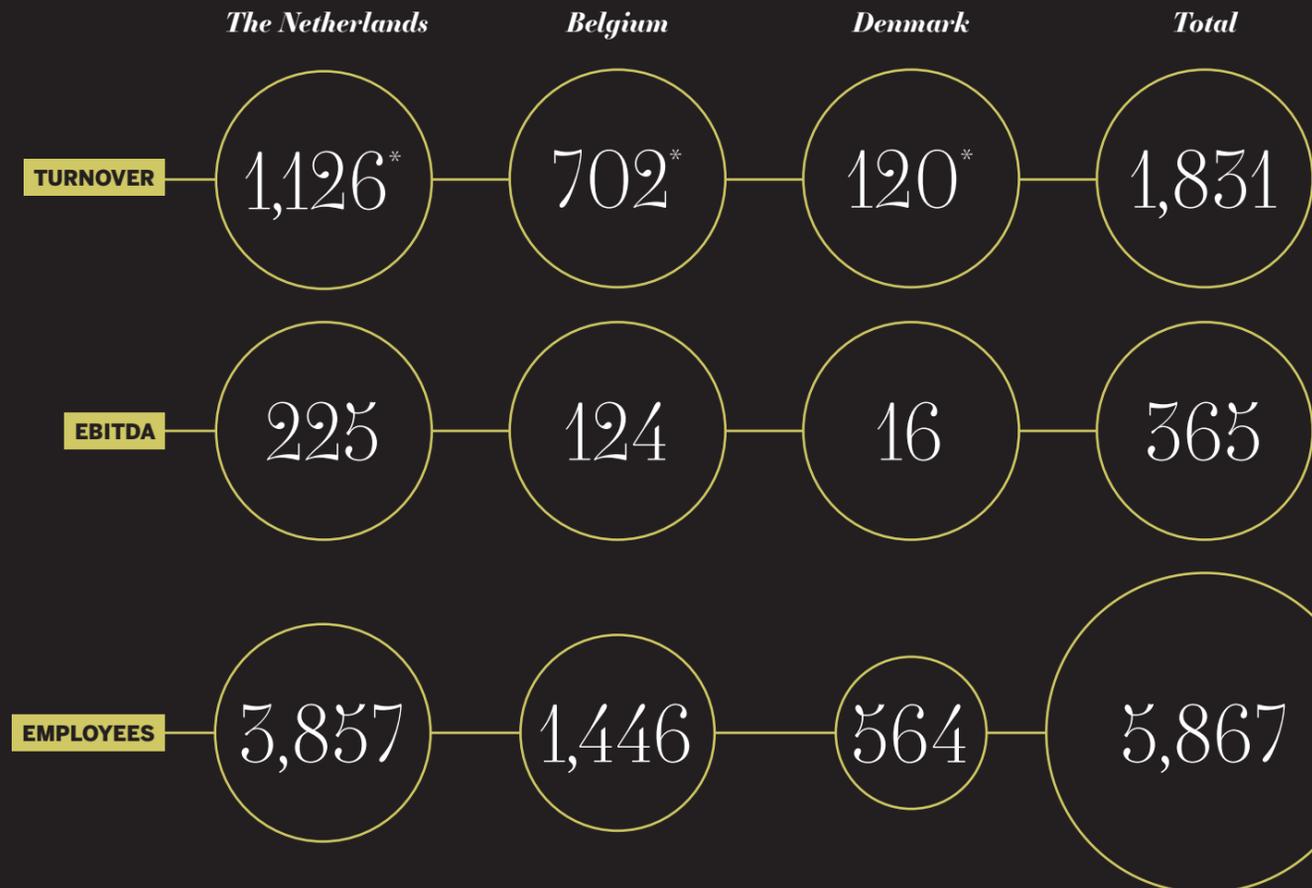
Continuous improvement isn’t a luxury, but rather a necessity, as we need to stay relevant in the daily lives of our readers, viewers and listeners. To do so, we need to become a digital companion – the same companion we’ve always been in print, linear television and radio. A North Star you can look for when you need it, which makes you feel informed and supported. A safe haven that evokes a sense of belonging. How do we create stronger brand identities in the digital space? This is something that’s very much on our minds at the moment. We want to offer all our customers the highest possible quality. That’s not just our readers, viewers and listeners, but also our advertisers and all the people who use our digital service platforms. We are investing in continuous improvement of all of our activities, based on the realisation that there’s still so much to be gained.

**MEDIA MAKERS**

This requires creativity, the drive to innovate, expertise and teamwork. DPG Media employs 6,000 people who, in a way, are all media makers. We all help shape the media of the future, day by day. We do so with a long-term vision, passion and an unwavering belief that people with talent and ambition can achieve wonderful things together. For all those people, DPG Media aims to be a warm and inspiring home. In this annual report, we want to introduce you to our company, our media brands and the employees who run and inspire them. Hopefully, it will help you understand what we do, why we do it and the spirit we do it in.

**DPG MEDIA IN**

2022



\* turnover by country before consolidation elimination



“2022  
was a year of two extremes”

**How did DPG Media fare in 2022, and what will happen in 2023? CEO Erik Roddenhof, 51, reflects and looks ahead.**

**A**s a result of the pandemic, DPG Media had a banner 2021 – was 2022 a hard landing?  
“You could say that the post-pandemic era and the war in Ukraine have turned the world upside down. The impact on our company has been substantial: there’s the energy crisis, with unprecedented prices, massive inflation almost across the board, paper prices going through the roof and a severe labour shortage. The cumulative effect of these developments is that our costs have increased by 60 million euros, and they will do so again this year. That’s 120 million euros in extra costs across a two-year period – you don’t just recoup that. Fortunately, turnover was good last year and we paid extra attention to our

spending. The situation required expert helmsmanship, and given the changing economic landscape the year ahead will be no different.”

**Is it true that the news media brands – the newspapers in particular – were hit the hardest?**

“That’s right. The cost increases were mainly felt by our publishing division, which includes all our news media and magazines. The soaring costs of paper, delivery and staff had a big impact. There were significant losses in that division – the percentages were in the high double digits. On the other hand, television, video and radio turned in great results. Partly due to a strong advertising market, the results there were among the best in the past 20 years.”

“It was a year of two extremes, which meant we had to concede 8 percent on our EBITDA compared to the banner year we had in 2021, so it wasn’t a hard landing for DPG Media. That’s the benefit of being a large group with a diversified portfolio made up of different types of media. We are and will remain a healthy company. This will allow us to continue investing in our future and growth.”

**Your mission is to digitise DPG Media. Is that process still moving forward at a steady clip?**

“We experienced the ongoing transition to an increasingly digital society at all levels last year. In Denmark, B.T. released its last print edition. After more than a hundred years, B.T. is now a fully digital news brand – the largest in Denmark. We also closed two printing plants and stopped afternoon delivery in the Netherlands, making Het Parool a morning paper. All necessary decisions as part of our digital transition, but these kinds of changes always hurt a little as well.

“On the other hand, the digital side of our business continues to grow. Subscriber numbers for our news media and magazines grew to 800,000 last year, and the digital ad market just keeps getting bigger as well, increasing by more than 50 percent over the past six years. We also fantasised about our own DPG Media ad system so we’re no

*“It’s crucial now to leverage our digital position to create much more value”*

longer dependent on Google, which skims half of our revenue. It’s called Trusted Web, and the fantasy is starting to become reality. And Online Services, where, for instance, Independer and AMV inform and advise consumers when buying products and services also continue to amaze us with their excellent results. We’re still a long way from where we need to be, but we’ve come a long way as well.”

**What are the next milestones before you reach your final goal?**

“We can no longer say we’re going digital. We are digital. Many of our brands are among the biggest in their markets, so we’re no longer talking about a radical digital course change, but rather a slight adjustment. It’s crucial now to leverage our digital position to create much more value. We need to be so strong and unique in the digital space that consumers and advertisers are willing to pay more for our products and services.”

**And what about digital journalism?**

“We’re getting increasingly skilled at improving our digital media, but we can and must do a lot better still. And there’s no shame in that. If you look at how long we’ve been making newspapers, magazines, television and radio – print media has been around for ages – it’s clear that we’re only just getting started in the digital space. But we’re taking big steps forward every year. In 2022, we became a serious player in podcasting. We achieved more than 90 million downloads, thanks in part to gems like HLN’s *De Kroongetuigen* and ADR’s *In de ban van Rian*. We also invested in expanding our regional titles’ digital news, adding much more local news.”

**So you stay on top of all those developments?**

“Absolutely. And I could go on and on. VTM GO introduced Shorties: series made up of 10-minute episodes that got millions of views right out the gate. Libelle.nl and Margriet.nl doubled their digital reach. We’re also improving our digital storytelling across the entire company, supporting our journalists with new technology, but also with training from our Campus. We’re just getting started!”

**DPG MEDIA IN**

**2022**

TOTAL ADVERTISING TURNOVER:

€ 612 million

DIGITAL ADVERTISING TURNOVER:

€ 214 million

TOTAL ONLINE SERVICES TURNOVER:

€ 127 million

TOTAL SUBSCRIPTIONS:

2,948,414\*  
\*excluding single-copy sales

GROWTH IN DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS:

14%

TOTAL CIRCULATION TURNOVER:

€ 866 million

TURNOVER DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS:

€ 154 million

MARKET SHARE TELEVISION BELGIUM\*:

39%

MARKET SHARE RADIO BELGIUM\*:

40.7%

MARKET SHARE RADIO THE NETHERLANDS:

20.4%

\* North

# DPG NETWORK

## VISITORS AND ADVERTISERS BOTH BENEFIT

Thanks to the innovative DPG Network, visitors are presented with targeted advertising, while subscribers get bonus access to other titles. Meanwhile, advertisers benefit from a secure environment and better results compared to big tech.

## DPG'S NETWORK IN 4 STEPS

### 1 SHOW VISITORS RELEVANT INFORMATION

When might a visitor be open to signing up for a subscription, and what kind of subscription would they be interested in? What kind of ads do they want to see? At the moment, the websites and apps of DPG Media titles still show a lot of irrelevant information. Developers are currently working on a system that shows visitors content that's most likely to appeal to them. This requires connecting the data and ICT systems of marketing and ad sales with each other, and with the apps and sites visitors see.

### 2 THE USER PROFILE IS ESSENTIAL, SO THE CUSTOMER HAS TO BE ABLE TO TRUST DPG MEDIA

To better serve customers and advertisers, it helps DPG Media to learn more about its visitors. Obviously, the visitors themselves have an important say in this. It's essential that they are confident in how we handle their data. DPG Media stores user data securely, doesn't sell it to third parties and gives visitors control over their information.

### 3 BONUS FOR SUBSCRIBERS: OTHER MEDIA ARE INCLUDED IN THEIR SUBSCRIPTION

Creating a user profile only makes sense if you know who you're dealing with. That's why DPG Media wants 50 percent of visitors to be logged in by the end of 2023. Recently, millions of subscribers (digital premium, Saturday or full subscription) were given extra incentive to do this: by logging in, they get access to all of DPG Media's news websites and apps. This was made possible by creating one single login system for all news titles.

### 4 ADVERTISERS GET A BETTER ENVIRONMENT, INCREASE THEIR REACH AND HAVE ACCESS TO MORE EFFECTIVE TOOLS

By launching its own ad network, DPG Media is going toe to toe with big tech giants, like Google and Meta. The benefit for advertisers is that they know that they're advertising in an environment that's known for quality journalism. In addition, DPG Media has developed self-service tools and a data lab to give advertisers the same level of convenience they get from major social media companies.

# “We don’t want to bother visitors with irrelevant messages”

In recent years, DPG Media has made significant investments in its own independent DPG Network, in which data, subscriber and advertising systems are connected to each other, and with all DPG Media brands. It’s a crucial part of our vision for a digital future, creating a foundation for commercial success in the digital space by providing the best content on the most user-friendly platforms. We talked to the two driving forces behind this project, Stefan Havik and Bert Willemsen, about this giant leap for DPG Media.

## WHAT WILL CHANGE FOR VISITORS TO OUR NEWS WEBSITES?

**STEFAN HAVIK:** “The way things are at the moment, visitors to our news websites see recommendations for other articles, marketing offers, relevant ads based on their behaviour, and something else from Online Services. Now we’re taking the next step.”

**BERT WILLEMSSEN:** “Based on user data, the system is going to make a decision: which of our models or which combination of models are we going to run?”

**STEFAN HAVIK:** “If we think a user might be interested in getting a subscription, we might remove the ads and Online Services content and instead show more subscription offers.”

**BERT WILLEMSSEN:** “Or, if a visitor has encountered paywalls before and doesn’t appear to be interested in a subscription, they’ll see more ads instead of subscription offers.”

## WHY IS DPG MEDIA PUTTING SO MUCH EFFORT INTO THIS?

**BERT WILLEMSSEN:** “Currently, visitors often see things that aren’t relevant to them. I myself get really annoyed sometimes if I see the same message over and over again.”

**STEFAN HAVIK:** “There comes a point where everyone’s fighting for attention, because our websites and apps only have so much space. There’s scarcity and waste at the same time. Moving forward, we’re going to strike a better balance.”

**BERT WILLEMSSEN:** “We can use this technology to improve our offering, because we know what our users are doing. And we can improve our efficiency by reducing waste. Plus, the user gets a more pleasant experience.”

## HOW WILL VISITORS BENEFIT?

**BERT WILLEMSSEN:** “They’ll see more relevant content. They won’t get the same ad a thousand times over.”

**STEFAN HAVIK:** “The studies that have been done on this all tell the same story: people don’t want to be bothered with ads for products they’re not interested in. You need to show relevant ads.”

**BERT WILLEMSSEN:** “There’s the convenience of only having to log in once to get access to the entire network. And people know: this is reliable, I can trust them with my data, this is safe. We’re also giving away all kinds of things for free to get people to log in. Since a short while, we’re able to offer millions of subscribers access to all of DPG Media’s news titles, thanks to the network we’ve built. That’s a huge advantage.”

## WHY IS YOUR DATA IN BETTER HANDS WITH DPG MEDIA THAN WITH GOOGLE AND FACEBOOK?

**STEFAN HAVIK:** “We don’t sell user data to advertisers – it stays with us, in a secure environment. We also explain to users what we do with their data, using simple language. And customers can control their data by adjusting their settings. People are fine with sharing their data if you give them more transparency and control. We have a very high level of consent, almost 100 percent.”

**BERT WILLEMSSEN:** “Reliable brands are the foundation of our business. That’s why we embrace privacy – it very much suits who we are. If we do this right, it’s going to help us. And I do understand the concerns users have: where is my data going to end up? The fact that it stays with us is crucial.”

## WILL THE SYSTEM ALSO DECIDE WHICH ARTICLES VISITORS GET TO SEE?

**STEFAN HAVIK:** “The more we know, the better we’re able to recommend articles that are relevant to your interests. We do label those articles ‘For you’.”

**BERT WILLEMSSEN:** “Some people fear that personalisation is going to push them into a bubble. So we’re vigilant about that. It’s not just about trust and privacy, but also about our journalistic mission and our role in society. We make it very clear to our customers where on our websites and in our apps we apply personalisation.”

## WHAT WENT INTO MAKING THAT POSSIBLE?

**STEFAN HAVIK:** “On the technical side, you need data, and you have to make sure you’re able to identify users and that you know something about who they are. That’s a fairly complex process. But the most important question is: do we have the right permissions to put things together? We also need the components that our various business models use, such as advertising and marketing systems,

the central DPG Media account and the privacy settings. We’re building almost all of it ourselves, because there are no ready-made solutions for something this complex. There are other publishers who do this kind of thing, but not on the scale we’re able to do it because of the large number of titles we have, and the diversity of our revenue models. But there’s also a cultural aspect to it: we’ve always operated in a fragmented way and now everything needs to come together.”

**BERT WILLEMSSEN:** “The cultural side of it was maybe even more challenging than the technical one. On the technical side, we really benefited from the fact that we have several big platforms that are used by different titles. That makes it scalable.”

## HOW FAR AWAY ARE YOU FROM REACHING YOUR FINAL GOAL FOR DPG NETWORK?

**BERT WILLEMSSEN:** “The technology is developing so fast. If you compare it to a house, we’ve laid the foundation and built a decent home, and now we’re going to keep working on it, adding dormers and what have you, until we end up with a beautiful mansion. But I don’t believe it’s ever going to be finished. New AI technology or new legislation could turn everything upside down.”

## YOU WANTED TO COMPETE WITH BIG TECH. HOW’S THAT GOING?

**STEFAN HAVIK:** “The core of our engineering hasn’t been with Google for some time now. More importantly, we’ve built ad platforms of our own to compete with those of big tech. DPG Datalab has been fully embraced, and for SMEs we have DPG Direct, which is also performing very well. And 2023 will be the year of DPG Demand, making us a true competitor for Google and other tech parties. We’re building a product that’s similar to theirs, the main difference being that with the tech companies up to 40 percent of technology costs go to middlemen. With us, it’s 0. Meanwhile, our ads are more profitable because we know more about the content they appear next to. This has proven to be very advantageous for advertisers.”



*Stefan Havik*  
39, MANAGING DIRECTOR DPG NETWORK



*Bert Willemsen*  
43, CMO DPG MEDIA

# The success of SALES

MEETING WITH CLIENTS FACE TO FACE

Advertising revenue for all media types grew sharply in 2022. Digital Sales also had a very strong year. How did these banner results come about?



*Anne Bouwman*  
33, MANAGER OF  
PROGRAMMATIC  
TRADING

Transitioning to a reliable, transparent and privacy-proof Trusted Web, DPG Media Digital Sales had its best year ever in 2022. An excellent team of ‘self-proclaimed ‘professional nerds’ ensured great results as Open Web was phased out, while positioning DPG Media as the leading knowledge partner for clients.

The 7 percent increase in sales was made possible in part thanks to no fewer than 51,000 client visits, says Barbara Hazenberg, director of Domains and Digital Sales. Those targeted client visits, carried out by a team of account managers and specialists, are an important part of the transformation of the advertising market.

#### WINNERS

Anne Bouwman, manager of Programmatic Trading, says the switch from Open Web to Trusted Web is producing winners on several fronts. “More and more, our role in our relationships with clients – the procurement agencies – is becoming that of knowledge partner: we often meet with them face to face to advise them on their procurement behaviour at DPG Media. Unlike Open Web, where the procurement process is anonymous, non-transparent and non-privacy-proof, we advise clients on the right target groups for their ads, as well as on effectiveness.”

Moving procurement away from Open Web to Private Deals and other platforms means that DPG Media is increasingly less dependent on Google. And perhaps more importantly, clients see that DPG Media’s

procurement advice works, thanks in part to the use of evaluations and continuous feedback to get even better results when they come back. It goes without saying that Barbara Hazenberg is proud of the 7 percent growth in revenue. “While maintaining print revenue, we’re managing to increase digital ad revenue. We’re outperforming the market, including global players like YouTube and Facebook. We’re even prouder of our teams, the energy everyone is putting in to achieve great results together with our clients.”

#### COMPLEX

The same goes for Anne Bouwman and her team. “Programmatic Advertising is a complex thing. Fortunately, we have a lot of technical knowledge, which we share with our clients. We also like to dive into the numbers with them to explore how we can improve campaign performance. In that sense, we’re true ‘professional nerds’: we go deep, but we always stay focused on getting the best results for the client, and the highest return. Of course it takes time to sit down with clients face to face, but they see that it actually delivers better results. Our clients really appreciate the way we work.”

Investing in close relationships with clients is leading to higher turnover while also improving continuity. “We’ve been phasing out Open Web since 2020,” says Anne Bouwman. “Last year, we made very big strides, and we’re on schedule to complete the entire process in the second quarter.”



*Barbara Hazenberg*  
40, DIRECTOR OF  
DOMAINS AND  
DIGITAL SALES

## BELGIUM: BRINGING TOGETHER TWO LANGUAGE AREAS

In Belgium, Digital Sales had a “tough and challenging year,” according to the division’s manager, Sofie Allegaert. “We were able to end the year on a high note thanks to our experts: passionate colleagues who are driven to innovate and always want to go one step further.”

Last year saw the introduction of broadcasting video on demand: the VTM GO offering supplemented with a portion of delayed viewing that is digitized. Meanwhile, IPB, RTL Belgium’s advertising arm, was integrated into the Digital Sales team. “The French-speaking market is different from the one in Flanders and much more fragmented, so we need to claim our position there much more strongly.”

After the acquisition of RTL Belgium was greenlit in March 2022, the team started setting up a joint Sales organisation. This presented more than a few challenges: Belgium is a multilingual country, and different brands, languages and cultures had to be brought together. Sales now works in two language areas with a national offering and joint teams. Digital Sales targets large media agencies and advertisers, but also slightly smaller ones. “Our strength lies in collecting a lot of data so that we can match clients with the right target groups and platforms. Between that, the reliable quality of our ecosystem and the many client visits we make, there’s a lot of potential for further growth.”



*Sofie Allegaert*  
39, MANAGER OF  
DIGITAL SALES

📄 Daily digital reach 📄 Paid circulation



ADR 📄 Total reach 5,147,950 📄 Total circulation 901,852



# NEWS MEDIA

## We're listening to our audience

It's become the most frequently asked question among our readers: "Why are you journalists always so negative?" It's not even a question, but an accusation. And we don't just hear it from readers – I also get it from friends, and even from my daughters.

We might respond by saying something like, "It's not our fault that Russia invaded Ukraine or that transgressive behaviour is an important topic right now," pointing out that as journalists it's simply our job to report on these things. But that type of answer is no longer cutting it. It appears that our audience is growing tired of the moralising they sometimes perceive in our reporting.

You can see what that leads to on NU.nl. Every day, some 10,000 unique users post a total of 25,000 comments on the discussion platform NUjij. A lot of these posts contain questions, and every day the editors of NU.nl use at least one of those questions – often one that is asked a lot – to create a new article or explainer. VTM Nieuws has long been asking viewers to share their thoughts, indebted as it is to its motto, 'We are here for you'. Our regional editions in the Netherlands and Flanders are now following suit. They're calling on readers to speak their minds or suggest solutions to local problems.

We're listening to our audience. Doing so helps us improve our publications as well our journalists, without losing sight of our sacred mission: to report the news.



*Erik van Gruijthuijsen*  
62. MANAGING  
DIRECTOR OF  
PUBLISHING

JOURNALISTIC HIGHLIGHTS OF

2022



ABEL BORMANS, WILLEM FEENSTRA & MAUD EFTTING (DE VOLKSKRANT)  
**“NOBODY INTERVENED AT DE WERELD DRAAIT DOOR”**

“In June 2022, we decided to launch an investigation into the work climate at the TV programme *De Wereld Draait Door*. A lot of people who work in the media already knew that the show’s staff weren’t always treated with kid gloves behind the scenes, but the exact nature and extent of any problematic behaviour remained unclear. Due to the personal nature of the interviews we conducted with our sources, we often struggled to gain their trust. But we always stressed that our concern was with the system – not with one person or a few individuals. And as it turned out, there was a widely shared sense of outrage about that system, which motivated many people to set aside their reservations and talk to us. Our investigation showed a pattern

of transgressive behaviour at *De Wereld Draait Door* and found that a system had formed that allowed the hit programme to continue despite the misconduct. Dozens of staff members suffered from burn-out and developed severe mental health problems, such as anxiety and panic attacks, or reported other harmful consequences. Executives at BNNVara had repeatedly been warned about the programme’s work climate, but had not intervened. We spent five months working on the article and ended up talking to more than 70 former staff members. Our article sparked a conversation about workplace behaviour and power relations in the media world.”  
**The article on *De Wereld Draait Door* appeared in the *Volkscrant* on 18 November 2022.**

**Strong independent journalism is the beating heart of DPG Media. In 2022, our news media brands continued to produce impactful, high-profile stories and podcasts. How were they made and what did they accomplish? These are the stories behind the stories, told by the journalists who reported them.**

MATTHIJS VAN DAM (TROUW)  
**“THE STORIES OF SLAVERY IN QATAR CHANGED MY LIFE”**

“Already many years before the Qatar World Cup, we heard stories about guest workers from impoverished countries who built the stadiums and other infrastructure, in appalling conditions. We knew that many of these people were working themselves to death for very little pay, but we didn’t really know who they were. For our investigative series about slavery in Qatar, photographer Patrick Post and I travelled to Bangladesh, from where many underprivileged young men were migrating to Qatar. Our goal was to put a human face on the huge sacrifice that was being made for this World Cup. We made five portraits of guest workers who had returned to their home country and of grieving families whose loved ones had died in Qatar. What we found were regular people, just like you and me, with dreams, hopes, despair, sadness, shame and, miraculously, enormous resilience. About a thousand concerned readers came together and organised a crowdfunding campaign, which managed to raise nearly 50,000 euros. I will always cherish the photos and messages I received from Bangladesh, which showed how that money was helping people rebuild their lives. My experience in Bangladesh also changed my life as a journalist. I’m more grateful for what I have, and for the simple fact that I was born in the Netherlands, where I don’t have to choose between starvation and slavery.”  
**The investigative series *The Slaves of Qatar* appeared in *Trouw* in October and November of 2022.**



“As a crime reporter, I uncovered three murders and six attempted murders of residents at a care home in the West Flanders municipality of Oostrozebeke. Despite a secret two-year criminal investigation, the culprit was never caught. Together with reporters from the News City investigative journalism unit, we did reveal that the victims had all received an overdose of insulin, even though none of them were diabetic. News City spoke to relatives of the victims, who were completely unaware of what had happened. How could someone have administered the insulin without anyone noticing? Reporters requested all the care home’s inspection reports, which revealed that poor medication policy had been an issue at the facility for years. One

journalist went undercover at the facility and, using a hidden camera, recorded how medication wasn’t locked away, but left out for anyone to take. The Flemish welfare minister found herself in hot water following the revelations. It turned out that inspection reports hadn’t been followed up, and both the killings and the public prosecutor’s investigation had escaped the attention of her ministry’s agencies. When care inspectors visited the home to conduct an unannounced review, they found many more deficiencies. This led to strict follow-up inspections as well as an admission freeze for new residents. The care home killings are still unsolved.”  
**HLN and VTM Nieuws broke the story of the care home killings on 7 September 2022.**



JULIA BOKDAM (AD)

## “THE REAL-WORLD IMPACT OF THE ENERGY PRICE PANIC”

“She starts yelling. ‘You’re just leaving me out to dry!’ The woman I’m talking to has just learned that she’s not entitled to the 190 euro energy compensation offered by the Dutch government, and she’s panicking. She has no family left, only a dog, which she might lose because she can’t afford to take it to the vet. It’s one of the conversations that will stay with me. Like the cry for help from a mother who was at her wit’s end because she was afraid she wouldn’t be able to keep feeding her children. Or the conversation I had with a customer who, in a blind panic, said he was going to take his own life if we couldn’t offer him a solution. I worked in energy provider Budget Energie’s customer service department for seven weeks, donating my salary to the Poverty Fund. My story showed the real-world consequences of skyrocketing energy prices, which was still a fairly abstract issue at the time. And those real-world consequences were dire: people began to panic and became desperate. Many families struggled to make ends meet. This story resonated with readers, who felt heard, but also with organisations, which are now opening doors that until recently remained closed. And with me, as a journalist. Because I wasn’t just observing things from a distance – the story was happening all around me.”

**The article *Undercover at an energy giant* appeared in the ADR newspapers on 17 December 2022.**

JOËL DE CEULAER (DE MORGEN)

## “A PODCAST THAT RESONATES WITH LISTENERS FOR DAYS”

“In my podcast series, *Het inzicht*, I do what I love most: having meaningful conversations with people who have something to say. Every week, I invite a guest and ask them to share a fundamental insight. I want the conversations to stay fresh and relevant for a long time, and ideally each episode should resonate with listeners for days because of the food for thought my guests have given them. There’s only one criterion every episode has to meet: it must teach us something fascinating. Like the geologist Manuel Sintubin (‘Life on earth is one gigantic fluke’) or the philosopher Tinneke Beeckman (‘The idea that you can become anything you want is just totally wrong’). My specialty doesn’t lie in one particular field, but rather in a genre: the interview. It’s a beautiful profession, because you get free private lessons from thinkers and makers from all kinds of sectors. With podcasting being embraced as a journalistic medium, it seemed like the time was right to try my hand at this new form. And there’s a big upside: I don’t have to transcribe my conversations anymore.”

**The podcast *Het inzicht* started on 6 September 2022 at De Morgen and ran for 10 episodes last year.**



ANGÉLIQUE KUNST (TUBANTIA/ADR)

## “FASCINATED BY THIS BIZARRE SAGA”

“I was on the verge of giving up at least three times. I had already written over a hundred articles about Twente multimillionaire Gerard Sanderink and his unusual girlfriend, ‘cyber charlatan’ Rian van Rijbroek, as well as a book. So when DPG Media wanted to make a podcast about Sanderink, I didn’t see the added value, to be honest. It also took ages to make, and while working on the podcast together with Renée van Heteren, it turned out that we had very different ideas about storytelling. But since it came out, the podcast has been downloaded well over a million times, and *In de ban van Rian* is DPG Media’s most successful podcast in

the Netherlands ever. My struggle with this new medium ended up turning into an exciting adventure thanks to Renée. We wrote scripts together, interviewed people and searched for useful clips. She taught me how to look at the story in a different way and, most importantly, to *listen* differently. I never imagined this would be such a success. The best surprise, though, was that the podcast managed to attract a whole new audience: as it turns out, young people are also fascinated by this bizarre saga.”

**The podcast *In de ban van Rian* started on 23 July 2022 at ADR and ran for 7 episodes last year.**

# NU.nl & NUjjj

## are borrowing readers' brains

**More original news, more 'stories of the day' and, thanks to NUjjj, more articles inspired by readers: 2022 was a banner year for NU.nl. And thanks to last year's investments, the best is yet to come for the Netherlands' biggest online news brand.**

It took time, effort and resources, but it paid off: NU.nl, which was acquired by DPG Media over three years ago, has turned NUjjj into its secret weapon. While many other media outlets struggle with reader engagement, NU.nl was ahead of the curve when it launched NUjjj four years ago – leaving the competition in the dust, says deputy editor-in-chief Colin van Hoek. “We write stories based on readers' questions every day, so our readers feel heard.”

On the NUjjj platform, readers can comment on news articles and are invited to share their thoughts on issues that are relevant to them. And while those responses, questions and suggestions do require constant moderation to filter out abusive comments, they also provide valuable ammunition for subsequent articles. A team of community moderators creates a daily top 10 of reader questions, which journalists sink their teeth into every morning.

“We've got five full-time moderators,” Van Hoek says. “And about 80 per cent of the replies are

moderated by an automated system. Some are rejected for violating community guidelines, but most are fine and get published. The remaining 20 per cent, which are too ambiguous to be moderated by the system, are sent to our human moderators, who manually evaluate them. So it remains a labour-intensive process, but that's a very conscious decision we made because we want to provide a safe environment where everyone can express their opinion.”

“And just as importantly, the interaction with our readers produces super relevant questions. Covid was a big help in that sense. The pandemic had a direct effect on everyone, and our readers asked us questions that had never been answered before. So we were able to use those to write very well-read articles. And we kept using the same approach after Covid. For example, when there were riots following World Cup matches and ‘neighbourhood fathers’ were tasked with keeping the peace, we were asked who these people were exactly, and how they got that job.”

#### RELIABLE AND NEUTRAL

With 8 million monthly users and 3 million followers on social media, NU.nl is known for its free (thanks

to advertising), reliable and neutral news coverage. The news site, which was founded in 1999, has a large contingent of loyal readers who use NU.nl daily because it's fast, factual and neutral, says general reporter Leon Moleman. “Other media outlets are easy to pigeonhole: liberal, conservative or outrage-driven. We're not like that, which our readers appreciate. We don't do opinion pieces, and we don't have columnists either.”

Lately, the site has been focusing more on creating its own original content. Whereas in the early days, people would sometimes sneer that NU.nl just copied and pasted ANP reports, it now has a relatively young and diverse editorial staff of 70 journalists who have plenty of opportunity to provide their own input, Van Hoek says. “Our editorial team – thanks in part to the DPG traineeships – has become more diverse, which leads to different stories and angles.” Articles on topics like Ramadan, adoption, Indonesian cuisine as cultural heritage, or on the consequences of student debt take on an extra layer when they're written by people who have a direct link to the story, or by reporters with a bicultural background.

#### IMPACT

One of NU.nl's goals for 2023 is to make an even bigger impact. Which is a tall order, given the splash the brand made in 2022. NU.nl's podcast *Het geheim van Mallorca* was number one on Spotify for weeks, NU+ published more in-depth stories and the editors focused on using simple language to make articles accessible to more readers. “Every outlet explains the news,” Van Hoek says, “but we have to do it better than any of our competitors, using the most approachable, accessible language. We also want to have ‘the story of the day’ more often.”

The strong connection with the reader remains invaluable, according to Moleman. “If you have the opportunity to borrow the brains of hundreds of thousands of readers, why wouldn't you?”

**NU.nl was launched in 1999 and reaches more than 3 million daily visitors.**



*Colin van Hoek*  
35, DEPUTY EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF NU.NL UNTIL FEBRUARY 2023, NOW HEAD OF NEWS ANALYSIS FOR THE NETHERLANDS



*Leon Moleman*  
27, GENERAL REPORTER, NU.NL

# EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

**It's never the primary goal, but sometimes great journalism is recognised with a prize. Gep Leeftang (de Stentor), Maarten Keulemans (de Volkskrant) and Robin Ramaekers (VTM Nieuws) were all lauded for their work last year. We talked to them about perseverance, their work ethic and the sacred duty of journalism.**

## WINNER OF THE SASKIA STUIVELING PRIZE

GEP LEEFLANG (DE STENTOR):  
*“You have to follow your instincts as a journalist”*

**L**ike getting a perfect 10 out of 10 on his report card, something he never expected to get – that’s how Gep Leeftang (57) felt when he won the Saskia Stuiveling Prize for Best Regional Political Journalism. A reporter for de Stentor, the regional newspaper in the eastern part of the Netherlands, Leeftang received the award in March 2022 for a series of nearly 100 articles on public corruption in the municipality of Epe. The jury praised Leeftang for his “intrepid and tenacious” investigative work and articles, and for single-handedly exposing questionable deals despite firm opposition from local administrators.

Leeftang sees himself as a regional watchdog – one that’s not just there to wag his tail during happy events, but one that also growls and barks, and that won’t let go once he sinks his teeth into something. It all started innocently enough, with an alderman handing out permits without going through the proper channels. Leeftang got to the bottom of the story, and his reporting caused a political crisis that led to the resignation of two aldermen. But for Leeftang, the more important outcome was that he managed to expose abuse of power in local politics. “You see a municipality that’s at odds with its own community and that’s trying to win legal battles instead of generously involving local residents in issues.”

Leeftang considers the Saskia Stuiveling Prize an enormous honour, and he sees it as a sign of encouragement. Because like every other newspaper, de Stentor also feels the pressure to fill its pages every day, which can sometimes come at the cost of thorough and sustained investigative journalism. The trick is to do both. “I also end up chasing the story of the day sometimes,” Leeftang says. “But when you find a story that smacks of corruption, you have to show guts, be stubborn and follow your instincts as a journalist by diving in. Even if it takes countless hours of research and a lot of perseverance. In my case, the investigative work I did yielded a large number of articles for the daily newspaper. In a way, I created my own work.”

Besides the appreciation of his editors and colleagues, promises to do better from public officials and the observation that regional journalism is alive and well, the award also brought Leeftang something else: “I think administrators are now thoroughly aware they can’t pull the wool over my eyes.”



## JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR

MAARTEN KEULEMANS (DE VOLKSKRANT):

*“You have to separate fact from fiction”*

It's nice to have a science journalist in the spotlight for once, says Maarten Keulemans (54) of de Volkskrant. In January 2022, he was named Journalist of the Year in the Netherlands for his 'tireless reporting' on the coronavirus pandemic. "Usually, awards like these go to political reporters who break a big story," says Keulemans. "As a science journalist, I mainly wrote pieces for the back pages. That changed during Covid."

So Keulemans, a self-proclaimed 'geek', basked in the limelight, considering it a great honour. He sees it as his sacred duty as a journalist to keep the public well informed – especially in uncertain times. "There came a point where some readers started turning away from the mainstream media, which they viewed as defenders of the establishment. Subscribers no longer believed what was in the paper. That's when it's even more important to separate fact from fiction, to explain what the scientific consensus is and where there's doubt and uncertainty."

Keulemans' commitment to the truth earned him high praise from the jury, as did his series of columns, 'Keulemans in quarantine', in which he answered readers' questions about Covid and other topics. His efforts to engage in discussions with his readers, also on Twitter, were lauded as well. "I don't represent de Volkskrant on Twitter, and it's something I do in my spare time," says Keulemans. "But I do enjoy using Twitter as another platform to explain scientific studies and debunk nonsense."

As Journalist of the Year, he is occasionally treated with a little more respect ("You're not just anyone," one researcher told him), but what remains unchanged is his drive to explain complicated subjects in an approachable way. "It's a common pitfall in journalism to assume that readers already know something because you've written about it before. You just need to explain things in simple terms. My way of working hasn't changed. Now that the pandemic is on its last legs, I'm just as happy diving back into scientific studies and articles on things like climate change. That's also great fun."

## AIB AWARD NOMINEE

ROBIN RAMAEKERS (VTM):

*“Keep telling stories about anonymous heroes”*

He didn't end up winning, but Robin Ramaekers (48) says it was an honour just to be nominated for the Association for International Broadcasting's AIB Awards, also known as the 'Oscars of journalism'. Especially since his fellow nominees worked for global players like CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera. The Flemish TV journalist, who previously earned a nomination in 2019 for his reporting from Yemen, received a nod again last year for a series of reports for VTM Nieuws on the war in Ukraine.

To be more precise, he reported from Mykolaiv, just after the city had suffered heavy bombing. "In Mykolaiv, we were the only outlet reporting from an army base that had just been bombed in an attack that likely killed over 200 recruits. We were able to put a face to the war every day with unique stories, including one about a postwoman who continued to deliver cash pension payments to local residents in bomb shelters and flats amid all the attacks and violence. We were in the right place at the right time," says Ramaekers, whose reports were picked up by outlets including the BBC, ITV and the NOS.

Coincidence does play a role, says Ramaekers, but only to an extent. "Sometimes the puzzle pieces all fall into place, but that's preceded by a lot of groundwork: figuring out where to get the best story and constantly being highly aware of the context in which you're operating. But there are also days where you're just very frustrated, because the warring parties will often make a conscious effort to obstruct your work, simply because the story you want to bring doesn't fit their desired narrative."

As a war reporter, Ramaekers sometimes works in areas struck by rockets just moments before. Yet he doesn't think of himself as 'fearless'. "That suggests a certain hubris, and we know our limitations. But I do have a great deal of curiosity. I'm under no illusion that our reporting is going to make a big difference. Still, I think it's incredibly important to keep telling the stories from this war, to keep feeling empathy for the ordinary people caught up in it, like the modest anonymous heroes who, despite everything, continue delivering the mail."

Ramaekers sees his nomination mainly as encouragement. "Obviously, I would've loved to win the award, but I also see it as an incentive to do even better reporting this year."



# REGIONAL IS COMING CLOSER TO HOME

Every day, more than 800 in-house journalists cover regional news for DPG Media in the Netherlands, bringing readers news and stories from close to home. Following the successful online growth of the regional titles over the last few years, 2022 saw the beginning of the next phase in DPG Media's regional news strategy. The new goal: to enrich and improve the presentation of local and regional news offerings.



Dutch regional newspapers have made a giant digital leap in recent years as a result of increased collaboration and content sharing. Digital reach and online subscriber numbers showed a solid increase, reaching absolute highs during the ‘pandemic years’ 2020 and 2021. ADR has a daily reach of over 5 million unique visitors, more than half of whom read at least one article about their region every day.

“Those are great numbers, but we’re not there yet. We can – no, we *must* serve our online local and regional readers much better,” says Allard Besse, director of journalism at ADR Nieuwsmedia, which includes AD, BN DeStem, Brabants Dagblad, Eindhovens Dagblad, de Gelderlander, PZC, de Stentor, Tubantia and indebuurt.nl, an online platform for local city news.

#### APP AND WEBSITE REVAMP

To continue digital growth, regional journalism needs to offer richer content about stories closer to home and present them in a way that’s clearer for readers. “Readers like to get as much local news as possible,” Besse explains. “They want to know what’s going on when they hear sirens, why that street in their neighbourhood has been broken up for so long and how their local football club did on Saturday afternoon. But they also want journalists to hold their municipality to account,

and understand why the outcome of the provincial elections could affect their daily lives.”

If there’s news, it’s important to help readers find it, and to present the stories in a well-organised way. “That applies not only to regional news about the potential negative consequences of a new commercial airport like Lelystad or about hazardous substances contaminating the water off the coast of Zeeland, but also – and especially – to small local news and service announcements in cities, neighbourhoods and villages.”

To help readers find these kinds of stories, the ADR app and website are being revamped. Until last year, the entire tapestry of regional news was presented as one single stream. This caused less time-sensitive pieces, such as restaurant reviews, to quickly get snowed under.

With one easy tap on the Region button in the home screen, users can now navigate directly to content about their own municipality as well as relevant news from surrounding towns. Another recently added feature in the regional news environment is the navigation bar at the top of the screen, which shows new sections, with news and service articles presented side by side for the reader’s convenience. “So suppose you heard sirens in your neighbourhood last night, you go to the emergency news section. Or maybe you want to know how your local football club did, so you go to the regional sports section. And if you’re not sure where to go for a bite to eat Friday evening, there’s the food and drink section.”

#### ADVERTISERS

And there’s more coming down the line. Advertisers will soon be able to target consumers regionally or locally with special offers and advertising content in the promotions section. Obituaries as well as stories about the deceased will be published in a new ‘in memoriam’ section, while a readers’ section will feature stories, photos and videos submitted by readers. “That’s why every ADR editorial team is investing in reader interaction by appointing community editors, who also will engage readers in conversations about the news on our platforms.”

Over the past year, DPG Media’s hyper local digital platform, indebuurt.nl, was incorporated into the ADR ranks. This platform reports on the fun, enjoyable aspects of city life, such as local nightlife and



Allard Besse,  
DIRECTOR OF  
JOURNALISM,  
ADR NIEUWSMEDIA

“We must serve our online regional readers much better”

shopping, in more than 30 major cities, and offers lots of space to local advertisers. It’s a platform with around 5.5 million monthly visitors that racks up more than 20 million monthly views. Articles from indebuurt.nl are featured (under the *indebuurt* label) in the daily news stream of the regional sites and in the entertainment sections, as well as in the city editions of newspapers such as AD, BN DeStem and de Gelderlander.

Our editorial staff relies on a bot to generate a significant proportion of boilerplate factual reports and service announcements, for instance on regional weather, traffic or waste collection “The bot software uses data to produce simple news and service messages for all municipalities. This can be done with raw data from amateur sports matches, such as score histories and results, or using weather forecasts. The bot automatically prepares summaries for each league and weather reports tailored to individual municipalities. But the team can also check data from Statistics Netherlands (CBS) to see if there’s any national or regional news the editorial bot could use to generate unique posts for each municipality.”

DPG Media’s ambition is simple: ADR’s regional platforms should be the go-to place for readers who want to stay informed on everything going on in their local area, offering interaction with and between readers. “All based on that underlying goal: more reach and more digital subscribers.”

**BN DeStem, Brabants Dagblad, Eindhovens Dagblad, de Gelderlander, PZC, de Stentor and Tubantia (DPG Media’s regional titles) together have a daily online reach of over 2.2 million readers. On top of that, AD brings regional journalism from another seven regions to an audience of millions every day.**

# SERVICE JOURNALISM:

news you can use

**In a year when people needed every bit of help they could get, DPG Media's service journalism hit exactly the right spot. The huge need for guidance and more in-depth content translated into previously inconceivable growth figures in Belgium. How did this form of journalism become such a success?**



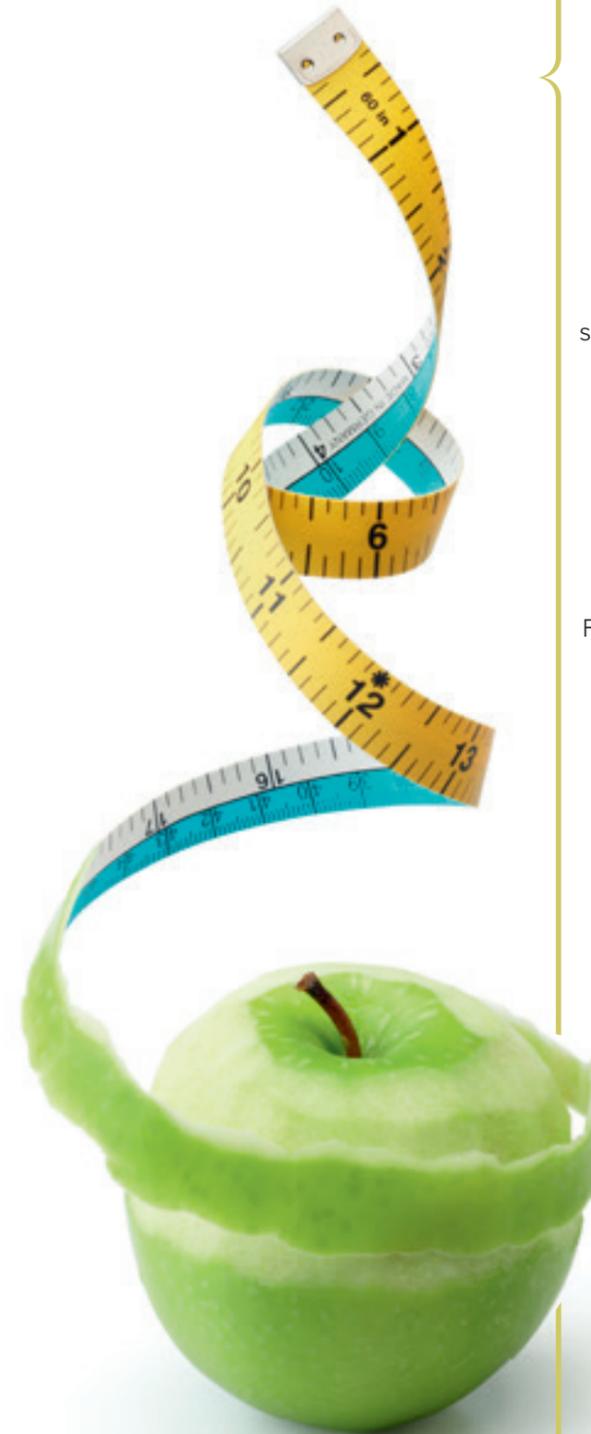
**Justin Mol**  
33, HEAD OF VERTICALS & GUIDANCE AT DPG MEDIA BELGIUM UNTIL JANUARY 2023. NOW LEAD FREEMIUM PRODUCT MANAGER

**J**ustin Mol calls it 'the discovery of the year': the meteoric rise of service journalism in 2022 in Belgium. It should be noted here that Mol isn't entirely impartial – as head of Verticals & Guidance, he spent the past year managing a team of coordinators and editors who provide DPG Media's Belgian titles, especially Het Laatste Nieuws, with daily service stories. But the numbers paint exactly the same picture.

Last year, digital reach of service journalism in Belgium more than doubled, growing from 9 million page views per month in 2021 to 23 million in 2022. Of all visitors who took out a paid subscription to Het Laatste Nieuws, 1 in 5 did so after reading a service story, a conversion rate of 20 per cent.

**HELPING READERS GET THEIR BEARINGS**

"Service journalism focuses on news you can use," Mol explains. "Often as a follow-up to current news. When new inflation figures are announced, for example, we ask the question: how will this affect consumers? We want to offer guidance and help our readers get their bearings – service articles should be helpful and allow people to make their own decisions. We add depth by collaborating with leading experts in the fields we write about. We get to the bottom of subjects, find



**TOP 3 MOST POPULAR TOPICS IN BELGIUM IN 2022**

- 1.** Health tips, such as ways to lose weight
- 2.** The personal finances of famous and regular Flemish people
- 3.** Car expert advice on going electric

out what things cost and set out the pros and cons consumers might want to consider. It's a different way to approach the news."

There are a number of service domains, such as Money, Food and Mobility. They're also called verticals, because they exist alongside the news. "The basic task of a news medium is to inform people of the latest news," Mol says. "But our readers expect other things as well, and they have personal reasons for coming to us. Because they want to teach themselves something, for instance, or because they're looking for very specific information: 'I'm going to buy a house, and I want to know what kind of mortgage I should get.'" Our service stories are geared towards people's personal motivations to search for news content. That's part of the reason they're successful. The more personalised we can make the news, the more we increase reach and conversion."

**ADDED VALUE FOR NEWS BRANDS**

Last year especially, as Belgian people began looking for ways to save money en masse, service journalism proved to have great value for news brands. Editors responded by organising Q&A sessions with energy experts, with thousands of readers submitting questions. Digital tools were also introduced, such as Geldwijzer, which gives people insight into their financial situation and offers savings advice. "As news media, we want to empower people in their own lives, and our service journalism certainly contributes to that," Mol says. "The advice from our experts can help families save hundreds of euros every month."

The goal for 2023 is to turn the service domains into digital destinations. With the never-ending stream of news on HLN's homepage, service stories sometimes get lost in the fray. That's why efforts are being made to attract direct traffic to HLN's Money and Food domains, where articles stay at the top of the page longer. "Because service journalism pieces are more timeless and have a longer shelf life than the latest news. A lot of stories about how to save money are relevant all year round."



**HLN.be, which publishes the service journalism articles, has a daily online reach of more than 2.2 million readers.**

# DIGITAL CITY.

*B.T. focuses entirely on mobile*

Pernille  
Holbøll  
41, EDITOR-  
IN-CHIEF OF B.T.



**The new mission of Danish tabloid B.T., which is owned by DPG Media, isn't 'digital first' but 'digital only'. After an illustrious 100-year history, the newspaper's last print edition rolled off the presses on 31 December 2022. Editor-in-chief Pernille Holbøll talks about the brand's bold decision to focus only on mobile visitors.**

Pernille Holbøll started as B.T.'s new editor-in-chief in May 2022 and was immediately presented with a major challenge. "It's an exciting mission: to preserve the essence of a newspaper like B.T., with such a long history, in a 100 per cent digital version," says Holbøll, who describes B.T., founded in 1916, as a modern tabloid focusing on news, sports and entertainment. Like its umbrella company, Berlingske Media, it leans liberal.

The move to 100 per cent digital did not come as a surprise. In recent years, B.T. appeared as a paid newspaper only at the weekend. On weekdays, it was distributed for free in public transport. And while print circulation had been declining since the 1990s, the bt.dk website just kept growing and growing – with 550 million monthly page views, B.T. is one of the biggest digital players in Denmark.

#### DIGITAL FUTURE

While Holbøll firmly believes in a digital future, this does mean that B.T. is now fully funded by online ad revenue. "The question is how do we convert our digital lead into the highest possible ad revenue. The Danish market is also unstable due to the war in Ukraine and high inflation. Ad prices have dropped considerably."

B.T. needs more than just a large number of visitors to its website to generate enough revenue. Often, marketers prefer to buy ads from Google and Facebook because of how much those companies know about their users. This allows them to offer targeted advertising. Holbøll plans to solve this by asking users to create an account. By 2025, she wants more than half of B.T.'s visitors to be logged in.

To become Denmark's best news website, Holbøll also plans to invest in podcasts and video content, which readers can use to catch up on news, politics or major crime stories. One of her sources of inspiration is NU.nl, one of DPG Media's Dutch brands. "They have a very clean layout and they're always on top of the news, but they're also good at service-oriented content, like weather and sports. They even stream live matches."

#### FOR MOBILE USERS

Another thing that stands out about B.T.'s strategy is that it only targets mobile users – for now, at least. This becomes clear immediately when you open the bt.dk website on a computer: the layout is made for mobile. "We want to reach younger readers in the 25-40 age bracket, who read the news on their phone. That means our editors and reporters work differently: shorter articles, smaller paragraphs and clear intros."

At all the newspapers where Holbøll has worked before, people would always say that 'the paper' was the most important thing, more important than the website. It's time to ditch that mentality, she believes. "The number of subscribers is falling, but there are more potential readers than ever. Clearly, we need to do better to reach younger readers. We need to be assertive, set the agenda and develop new business models."

This is also what she tries to tell her colleagues every day. No more thinking about tomorrow's newspaper – focus on today's reader. "We now have a continuous deadline, which is new territory," says Holbøll. "We're several years ahead of other media."

# HOSTING THE *RUSSIAN FREE PRESS*

Russian voices can be heard in the cafeteria. Inside TV Rain's studio, Cyrillic letters fly across a giant screen, while outside journalists from Moscow still look a bit wobbly navigating Amsterdam's bike traffic. When the request came, DPG Media didn't hesitate for a moment, committed as it is to press freedom. Now critical journalists who had to flee Moscow because of the war in Ukraine are working out of DPG Media's Amsterdam office. Their coverage ensures that Russians retain access to fair and balanced news alongside Putin's state propaganda. The office, which has its own TV studio, now hosts two editorial teams, soon to be joined by a third one. What's it like for these Russian journalists to live and work in Amsterdam?



**ALEXANDER GUBSKY**, 53, JOURNALIST AND PUBLISHER OF THE MOSCOW TIMES

*“Russian society needs truthful information”*

“When the war started, a law was passed in Russia that made just using the word ‘war’ punishable by up to 15 years in prison. We were forced to leave the country in a hurry. Luckily, thanks to Derk Sauer (the Dutch founder and owner of The Moscow Times, ed.), we were able to come to Amsterdam. I’m very thankful to DPG Media for how we were received here. It would have been a lot harder without all your help – even teaching us how to ride a bike!

I’ve fallen in love with this city and this country, and the openness people have towards others. ‘We’re just going to stay until the end of the year’, we said in the beginning. Now we all live in the city, are learning Dutch and our families can join us here. My daughter Kira is 15 and will be attending an international school in Amsterdam this summer.

The Moscow Times earns 25 percent of its revenue from advertising and reader donations – the rest comes from Western foundations. Despite our website getting shut down six times and constant DDoS attacks, we manage to reach millions of Russians, who read our articles using a VPN or follow us on Telegram. The English-language website reaches many more millions of people around the world. Our jobs as journalists have gotten more difficult, because sources can’t speak freely. But we also have anonymous contributors and many contacts in Russia. I’m glad we came here. Russian society needs the truthful information we provide.”



**NATALYA SINDEYEVA** 51, FOUNDER AND HEAD OF TV RAIN, PROGRAMME CREATOR

*“We have to rebuild our company and, also our lives”*

“Twelve years ago, I set out to launch an optimistic TV station with quality programming for ‘thinking’ people – something that didn’t exist yet in Russia. It became a success. We never planned it, but as repression ramped up we were the only ones to report on the protests, so TV Rain automatically became a kind of opposition channel.

We were forced to shut down when the war started. At first, we were in shock. But we have a big audience, and they expected us to keep going. Our staff, who were scattered between Tbilisi, Riga and Paris, felt the same way. We had to get equipment, and thanks to Derk Sauer we ended up coming to Amsterdam. I was homeless and sad, but it was very nice to speak with the people at DPG Media. Their support is so important. We have a good studio, but now, with more of our people coming here, it’s getting a bit cramped, so we have to start thinking ahead.

It’s very pleasant here. My son Luka is going to study mathematics at VU Amsterdam. But it’s also very painful to lose your home. We have to rebuild not only our company but also our whole lives. Obviously, we’d like to return to rebuild a new and better Russia. That’s what we hope for, but we don’t expect it to happen.”



**MIKHAIL FISHMAN**, 50, JOURNALIST, ANCHOR OF AN INFLUENTIAL WEEKLY POLITICAL PROGRAMME ON TV RAIN

*“Working as a journalist eases my existence in exile”*

“I was in the middle of an online broadcast when the state censorship agency took our website offline. We were able to continue on YouTube, and we still post content there now. The regime won’t shut down YouTube because too many Russians use it for all sorts of things, and it would compromise other Google services.

When I fled Russia together with my wife, Julia, who’s also a journalist at TV Rain, we first went to the Caucasus countries. Now we live in De Pijp. Amsterdam is a liberal and very friendly city, and our 5-year-old daughter Katja is already starting to feel more at home at the neighbourhood school. We should count ourselves lucky. Living here, I do wonder if I have any right to speak about the situation in Russia, because I’m personally no longer at risk and live in comfort compared to the people back home. But I have no choice: I can’t work from Russia, but I can’t stop working either. I feel a moral and professional responsibility to tell the Russian public the truth about the war. So I have to do this, and it eases my existence living here in exile – what I do has a purpose.

My old life ended from one day to the next, which is something indescribable. I’d prefer to go back, of course. But I don’t think the war is going to end anytime soon, and I don’t think the regime is going anywhere either. I’ve accepted that I’m going to be an emigrant for a long time. This won’t be over in a month, or six months or a year.”

ENTERTAINMENT Total circulation: 646,841

**WOMEN**  
Total circulation:  
412,304



**KIDS**  
Total circulation:  
431,706



# MAGAZINES

*Honest and genuine brands*



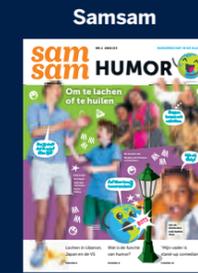
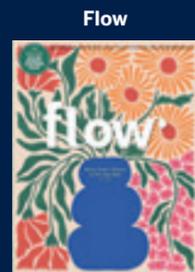
Joyce Nieuwenhuijs  
53, DIRECTOR OF  
MAGAZINES

In a world turned upside down, we at Magazines more than delivered on our promises in 2022. Our magazines in the Netherlands reached 1,249,396 people a day, and we're set to keep innovating in the year ahead. Our digital sales increased by 44 percent in 2022, and we welcomed our first digital subscribers. We published beautiful stories and joined forces with colleagues within Magazines and beyond.

Our relevance is about more than just reach or revenue. I'm also incredibly proud of the impact our editorial teams make. With our strong, trusted brands, we connect people with each other and society.

Consumers are becoming more and more discerning, and rightly so. In a world where you can't always tell if a text was written by a chatbot or a flesh-and-blood media creator, our role is more important than ever. Libelle, Margriet and Donald Duck are household names. Our brands are honest and genuine. And we keep them that way because we have the best people on board.

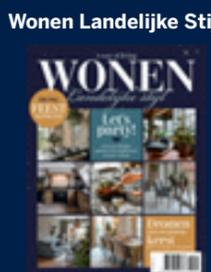
Our teams are passionate about curbing violence against women, increasing literacy, fighting loneliness and promoting diversity. We help people talk about difficult topics and provide our readers with information, inspiration and entertainment. In these turbulent times, we're more relevant than ever, making the lives of our readers and users a little brighter.



**SPECIAL INTEREST**  
Total circulation:  
197,159



**GENERAL INTEREST**  
Total circulation:  
87,626



# ENTERTAINMENT JOURNALISM

## *in the front row*



DPG Media's entertainment magazines reach 2.1 million readers a week in Belgium and nearly 1 million in the Netherlands.



**Almost half a century after the first issue of Story was published, entertainment magazines are still thriving and managing to captivate readers. Entertainment news is also a huge success online. What explains the attraction of these publications?**

On 1 February 1974, publisher VNU (later Sanoma) presented the first issue of Story, a new weekly magazine, to Berend Boudewijn, the most popular TV game show host at the time. As the Netherlands' first entertainment magazine, it was predicted to reach a peak circulation of 150,000 – a figure that was welcomed with a rapturous toast. “Within a month, they were selling half a million copies a week,” says Guido den Aantrekker, creative director of Entertainment Magazines for Belgium and the Netherlands. “That’s how the phenomenon of entertainment journalism was born.”

That year saw growing interest in the personal trials and tribulations of celebrities such as Mies Bouwman, André van Duin and Crown Prince Willem-Alexander, who was just 6 years old at the time. “Stars who people knew from the radio, TV and film became human when people learned about their relationships and struggles, and the important events in their lives,” says Den Aantrekker.

#### PRINT AND DIGITAL GO HAND IN HAND

More than a decade later, on 19 November 1984, the first issue of Dag Allemaal was published in Flanders. Like Story, it was a weekly magazine filled with so-called human-interest stories, focusing on the private lives of celebrities. It soon became the number one magazine in Flanders, a position it still holds today.

Both of these DPG Media titles are still thriving and managing to captivate readers in 2023. Of course, the impressive circulation numbers of the past have now made way for the success of various digital versions of entertainment brands in Belgium and the Netherlands, which include Veronica Superguide, Primo, TV Familie and the Flemish edition of Story.

“News City, the centre of DPG Media’s journalism activities, in Antwerp, has invested a lot of energy into the collaboration between HLN.be and the Magazines & Showbiz division,” says Den Aantrekker. “That’s why we’re now able to offer a wide selection of extra content from the best news-hounds working for our papers, magazines and

websites. Whereas our weekly magazines increasingly focus on telling the story behind the story, providing readers a moment of calm in today’s hectic society, digital platforms fill the dynamic demand for breaking news.”

#### REACH AND CONVERSION RATES

As online manager of Story, Veronica Superguide and Totaal TV in Hoofddorp, Sabine Kok knows better than anyone what makes for popular content. “Our readers on Story.nl, for example, aren’t just interested in the latest news about André Hazes, the Meilands and Marco Borsato. They also want to read background stories about celebrities we refer to as ‘evergreens’, such as Ron Brandsteder and Robert ten Brink. In fact, two pieces we published about these fixtures in Dutch entertainment were in the top five most-read articles on Story.nl in 2022, even though the stories had no real urgency. There’s a growing interest in celebrities, which we’re responding to with our websites, social media channels, newsletters and push notifications, all of which received a makeover recently.”

Andries Kumpen is news analysis coordinator at News City, in Antwerp. Based on his experience in this role, he knows exactly what kind of stories and angles produce the biggest impact for HLN.be. “In 2022, showbiz content on HLN.be accounted for 17 per cent of article reach, 15 per cent of video reach and 12 per cent of total conversions. We had front-row seats at Belgian and British royalty events, and shared beautiful and also tragic moments from the lives of Flemish celebrities.”

The Content Performance division, which meticulously monitors the online reach of every article, as well as the read time and conversion rate, knows that showbiz stories typically do well. “Even on HLN.be, it’s not always breaking entertainment news that gets the most clicks. For example, an article in which former Playboy Playmates opened up about the legendary Hugh Hefner and one in which a body language expert analysed Amber Heard and Johnny Depp’s infamous court battle both had a large reach and attracted lots of new subscribers.”



**Guido den Aantrekker**  
56, CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINES, BELGIUM & THE NETHERLANDS



**Sabine Kok**  
37, ONLINE MANAGER, STORY, VERONICA SUPERGUIDE AND TOTAAL TV



**Andries Kumpen**  
29, NEWS ANALYSIS COORDINATOR, HLN.BE

# HOW AUTOWEEK HIT THE DIGITAL ACCELERATOR *and broke all records*

**For years, editorial content on AutoWeek's website drew a steady 3 million page views per month. But in 2022, the average number of monthly visits doubled to more than 6 million – the result of a new business model, and a strategic overhaul.**

**A** lot has changed for AutoWeek since Sanoma Netherlands was acquired by DPG Media in 2020. The popular weekly magazine for car enthusiasts, which started in 1990, does not fall under Magazines within the new organisation, but under Online Services, together with other Special Interest Media (SIM) outlets such as Tweakers, vtwonon and Ouders van Nu.

The business model for Special Interest Media is based on the 3Cs strategy, where the three Cs stand for content, community and conversion. The driving force behind these outlets is passion: they are dedicated to hobbies that readers want to know all about, enjoy talking about with others and are willing to spend money on. Car enthusiasts fit this profile perfectly.

## NEW TARGET GROUP

But AutoWeek doesn't just appeal to gearheads, says editor-in-chief Damiaan Hage. "Traditionally, we've served two target groups: car enthusiasts, who read our magazine and visit our website to get the latest news every day, and car buyers, who are about to purchase a new car and want to make an informed decision. We still produce content for these target groups, but we've also added a third one: casual drivers with car-related questions."

Which cars fit three child seats? What's a good ice scraper? Do I really need winter tyres? All practical questions about driving that everyone at AutoWeek could answer, but which were rarely turned into website content. That has now changed. Hage: "We hired an editor to write what we call evergreen content, as well as opinion pieces. We can use those articles to link to affiliates that sell the product that's being discussed, like car tyres."

## PAGE VIEWS DOUBLED

The editors have also taken a closer look at the available data and have updated the website's technology, for example to make it load faster. All these developments began to translate into rapidly increasing growth rates starting in the second half of 2021. While AutoWeek, which bet on digitisation early and has had a website up and running for more than 20 years, sat at 3 million monthly page views for its editorial content for years, that number has now doubled to more than 6 million.

And that's not even the whole story, because overall AutoWeek's website now attracts some 16 million monthly visitors. This is thanks to high-traffic sections like the Forum, the Occasions page (offering 200,000 used cars through AutoTrack) and Carbase (an enormous database with extensive data on all car models). "The site offers loads of content for everyone."



*Damiaan Hage*

46, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF AUTOWEEK, AUTOWEEK CLASSICS, AUTOWEEK CAMPERS AND AUTOWEEK GTO

*"We are serving different audiences online"*

## PRINT VERSUS DIGITAL

This also makes AutoWeek a financially successful brand. "What I'm very happy about is that the circulation of our four print magazines (AutoWeek, AutoWeek Classics, AutoWeek Campers and AutoWeek GTO) barely seems to be affected," says Hage. "Even though we did start using a lot more content from the magazine online as well. We now see that the target audiences for print and digital are different. They have different interests. Some of our magazine readers think all the attention electric cars are getting is just modern nonsense. But news stories about electric cars do very well on our website. So we're just dealing with different audiences."

To keep making good magazines, the editorial department has been divided into print and digital, which each have their own management structure. Online, all content is free. By 2023, AutoWeek wants to focus even more on people who are looking for their next car. "We want to lean into our advisory role and help buyers take the first step in their decision-making process. Through lists, for example, like 'The best

cars under 10,000 euros' or 'The best cars for large families'. We're also committed to further facilitating and encouraging user reviews, where readers themselves can write an ongoing review of their car. This is very interesting because it gives you insights into how a car performs in the longer term, so it allows the members of our community to help each other."



**AutoWeek was first published in 1990. It has a weekly reach of over 1.2 million online visitors and a weekly print circulation of about 39,000.**



THE **HUMO** YEARS OF GUY MORTIER:

# “WORK HARD AND DON'T GIVE UP!”

**S**napping his fingers and humming an early Elvis tune, Guy Mortier trots into his favourite pub, a short walk from his home on Antwerp's Cogels-Osylei. He turns 80 at the end of March, but time has been kind to Humo's patriarch, who published his first pieces in Humo when he was 18. In 1969, at the tender age of 25, he became editor-in-chief, a position he would hold for over 30 years, after which he stayed on as creative director. He's still involved with the magazine as an adviser to this day. Sharp-minded and quick-witted, Mortier moulded Humo to his likeness for decades. And that winning combination of brains and banter is still on full display today, leading me to conclude that hard work must be good for your health.

“You're looking for a segue, aren't you? You're going to ask me what the secret behind Humo's success is, as if you don't know the answer to that question yourself.” Guy Mortier smiles. “It's hard work.”

“There was already a good foundation in place when I became editor-in-chief, so I was lucky.

No other weekly in the Benelux is transforming into a digital media brand as swiftly as Humo. Editor-in-chief Bart Vanegeren sought out Guy Mortier, Humo's grand old man, to congratulate him on his 80th birthday and collect some pearls of wisdom that will help secure Humo's glorious future.

BART VANEGEREN / PHOTOS JOHAN JACOBS

Humo had been the only TV magazine in Flanders for years, and even when that changed – the year I took over the reins, as it happened – Humo remained ‘the real deal’, and our TV section was unrivalled. That gave us the edge over our competitors, and it has always remained the backbone of the magazine. We also had pop music coverage already when I started. My main goal was really just to give everything an extra injection of quality, which I succeeded at, thanks also to lots of excellent young journalists who had just started. That's the foundation we built Humo on. The only rule was that every piece we published had to be very well written – captivating, critical and if possible with a healthy dose of humour.”

**Other countries also had TV guides. Why wasn't our golden formula copied elsewhere?**

“Those magazines usually made the decision to only print the TV schedule, steering clear of any comment or criticism, presumably because they didn't want to offend anyone so as not to hurt the record-breaking circulation numbers they were dreaming of.” He laughs. “That wasn't something we gave much thought to at Humo. And that's not how it works. We never tried to appeal to a broader audience to the point where we lost our identity. Humo was always clear about that: we offered a high level of quality for a wide audience, and we viewed our readers as intelligent people. This was exceptional at the time. Even the TV magazines

published by public broadcasters in the Netherlands were so inoffensive and bland – with the exception of the VPRO Gids, which was made by like-minded people.

But it's always been difficult to explain what kind of magazine Humo is to people abroad. We used to just say something like, ‘a combination of Time Out and Rolling Stone, but different’.”

**All in all, what are you most proud of?**

“That it became what it ended up becoming. That it worked so well. And that it still exists.

For a very long time, we were able to reach an incredible number of people with something that was really good. For a few years, we sold an average of 240,000 copies a week, which means we must have had peaks of up to 270,000 or even 300,000. That's an enormous circulation: each issue of Humo was read by four people on average, which means we reached a quarter of Flemish people who could read. Those are huge numbers, of course.” ▶

Humo was founded in 1936 and has a weekly print circulation of almost 90,000.





## “Humo challenged the rest of the field and made its competitors sharper. And we definitely influenced entire generations of young journalists”

With numbers like that, there's also the implicit understanding that you're making a social impact. Was the goal to emancipate Flanders?

“It certainly wasn't our primary goal. Can you imagine? But you do inevitably influence your readers, even if it's just through the way you formulate things, and you teach them – that was our hope, at least – to look at things critically and independently. We also wanted them to look at us like that, by the way. That was a mindset shared by everyone at Humo. Of course, we also employed some real baboons over the years – a list of names is available on request – but we always formed a close-knit team nonetheless: everyone shared a similar sense of justice and a critical outlook, everyone was pulling in the same direction. That was a great strength.”

That was only possible, of course, because the its current editor-in-chief set the course and – “– relentlessly cracked the whip across the bloodied backs of his underlings?” Mortier laughs. “Well, someone has to. But in all seriousness, it is crucial to work together as one when you're



Ever Meulen's poster for 'The man of language', an event at the Bourla in Antwerp in honour of Guy Mortier's 80th birthday.

making a magazine. Because that's something that shines through and becomes part of your image. And image is so important. So that's something I put a lot of work into, with the cover, all sorts of promotions and clever stickers, and alliances with festivals like Torhout/Werchter, now Rock Werchter. We also had Humo's Rock Rally, and we started making TV and radio ads as soon as we could. All to acquaint people with the essence and quality of Humo, through all possible channels.”

“I think that's also the biggest challenge today: making people aware of

how good the magazine is. That hasn't become any easier, because we're now competing with the whole world, and because of how important images have become thanks to digitisation. But promotion is still key. It's more crucial than ever.”

**What else should Humo do to keep your life's work vital?**

“Humo must be independent. An island on which editors have the freedom as well as the means to do what is necessary to keep the magazine unique. That also means going against the tendency of all those managing boards to organise companies in such a way that everyone has to do everything in the same way. Apparently, that's some kind of irresistible temptation – it's something that keeps rearing its head. But it must be avoided, or else it's game over for Humo, I fear.”

“Sales have declined, of course, but that's also due to the reduced impact of TV – when we started, there were two channels and everyone was watching the same programme at the same time. And our competitors have started to catch

# HUMO

## HUMO: THE INABILITY TO BE BORING

‘I'm from Humo, so, from what was possible in those days / Dreams, protests and humour, which were all the same: / the inability to be boring.’ So wrote Herman de Coninck, poet and Humo editor from 1970 to 1983. He helped shape the magazine during its miracle years, which would transform Flanders. Guy Mortier, a maverick who as an 18-year-old had bluffed his way onto the first rock 'n' roll show on Flemish radio, together with a band of like-minded talented young journalists, made Humo one of the strongest media brands in the Dutch language area.

Ground-breaking journalism, hard work and having fun always went hand in hand at Humo. Mortier and his crew set a high bar for innovative pop journalism, television criticism, participatory reporting, columns, hard-hitting interviews and investigative journalism – all written with a dashing sense of style, plenty of humour, irreverence and a critical mindset.

When Mortier handed over the reins to Jörgen Oosterwaal after more than 30 years, Humo's spirit and quality were preserved for another decade. After an interlude, Humo ended up at DPG Media, which brought Oosterwaal back to rebuild the magazine.

Now, seven years on, Humo is writing a digital story with its trademark panache and great results: in 2022, online growth doubled and total brand reach increased by more than 20 per cent. In 2023, Humo's website is becoming a daily destination for more and more readers and subscribers, helping them decide what to watch and listen to – a safe haven for gripping journalism and an incorrigible purveyor of delicious nonsense. The cards are in Humo's favour. Shortly before his death, superstar strategist Jan Callebaut, so competent that he managed to make the whole world believe that Heineken is actually refreshing, made his umpteenth cogent analysis: Humo's outlook on life matches that of an adolescent in search of the best music and TV series as well as ways to make the world a better place, irreverent towards authority and with a penchant for sharp humour and a healthy sense of irony. The upcoming generation of digital natives is a natural match for Humo: dreams, protests and humour, and the inability to be boring.

BART VANEGEREN

“The only rule was that every piece we published had to be very well written – captivating, critical and if possible with a healthy dose of humour.” (Photo: Bart Vanegeren and Guy Mortier)

up. During my early years at Humo, the other magazines and newspapers were a joke, but that's changed. Perhaps Humo challenged the rest of the field and made its competitors sharper. And we definitely influenced entire generations of young journalists.”

“The magazines we were sometimes compared to (Time Out, Rolling Stone, Les Inrockuptibles) no longer exist or have lost a lot of their lustre. Out of all those magazines, Humo is by far the most likely to have a long life. But maintaining our independence will be crucial. And we need lots of young people! Fortunately, I regularly see

great pieces by new writers in Humo. And besides that: work hard and don't give up!” He laughs. “And you need to be paid much better, of course. Here you should write: ‘The laughter has stopped. He is dead serious.’ The laughter continues.”

**Finally, if in addition to being energetic, you were also young and enterprising, what kind of business would you start today?**

“The same one. But that wouldn't be possible, of course. In any case, I would definitely learn to play a musical instrument. The piano! The guitar! And then you'd better run for cover.”

# WOMEN'S BRANDS

## *now reach all generations*

**DPG Media's women's brands decided to join forces in 2022 to reach even more women in the Netherlands. They started a women's platform and planted lots of seeds, and there was also a harvest, says editor-in-chief Hilmar Mulder. "No other magazine brand reaches as many women as we do. The influence we have is unprecedented."**

**I**t used to be all but forbidden: if you worked at Margriet, you'd never even dream of visiting a colleague at a rival women's magazine like Libelle. That has changed very quickly, says Hilmar Mulder, who's been managing editor-in-chief of Women's Publications at DPG Media (Libelle, Margriet, Flair and Nouveau) since early 2022, in addition to her position as editor-in-chief of Libelle.



**Hilmar Mulder**  
54, MANAGING EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF WOMEN'S PUBLICATIONS AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF LIBELLE

In her new role, Mulder explicitly sought to create synergy between the editors-in-chief of the women's titles. "The first thing we did was create a clear profile for each title. Margriet is the leading magazine brand for women over 60 who want to live a happy, healthy and full life. Libelle is still the number one magazine for over-45s who are excited about life and play an active role in their community. And Flair's target demographic, after the rebranding, are women roughly between the ages of 25 and 45."



**82%** GROWTH IN DIGITAL REACH  
**317k** UNIQUE VISITORS PER DAY  
**205,808** TOTAL CIRCULATION



**96%** GROWTH IN DIGITAL REACH  
**154k** UNIQUE VISITORS PER DAY  
**104,822** TOTAL CIRCULATION



**29%** GROWTH IN DIGITAL REACH  
**264k** UNIQUE VISITORS PER DAY  
**35,077** TOTAL CIRCULATION

For Flair, this meant a radical revamp, with a new look and a substantive focus on self-development as the new heart of the brand, responding to the changing interests of young women. In addition, all titles were to focus more energy on digitisation: all print articles now also appear online.

#### SHARING CONTENT

The new symbiotic strategy for the women's titles is taking shape in a number of different ways. "The editors-in-chief of the women's publications meet every month," Mulder explains. "And we've also started sharing content." Content sharing began as part of a pilot, which proved to be a success, and has now taken on a structural character. "In addition to their own unique content, all our titles now also publish more generic articles that can easily be shared. Often you only need to change the images. Articles on how to save money, the flu epidemic or the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women appeal to the readers of all of our women's titles. This helps us increase our reach and extend the life cycle of the content."

The strategy has proved successful, as DPG Media's women's platform saw a spectacular 75 per cent growth compared to the year before: it now reaches over 40 per cent of Dutch women, with over 800,000 unique visitors a day ("You could fill the Johan Cruyff Arena 14 times a day with the women we reach through our online channels alone"). The public visibility of the brands has also increased, with the magazines' editors-in-chiefs making monthly appearances on the TV programme *Koffietijd*.

#### SHARING SCHEDULES

Joining forces can also lead to better-quality content, whether it's articles on social issues, service stories or entertainment news. Hilmar Mulder gives an example: "Let's say Margriet and Libelle both wanted to make an Italy issue. Before, they wouldn't have known this about each other, and sometimes issues like these would even come out at the same time, with similar stories. Now they would share their schedules and mood boards and discuss who was going to do what. Of course, we still make sure we don't get in each other's way when it comes to high-profile issues."

"We're constantly learning from each other," Mulder says. "Whether it's Libelle and Margriet working together to create a digital edition on the death of Queen Elizabeth, or finding out what does and doesn't work when it comes to content people have to log in or pay for, sharing and analysing the data together. We've laid the foundation for cooperation, now it's a matter of building on that. We're going to take big steps forward this year."



**MARLEEN STAAL (FLAIR):**

## "You shouldn't hoard all your gems for yourself"

For Marleen Staal, head of Digital at Flair and a self-described 'data geek', the collaboration between DPG Media's women's titles and the strong focus on digitisation make total sense. "We create so much good content, and it's a shame to use it for just one title. You could of course make the argument that you need to keep your gems, your best stories, for your own title. And we still don't publish the same story in more than one print edition. But those print editions have a limited shelf life, unlike many of these fantastic stories. More than anything else, it's just a matter of getting the timing right."

In practice, the collaboration is already extending beyond the women's titles, says Staal. "Articles on parenting from Ouders van Nu and entertainment pieces from Veronica Superguide are often also interesting to our target audience. At Flair, we don't have the resources to write these kinds of stories ourselves. But if we change the images, they can still be very popular with our readers."

And no, every shared article doesn't require its own separate meeting. "If we see that an article is doing really well, we just ask if we can publish it too," Staal explains. For editors who came up in the print era, when titles were still in competition with each other, this new focus on sharing may take some getting used to. But the new generation has no problem with it, according to Staal. "People used to feel like they had to 'keep up with the Joneses'. But the younger generation believes that sharing is caring: you shouldn't hoard all your gems for yourself."



**MEREL SCHUT (MARGRIET):**

## "Readers just want good stories"

Merel Schut, online coordinator at Margriet, also saw the content-sharing pilot evolve into a close collaboration. Moreover, with Margriet's new website (launched in January 2022) and app, the magazine has become much more data-driven. "We now have a dashboard at the magazine showing things like our daily reach and most popular stories."

Sometimes these are stories from other titles. "Nouveau often has very personal stories that do well with our over-60 target group. And an article from Ouders van Nu about overstressed grandmothers who have to take care of their grandchildren was also a big hit with our readers. When we get a successful story like that, we try to build on the momentum, for instance by sending out push notifications."

According to Schut, there's still a world to be won by analysing why some articles do well and others don't. In any case, the days of magazines wanting to do everything themselves are behind us. "We hardly do anything related to spirituality ourselves. But if we see an interesting article from Flow, we'll still publish it – citing the original publication, of course." Isn't that confusing for readers? "No, we haven't had a single complaint or comment about it," Schut replies. "Readers just want good stories."

## Donald Duck: Easy Reading edition

This is a special Donald Duck edition for children with dyslexia and all other children with reading difficulties. Starting in 2023, Easy Reading editions will be published four times a year instead of just once. "We do this simply because we believe it's important for society," says Donald Duck editor-in-chief Ferdi Felderhof.



## READING SUPPORT

**Some 2.5 million people in the Netherlands struggle with reading, writing and basic math. This has a big impact on their daily lives. DPG Media is committed in various ways to helping anyone who has difficulty reading or is still learning.**

### NU.NL: NEWS THAT'S EASY TO UNDERSTAND

The news is for everyone. But how do you ensure that all your readers understand your articles without talking down to them? "The good news is: you can," says NU.nl editor-in-chief Gert-Jaap Hoekman. "By swapping out some commas for full stops. By listening more, so you hear questions you forget to ask yourself. But mostly by asking yourself: how would I tell this story to my friends or family?" As a result, NU.nl's comprehensibility has increased by 6 percentage points over the past year.

## Partnership with CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK

DPG Media has signed a strategic partnership with Stichting CPNB, which promotes Dutch-language literature and organises the annual Children's Book Week and the Children's Jury. Together, they will embark on a joint mission to help more children experience the joys of reading. Erik Roddenhof, CEO of DPG Media: "With this collaboration, we want to get kids reading and encourage parents and grandparents to read to their children. That's where our media titles can play a hugely important role."



## LIBELLE MADE MORE ACCESSIBLE

In cooperation with Stichting Lezen en Schrijven, Libelle published a special simplified edition in October 2022 with accessible wording, shorter sentences and a more straightforward layout. The final editors took a course on how to reword texts to accommodate lower reading levels, and the content was put together in consultation with a group of people who used to have reading difficulties. Libelle printed 100,000 copies of this special edition.



# KIDS' MEDIA

## *with a mission*

**In the year that saw the 70th anniversary of weekly magazine Donald Duck, DPG Media further expanded its kids' cluster with the acquisition of Kidsweek and Samsam. With this comprehensive portfolio of magazines, the kids' cluster is now the undisputed market leader. And that's not just great news for kids who like to read – it's also convenient for advertisers.**

**D**PG Media's kids' cluster offers a good mix of entertainment, education and news, with Donald Duck, Tina and Zo Zit Dat and, since 1 December 2022, Kidsweek and Samsam. Kidsweek, a weekly newspaper for children launched back in 2003, comes out every Thursday in the Netherlands. Samsam has an even longer history: this magazine, which combines journalism and education and features children from all over the world, has been around since 1975. Both brands are household names among pupils and teachers in primary education, and have spawned teaching materials.

"Kidsweek and Samsam are all about journalism, making them a perfect fit for DPG Media," says Sanne Linssen, managing director of Flow & Kids. "These brands are logical additions to our portfolio, given the large amount of overlap between our kids' titles: they target the same audience and share the same mission."

#### UNDISPUTED LEADER

Thanks in part to the acquisition of Kidsweek and Samsam, DPG Media is now the undisputed leader in the kids' market. "Together, we reach almost half of all children in the Netherlands, over 400,000 – at home but also at school. We're proud to inform, inspire and entertain such a large group of children between the ages of 7 and 12 in a safe, accessible and responsible way."

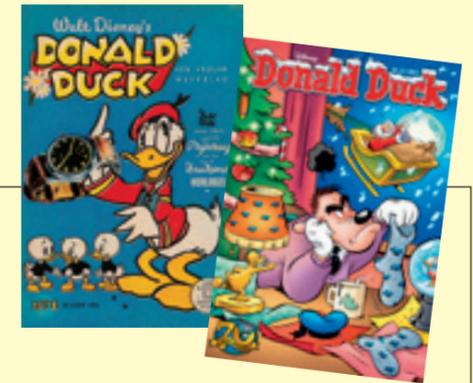
Kids' media play an important role in the development of future generations. "That's a role that excites our editorial teams," Linssen says. "With this collaboration, we want to provide the best possible content to all children. Because reading isn't just important, it's also a lot of fun. Every week, hundreds of thousands of children read our magazines. We want that number to be even bigger."

The kids' titles learn a lot from each other. Kidsweek and Samsam, for instance, have a firm foothold in schools, which could also be of interest to Donald Duck, Tina and Zo Zit Dat. The latter three could return the favour by sharing their entertainment expertise with their new colleagues at the journalistic titles. "In the coming years, the brands will continue to complement and strengthen each other, becoming even more effective at carrying out their social mission."

#### SHOCKINGLY LOW READING SCORES

That mission is to get primary school children to read more while also promoting reading pleasure. Reading scores in the Netherlands are shockingly low, with as many as 16 European countries performing better. For one of the most prosperous countries in the world, this is not just embarrassing, but also serious cause for concern. Research shows that children who don't learn to read properly are significantly affected by this later in life. Their vocabulary remains limited and they are less well informed, making them more susceptible to fake news and conspiracy theories.

The kids' titles ensure that children keep reading print media. And because they enjoy what they read, they improve their reading skills without even noticing it. They broaden their vocabulary and often end up learning something too.



#### DONALD DUCK TURNS 70

Weekly magazine Donald Duck celebrated its 70th anniversary in the Netherlands in 2022. There were exhibitions, anniversary books and special paperbacks, and the magazine also launched new products, such as the Donald Duck story time books.

"Despite these being tough times for print magazines, we can look back on a successful year," says editor-in-chief Ferdi Felderhof. "Print circulation fluctuates between 180,000 and 200,000, so we remain one of the largest magazines in the Netherlands. Donald Duck is a magazine that's read by generation after generation. It's part of the cultural fabric, and that's something we're proud of."



*Sanne Linssen*  
32, MANAGING  
DIRECTOR OF  
FLOW & KIDS





**vtm** Market share 39%



**RTL** BELGIUM Market share 32.7%



**vtm GO**



**streamz**



**The Netherlands** Market share 20.4%



**Belgium** Market share 24.5%



**JOE** Market share 12.9%



**Wily** Market share 2.2%

# AUDIO & VIDEO

## Not air, but oxygen!

‘Video Killed the Radio Star’ was the first music video aired by MTV when it started broadcasting in 1981 – a harbinger of the media revolution that video would bring about. But while video did live up to its promise, the rise of this new medium didn’t come at the expense of radio. Quite the contrary: more than four decades on, radio is still alive and kicking! In fact, 2022 proved to be a banner year for our radio, TV and streaming brands. Content, it appears, is more important than the medium it’s distributed through.

Radio and TV programmes are rarely seen as great art. Often, they’re simply dismissed as a load of hot air. A frivolous way to pass the time, which is nevertheless interesting enough to warrant the most critical reviews. Bread and games that entire newspaper sections and websites are devoted to every day. Fleeting entertainment that sparks untold water cooler chats. All that time wasted on a daily dose of hot air!

There are few forms of entertainment and companionship that have as much impact as radio and TV. And when a programme is moving, exciting or even just exceptionally witty, it’s anything but hot air. It’s that much-needed oxygen that every human being craves, day after day.

In 2022, our audio and video brands generated tonnes of oxygen. And after two years of Covid, people savoured every breath.



*Dirk Lodewyckx*  
52. MANAGING DIRECTOR, ENTERTAINMENT

Mohamed Ouaamari  
31, SUPPLY MANAGER, VTM GO SHORTIES

# VTM GO Shorties:

spontaneous entertainment

Calogero Macaluso  
39, STREAMING BUSINESS DIRECTOR

Last year saw the launch of VTM GO Shorties: exclusive mid-form video content. Racking up 21 million views right out of the gate, it was an instant hit. The video platform's success is driven by a combination of strong content and maximum viewing comfort, say Calogero Macaluso and Mohamed Ouaamari.

#### WHY DID VTM GO NEED SHORTIES?

**Calogero Macaluso:** "Online viewers have a stronger desire for spontaneous entertainment. Our Shorties not only respond perfectly to that need, but they also fit VTM's DNA."

**Mohamed Ouaamari:** "Our Shorties occupy the space between short-form (like TikTok videos and Instagram Reels) and long-form (linear TV shows). Whereas a TV programme has time for build-up, mid-form stories need to be told in 10 minutes. So our Shorties move faster, but they still have cliffhangers that make you want to binge. You can watch 10 or 100 minutes, on your smartphone, laptop, tablet or TV – the viewer decides!"

"We also challenge our makers to get creative with Shorties. How can they use our platform to tell exciting sub-stories in addition to the main story they're telling on TV? As with *The Voice Comeback Stage*, in which Laura Tesoro – the 'fifth coach' – gives people who get eliminated on *The Voice* a second chance on VTM GO. They can then make a comeback later, during the live shows. By offering content through multiple channels (linear television, VTM GO and social media), we reinforce the viewer's FOMO: fear of missing out."

#### WHAT TARGET AUDIENCE DO THESE SHORTIES REACH?

**Mohamed Ouaamari:** "Our Shorties content derived from successful TV programmes reaches a wide audience: VTM viewers aged 7 to 77 who can't get enough of their favourite shows. Our standalones are more about spontaneity. Take *Security Checkers*. Arno and Gerben aren't professional presenters, but two people who go on an adventure together. Footage is often

*"Shorties give you an extra reason to visit VTM GO"*

filmed using smartphones and GoPro cameras. That distinct approach and the use of influencers mostly appeals to younger viewers."

**Calogero Macaluso:** "Shorties give you an extra reason to visit VTM GO. And it's not just young people who are frequent users of VTM GO. We're also becoming more and more popular among older generations thanks to our presence on the 'big screen', through smart TVs and set-top boxes from Telenet, Orange and Proximus. We actually passed 200 million views in 2022: a 13 per cent growth. VTM GO has 2.7 million unique accounts – which translates to 85 per cent penetration among Flemish streamers – and a monthly reach of more than 850,000 accounts. Streaming on VTM GO has become mainstream."

#### WHAT DOES 2023 HAVE IN STORE?

**Calogero Macaluso:** "VTM GO has a 52 per cent market share, making it bigger than VRT MAX and GoPlay combined. We want to maintain that position by continuing to focus on exclusive content and increased viewing comfort. There will be lots of announcements in both of those areas, so stay tuned! For advertisers, VTM GO offers great opportunities to present their key demographics with targeted content. Ads on VTM GO now account for 10 per cent of our total TV ad revenue. A great result compared to our peers in other European markets. We're not just leading the way here in Flanders – VTM GO is setting the bar internationally."

Behind the scenes:

# FROM IDEA TO TV FORMAT

**In 2022, VTM once again managed to launch a number of successful new and surprising shows. How are TV programmes conceived and developed, and what does it take for a show to become an internationally successful format?**

A family is given half an hour to find 100,000 euros hidden in their own home (*Wie zoekt die Wint*). Young couples fix up a ruin, and at the end of the series one couple wins the house (*Huis Gemaakt*). Two pairs of contestants compete against each other to break out of an escape room as quickly as possible (*Code van Coppens*).

They might seem like simple ideas at first glance, but all three of these formats spawned incredibly successful programmes that aired on VTM in 2022. And while it may only take a split second to come up with an idea, turning it into an effective format that's good enough for TV can be a lengthy process. Sometimes it's a matter of a few months, other times it takes more than a year.

## PIT, VTM AND BE-ENTERTAINMENT

With in-house production studio PIT, TV channel VTM and format distributor Be-Entertainment, DPG Media owns the entire chain, from idea to format. It's an ideal situation: PIT comes up with and produces a programme, it airs on VTM and Be-Entertainment sells it abroad. VTM also works with external production companies that pitch ideas to the channel, which leads to new programmes as well.

Once an idea or pitch manages to excite creative director Davy Parmentier and his team, it's presented to VTM's channel managers. Then, if everyone shares their excitement, the channel either places an order with the production company or VTM allocates a development budget and fleshes out the concept together with the creators.

"In that development phase, we try to find the format's must-see quality," explains Leen Lombaert, DPG Media's head of Factual.



**Leen Lombaert**  
45, HEAD OF FACTUAL,  
DPG MEDIA



**Gepke Nederlof**  
42, MANAGING  
DIRECTOR OF  
BE-ENTERTAINMENT



## The Way Out

*Code van Coppens*, sold abroad as *The Way Out*, is an example of one of VTM's international hits. The escape room show, which revolves around the brothers Mathias and Staf Coppens, first aired in Flanders, in 2019. Its fourth season drew enormous ratings last year. The format has been sold to broadcasters in the Netherlands, Wallonia and Denmark, and has been on TV for multiple seasons in these regions. A version of the programme shot in the original escape room in Belgium is also available throughout the Middle East.

"How can we make sure that a programme becomes the next day's 'water cooler conversation'? We also think about the 'beats' of each episode: those exciting moments when you want to turn up the sound on your TV. This can be a deliberately built-in plot twist in a game or round, a contestant getting eliminated or the return of a well-known character. We also explore how we can offer content across multiple channels, for instance with a second-screen app, a Shortie (a short video) on VTM GO, or a collaboration with Qmusic or HLN."

## THE BEST FORMATS

Once the structure is in place, the producer can move on and VTM starts providing input to ensure that the finished programme makes sense conceptually, and that it fits the channel. This is also when Be-Entertainment gets involved. "That's to determine if we can tweak the concept so it can be sold internationally," says managing director Gepke Nederlof. "The best formats aren't predicated on the talent of local creators but can be used by anyone in the world, so to speak. That's why it's so important to create a foolproof structure. If you've got a tight, rock-solid format and an exciting, or better yet, *unique* idea, your chances of international success are many times higher. The stronger the format, the easier it is to sell."

One thing that strikes Nederlof, who is Dutch, is the attention to detail that goes into programme development in Flanders. "There's love for the programme and a sense of craftsmanship. Creators really go the extra mile and ask themselves: are we there yet or can we do even better? Every little detail is scrutinised. That way of doing things leads to a higher level of quality."

## INCREDIBLY SATISFYING

Some programmes, such as game shows, are pretested by recording a pilot episode. And programmes are still subject to rigorous scrutiny once they've made it on TV. "Even if it's a big hit, we won't be satisfied until all the kinks are ironed out," says Lombaert. "That's why we put a lot of work into the second season of *Huis Gemaakt*, which aired on VTM in 2022. We went from 12 to 20 episodes, including a finale week that did very well. That's incredibly satisfying."

Each year, about six or seven titles can be sold internationally – a fraction of all the new programmes VTM produces, which allows Be-Entertainment to get the cream of the crop. "It's a luxury for us that VTM is bold enough to launch so many new programmes every year," says Nederlof. "We always want to surprise viewers with our programming," Lombaert adds. "We never just copy and paste the previous season."



# RTL BELGIUM: ENTERTAIN, INFORM AND CONNECT

Since March 2022, DPG Media is a 50 per cent shareholder in RTL Belgium, which owns three TV channels and two radio stations. New RTL Belgium CEO Guillaume Collard has a crystal clear game plan: by investing in local content and strong brands, and by accelerating digitisation, he wants to become market leader on all fronts. Is he biting off more than he can chew? “I’m a realist, but more than anything else I’m an optimist.”

As a young boy, Guillaume Collard, 38, didn’t have dreams of one day becoming CEO of a media company in French-speaking Belgium. “I wanted to become a professional footballer,” he recalls. Unfortunately, he just wasn’t good enough, he says. “I never outlined my career plan. My advice is to do what you love. If I no longer enjoy my job, I would leave.”

That certainly isn’t the case in his current position. On the contrary, Collard is about to implement a three-year plan that he’s incredibly excited about. “I’m convinced that, together with DPG Media and Rossel (which each own 50 per cent of RTL Belgium’s shares), we’re going to add an exciting new chapter to our story.”

### THREE’S A CHARM

For Collard, good things always come in threes. RTL Belgium’s three-year plan can be summed up in three words: We are RTL. And behind those words is a three-part mission: *divertir, informer et rassembler* – entertain, inform and connect. To achieve this, Collard has set – you guessed it – three strategic priorities: invest in local content, boost RTL’s brands and accelerate the company’s digitisation.

“Despite the difficult economic circumstances, we’re going to invest in 2023. This sends a very important signal, and it’s proof that we’re serious about achieving our goals,” Collard says. “Obviously, we’re going to be responsible about how we spend our money and do everything we can to keep a balanced budget. But our ambition is to claim market leadership on all fronts: TV, radio and digital.”

### LOCAL CONTENT IS KEY

Appointed CEO in June 2022, Collard hit the ground running by implementing a new strategy and overhauling RTL’s organisational structure only a few months later, in September. Creating content around news, entertainment and sports will be a main focus, as will accelerating the company’s digital transformation. As CEO, Collard runs all content activities himself. “Content is the beating heart of our company,” he explains. “It’s my responsibility to get all our talented experts working together so that all our content becomes available on all our platforms.”

Local content – both original and co-produced – is given priority. Because as a media company in French-speaking Belgium, RTL feels the streaming services and French channels breathing down its neck. “Local content will set us apart from our competitors and trigger a whole chain reaction. After all, it’s content that’s created together with local talent, backed up by strong, local marketing. This is how you build an emotional connection with your viewers and listeners, which goes hand in hand with better ratings and, hopefully, growing ad revenue.”

### DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

RTL Play will have a special role in both the content strategy and within the digital transformation. “We want to have the number one streaming platform in French-speaking Belgium.” Not only will exclusive content be created for the platform, but there will be additional investments in RTL Play’s technology and marketing as well. “And the platform should also contribute to the growth of digital ad revenue, of course.”

Digitising the advertising model is high on the list of priorities too, especially with players including Netflix and Disney emerging as potential competitors. “Like DPG Media, we want to move towards addressable and non-skippable advertising,” Collard says. “But in the end, it’s all about the content. That’s how we win over viewers and advertisers on our digital platforms.”

Does Collard ever get stressed by all these ambitions? The answer is a resounding *non*. “There’s a good atmosphere. We are RTL. That’s not just a phrase, that’s who we are. Isn’t that fantastic?”



Guillaume Collard  
38, CEO OF RTL BELGIUM

# The SECRET of The SOUND

Qmusic had another record-breaking year, growing its market share to 24.5 per cent in Belgium and 20.4 per cent in the Netherlands. The Dutch station also celebrated the 15-year anniversary of *Het Geluid* (The Sound), which has become the most popular radio game in the Netherlands since its launch in 2007. But what goes on behind the scenes? And why is the game shrouded in so much secrecy? One of the judges (whose identity must remain secret) offers a sneak peek.

“I’ll never forget that security guard. He was doing his rounds through the building that night and opened the door to our studio, just as we were in the midst of our top-secret recording process for The Sound. We were in such a panic! Lucky for us, he didn’t realise what we were doing, but we did start locking the door after that incident.”

“When I talk about ‘we’, I mean the five-member jury that comes up with and records the sounds, and judges all the answers. We don’t go around advertising who’s on the jury to our coworkers at Qmusic – even the DJs don’t know. They don’t know the answer either, so they want to know as much as the listeners, especially if people keep guessing wrong. The judges listen in every hour

for every answer given. Only if a listener gives the right answer live on the air does the DJ get to see it on their screen.”

#### MORE THAN ONE SOUND

“As a judge, The Sound is always on my mind, all year round. As soon as I hear a good sound somewhere, I make a note on my phone. When we meet with the judges, we go through our lists and decide which sounds to record. Yes, that’s *sounds*, plural, because we always record more than one for each year

### The Sound in figures

Since its launch in 2007, 35 sounds have been played in the Netherlands. The fastest guess was 1 day, the slowest 72 days. The most lucrative sounds were: adjusting a travel adapter (2019, €100,000), closing a tab on the back of a picture frame (2017, €63,700) and putting a phone into a protective case (2011, €63,500).

so we have something to fall back on if the first sound is guessed too quickly. Because as we know, someone can get it right on the first day, but it can also take two months.”

“The sound is always an action you can perform, and not all actions fit the bill. Opening a tin: too easy. The sound of a stapler – the most frequently given answer over the years – also not a good idea. The answer also has to be unambiguous and widely recognisable. So flipping a switch in the cockpit of a Boeing 747 is out, because most people will never have heard what that sounds like. The best sounds are those where you hear more than just *click-click* – like if you hear a spring, for example, or if it sounds hollow.”

“The most illustrious sound we’ve had so far was closing a tab on a pack of chocolate sprinkles. The hour before, a listener had guessed ‘opening a tab on a pack of chocolate sprinkles’. Unfortunately, that’s just not the same thing. But it did inspire the winner, who called in an hour later.”

#### PLAYING ON THE LISTENER’S CURIOSITY

“The Sound has proved itself as a booster for Qmusic’s listening figures, especially when it comes to listener retention. People keep listening to hear if the next caller does guess it. We like to compare it to TV programmes like *Wie is de Mol?* and *The Masked Singer*. At some point, you just *have* to know who the mole is, who’s in that suit or what the noise is. The reason the game is so successful is that it plays on the listener’s curiosity. “That’s why our slogan for The Sound is, ‘Know what it is yet?’”

“The Sound isn’t a new format – a game like this already existed on TV back in the 1970s. And before we started in the Netherlands, our colleagues at Qmusic Belgium were already doing their own version. It’s mainly about the way you play it. By introducing new elements like the Super Round and the wild card, we’re trying to keep things fresh, without compromising on the game’s basics. You hear the sound once and then it immediately gets stuck in your head – that’s the driving force behind the game, and it should stay that way. Because from that moment on, it’s on your mind, and you only want one thing: to know what it is. It’s simple, but irresistible.”



# “JOE IS AN EXPERIENCE”

promotions we run. Joe is more than just a radio brand, it's become an experience.”

Last year, that focus on experience resulted in major events like the Joe Top 2000 Singalong Party, Joe Summer Island and Joe Christmas House. There was also the second edition of Pakje van je Hart,

a heartwarming campaign where listeners donate Christmas presents for children who are struggling.

## OVERTAKING COMPETITORS

Listeners appreciate these kinds of events. “When we started the ‘Joe All the way’ adventure in 2016, Joe was still mostly a second- or third-choice station: listeners would start at another station before tuning in to Joe for the feel, and the hit songs. But we’re getting more and more people to come to Joe right away. We’ve now overtaken a lot of stations that used to be bigger, including MNM, Radio 1 and Studio Brussel, and we’re closing the gap with our colleagues over at Qmusic.”



*Robin Vissenaekens*  
46. CHANNEL  
MANAGER AT JOE

Joe’s main target audience is the 35-to-54 demographic, for which last year Joe was the most popular station in Flanders, sharing the top spot with Qmusic. This is according to data from CIM, Belgium’s Centre for Media Information. Joe’s market share among this demographic grew from 12.7 per cent in 2020 and 13.6 per cent in 2021 to 16.2 per cent in 2022. “In radio, you always have to play the long game. We started with figures well below 12 per cent, and we keep growing every year.”

## 250 MINUTES A DAY

In terms of daily listening time, Joe is number one among its target audience. “People listen to us the longest: almost 250 minutes a day, on average.” Joe’s overall market share in the 12+ category was 10.7 per cent in 2022, making Joe a fixture in Flanders’ top 3, behind Radio 2 and Qmusic.

Joe’s themed digital stations, available via DAB+ and online, are also a hit: Joe 60s & 70s (now the most popular DAB+ station in Flanders), Joe 80s & 90s, Joe Easy, Joe Lage Landen and Joe Top 2000. All of them are stations that fit Joe’s feel, Vissenaekens says. “We want to make people smile.”

**In 2022, Joe managed to secure a spot among the top 3 most popular radio stations in Flanders. It also expanded its reach to the Netherlands with the launch of its new digital channel, Joe 70s & 80s. This is a story about a radio brand for over-40s that’s rocking harder than ever.**

Joe’s steady rise obviously started with the key ingredient for good radio: the music. Joe – founded in 2009 as Joe FM – plays a cleverly calibrated cocktail of hits: one-third from the 80s, one-third from the 70s and 90s, a pinch from the 60s and one-third from this century, including today’s music. It’s a mix that resonates with audiences.

“We play all the music that makes you feel good,” says Robin Vissenaekens, one of Joe’s former DJs and, since 2016, the station’s channel manager. “It’s open, positive, recognisable and melodic. Anything that’s doing well in the charts, or that’s done well in the past, and fits Joe’s feel.”

## JOE ALL THE WAY

That ‘Joe feel’ is captured by the station’s slogan, ‘Joe All the way’. “We want to move forward. And not just a little bit, but all the way. We want to make radio for people who still feel young and hungry, even if they’re past 40. Because life doesn’t end at 40 – no, that’s when it starts! That’s also what informs the



# FORGET THE CLICHÉS ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE:

For six years, DPG Media organised Red Nose Day to support young people with mental health problems. The last edition was a big success, raising €3 million. The successor to this programme is JEZ!, a brand new DPG Media collective that aims to give all young people in Flanders a voice and a podium.

**“Y**ou’re all just lazy phone addicts!” Cédric Galle, 19, has been involved with JEZ! from the very beginning and knows the clichés about his generation. “But nothing could be further from the truth,” he says. “We’re growing up in a different time, in a digital world where we interact with new technologies every day. If we’re smart and creative, we can use those to address issues like sustainability and inequality.”

JEZ! is making a name for itself by calling attention to problems that keep young people awake at night, and by organising events where they can come together. DPG Media, VTM, Qmusic, HLN and Belfius all got behind JEZ! because they believe in motivated, committed and well-supported young people. DPG Media sees it as its social mission to empower the next generation, as it’s ultimately up to them to shape the future.

#### YOUNG AND FOOLISH!

JEZ!, an acronym for *Jong En Zot!* (Young And Foolish!), stands up for all young people in Flanders and

Brussels. In a short period of time, 200 youth organisations rallied behind the collective, which is also organising the biggest ever youth charity event together with VTM, Qmusic and HLN, and raising money for youth organisations in Flanders and Brussels.

#### OWN CONTENT

“JEZ! dives into the lives of young people,” says Jessica Bohez, 22, one of the young creatives who regularly hits the streets for JEZ! “We look for young people with special talents and ask them to share their thoughts. JEZ! is one of the few places where young people are heard and seen, where we get to make the editorial decisions, and where we can create the content ourselves.”

All young people are welcome to join JEZ! and can make their voices heard by following the collective on social media, coming to events or creating their own content, sometimes in co-creation with VTM, Qmusic and HLN. Exclusive videos, photos and blogs are often featured on the collective’s social channels such as @Jezofficial.be on Instagram.

 [www.jezofficial.be](http://www.jezofficial.be)



📄 Number of visits/sessions per month

# ONLINE SERVICES

*“We tried to subdue that anxious little voice”*

During a year in which the world suddenly became much more uncertain, a lot of people decided to check whether they had their financial affairs in order. More and more, Online Services is developing into an excellently informed personal assistant – a great help in hard times, says Felix Tenniglo, managing director of Independer and Online Services.



Felix Tenniglo  
60, MANAGING DIRECTOR, ONLINE SERVICES AND INDEPENDER

Last year was an especially wild ride for Independer: consumers flocked to the comparison website in droves to compare their health insurance policies, resulting in an impressive 2.5 million comparisons. Meanwhile, uncertainties about the energy market and rising prices changed people’s mindset. “The war in Ukraine affected our sense of security,” says Felix Tenniglo. “That, combined with high inflation and rising energy prices, caused a lot of people to start wondering: do I have my financial affairs in

order? We tried to subdue that anxious little voice.”

The website did this by offering lots of information and tips. “It was an unprecedented year for us,” says Tenniglo. “For a long time in 2022, energy providers refused to accept new customers. We anticipated this with clear articles that answered questions like, ‘What is going on in the Dutch energy market?’ And also by showing that there were major differences between energy providers. Online Services’ core mission is to help and guide people. So we need to provide consumers with good information and enough insight to make the right choices. If we manage to do that, we can give consumers some peace of mind.”

#### CONSTANT STATE OF FLUX

There was very little peace of mind to be had at Online Services in 2022. To some extent, that’s just part of the job: Pricewatch, the price comparison page of special interest title Tweakers, passed one billion page views, as consumers used it to compare the prices of tech products and electronics millions of times. Because the prices of these kinds of products are constantly changing, it’s a world that’s in a constant state of flux. “We want to keep personalising and tailoring the information we provide to consumers,” Tenniglo explains. “Only if they’ve given their permission, of course.”

For health insurance policies, Independer shows consumers the cheapest option, as well as the one that best fits their needs. The website also offers the My Monthly Expenses Tracker, which shows you at a glance what you’re spending on things like

your car insurance, health insurance and energy contract.

#### RELIABLE PARTNER

The automotive industry also struggled in 2022, but Online Services’ Automotive branch didn’t stumble. “Both car companies and consumers are increasingly relying on us as a dependable partner that brings together supply and demand.” Online Services’ recruitment branch turned in excellent results as well. “While the labour market is facing serious staff shortages, the DPG Media brands Nationale Vacaturebank and Intermediair successfully match jobseekers with employers every day.”

#### DANCING IN THE RAIN

Still, when Tenniglo looks back on 2022, he admits that it wasn’t the easiest year. “It’s our ambition to keep growing,” he says, “which we managed to do thanks to our highly motivated team, who all have a winner’s mentality and a strong sense of dedication. In that sense, we were ‘dancing in the rain’ in 2022: continuing to grow despite setbacks while steadily improving our services for an increasing number of consumers.”

“Our job is to guide consumers and to bring clarity to complex matters. And we’re getting better and better at that – we’re increasingly cited as an authority on consumer issues. Look at health insurance: we were mentioned by pretty much every TV programme and media outlet. So that’s a good position to be in, and one that Online Services wants to build on. We’ve been able to help millions of people, including those who are struggling financially right now, to make better choices and save money in smart ways.”



## MY MONTHLY EXPENSES TRACKER

DPG Media’s Online Services aims to help consumers navigate a wilderness of difficult decisions to find the best products and services. As part of this mission, Independer in October 2022 launched My Monthly Expenses Tracker: a personal environment that shows customers an overview of all their monthly expenses (such as their insurance and energy contracts) in one secure place. It also shows all the information customers need for each contract, and it offers them personalised tips and advice to help them manage their monthly expenses in the best possible way. “If you have a good overview of your fixed expenses, you not only make better choices, but it also becomes easier to save money,” says Sabrina Post, who heads up Lead Strategy and Business Development at Independer. My Monthly Expenses Tracker serves three purposes. “First, it allows you to have all your fixed expenses together in one place, giving you a clear overview of your financial situation so you never have to go through a pile of papers to find a contract again. Second, the personal environment makes it a lot easier to compare and conclude new contracts, because a lot of information is already filled in and we’re aware of your situation. Third, you get smart personalised tips and tailored advice that you can benefit from as a consumer, like a notification when the new healthcare premiums have been announced, or when energy prices are starting to go down again.” In 2022, 450,000 unique customers ended up logging into the secure customer environment and some 20,000 additional contracts were concluded (a 25 per cent increase in logged-in sales compared to last year). “We will continue to expand this year, because we’re off to a promising start.”



Sabrina Post,  
LEAD STRATEGY AND  
BUSINESS  
DEVELOPMENT  
INDEPENDER

# PRICEWATCH: 61 million SEARCHES FOR THE BEST PRICE

**Pricewatch, Tweakers' price comparison page, lists the prices of over 1 million tech products, from mobile phones to laptops and TVs. And that's not even the most impressive statistic: in 2022, Pricewatch logged 61 million searches. So what's the secret behind its success?**

**I**f you want to get a sense of how long Tweakers' Pricewatch page has been around: in its early years, the prices of products were still listed in Dutch guilders (FL).

"Pricewatch was conceived in 1999 by the Tweakers community," explains Tweakers editor-in-chief Wout Funnekotter. "The aim was to help each other find low prices and good promotions. Our visitors would actually go to shops to check the prices of products, which we then manually entered into a database."

#### UP-TO-DATE PRICES

Today, in 2023, Pricewatch is largely automated. Affiliated retailers provide a feed with all relevant product information, which Pricewatch uses to update its listings four times an hour. So if a retailer adjusts one of its prices, it never takes more than 15 minutes for the price to change on Pricewatch. Tweakers also has a four-person team that manually looks up and adds additional

specifications not provided by the manufacturer. "We put a lot of time and effort into offering more comprehensive information than the competition," says Funnekotter.

That comprehensiveness is the page's strongest selling point. "Pricewatch is strongly geared towards Tweakers' target audience: true tech lovers. But their slipstream also pulls in a lot of other people. Our filtering and sorting options have expanded massively over the years, which may be too much of a good thing for some, but they allow our target audience to filter and dissect every little detail."

#### A WEALTH OF INFORMATION

Funnekotter sees Pricewatch as "a hub where all the information that's available about a tech product comes together." If you're looking for a new smartphone, tablet, laptop, camera or television, the page offers a wealth of information: all the news stories, about a product, editorial and user review, test reports, message board discussions and, of course, specs and prices. Another beloved feature are the graphs tracking price trends, so you can see at a glance whether a product has become more expensive or cheaper over the past months.

Pricewatch has a transparent revenue model based on the principle of affiliate marketing. For every visitor it directs to an online retailer, Tweakers receives a small commission, either per click (CPC, cost per click) or per sale (CPS, cost per sale).

#### TRANSPARENT REVIEWS

On average, Tweakers has around 50,000 active monthly contributors. Any member

of the community can post their own reviews, which some avid users take so seriously that they will spend weeks working on a review. Here too it's all about transparency. If you post a review, you *must* indicate how you obtained the product: did you buy it, was it a gift or were you sponsored in exchange for writing a review? Other community members can then rate your review with a score from 0 to 3. "That's where you see the community's ability to self-moderate. If someone keeps writing very short reviews ('This product changed my life, wouldn't change a thing'), they'll never get a high score."



*Wout Funnekotter*  
38, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF TWEAKERS

#### PRICEWATCH IN FIGURES

1,082,000 PRODUCTS  
742,000 PRICE ALERTS SET  
155,000 VENDOR REVIEWS  
46,000 PRODUCT REVIEWS  
6,800 BRANDS

Since last year, Pricewatch has spotlighted temporary price drops. If a product suddenly becomes a lot cheaper, it will get highlighted in the search results. This feature will be further optimised in 2023. Users can also set a price alert, so they're notified when the price of a product drops below a level they set themselves.

How important is Pricewatch to the Tweakers ecosystem? "Hugely important," Funnekotter replies. "For our target audience, it's something unique. There's no other website that offers this kind of high-quality, comprehensive information. There's simply no alternative. If we were to take this page offline, they'd be standing outside waving pitchforks, so to speak. Pricewatch belongs to the whole community: it's still very much a collaborative project."

# COMPARISON SITES

## ARE HELPING PEOPLE THROUGH THE ENERGY CRISIS

For a lot of people in the Netherlands and Belgium, 2022 was a year of serious financial worries. As inflation and energy prices soared, many looked for new ways to save money. DPG Media's Online Services division, which includes Mijn Energie and Independer, helped households balance their budget and experienced an incredible year across the board, capped off in Belgium with the acquisition of Wikipower.

When Russia invaded neighbouring Ukraine on 24 February 2022, igniting a war in Europe, a period of great uncertainty began. Because of Europe's strong dependence on Russian gas, people feared that energy would become scarcer – and much more expensive.

As the continent plunged into an energy crisis, that fear came true. Everyone reading this will have been affected by it in the past year. Prices for gas and electricity went through the roof, and Dutch and Belgian consumers suddenly saw their monthly energy bills double or even triple. "People had to pay hundreds of euros extra a month," says Kenneth Vansina, director of Online Services for Belgium.

The skyrocketing prices caused many people to look for cheaper – or, to put it more accurately, *less expensive* – energy contracts. Energy comparison websites saw traffic explode: in the Netherlands, Independer saw record-high visitor numbers (up 23 per cent from 2021), and in Flanders some 3.8 million comparisons were made on Mijn Energie, also an absolute record.

**NETHERLANDS: NOWHERE TO GO**  
But while the market remained open in Flanders, supply dried up completely in the Netherlands. "An unprecedented situation. We had never experienced this before," says Joris Kerkhof, domain manager for Energy at Independer.

Energy suppliers stopped offering contracts altogether. While existing customers faced hefty rate hikes, new



*Kenneth Vansina*  
35, DIRECTOR OF ONLINE SERVICES FOR BELGIUM



*Joris Kerkhof*  
38, DOMAIN MANAGER FOR ENERGY AT INDEPENDER

customers basically had nowhere to go. "This also dried up the supply on our comparison site. In the summer, some suppliers returned with variable contracts, where prices change on a monthly basis. Fortunately, that gave customers access to energy at 'more realistic' prices again.

The fact that energy prices dominated the public conversation did give Independer the opportunity to further strengthen its position as energy expert. "Through newspapers, radio and television, we were able to provide a lot of consumers with information about the energy market, prices and the options you have as a customer. After the Dutch government announced an energy price cap on Budget Day, we were the first comparison website – just a few days later – to offer an easy-to-use tool that allowed people to calculate how the price cap would affect their advance payment amount."

**FLANDERS: ENERGY ECOSYSTEM**

Things looked very different on the other side of the border. In Flanders, consumers were still able to get new energy contracts, but methodological differences made it very difficult to make accurate comparisons.



Mijn Energie saw itself forced to change course: the energy comparison site also started selling solar panels in 2022, as these were suddenly in high demand. Its stock of five hundred systems, with guaranteed installation in 2022, sold out within a month. Several thousand additional systems will be made available this year.

“We will build an energy ecosystem in 2023 by offering sustainable solutions, such as solar panels, insulation options, batteries and charging stations,” Kenneth Vansina explains. “So in addition to our comparison site, we will also offer a range of other services for everything to do with energy and saving energy. This will allow us to make an even bigger impact in the lives of our customers.”

#### ACQUISITION OF WIKIPOWER

Mijn Energie also wants to focus more on brokering group energy purchases in Flanders. Customers can register for this service, after which energy suppliers will make an offer for the entire group through an auction. This will lead to more competitive prices for consumers.

To facilitate this, DPG Media acquired the Walloon company Wikipower at the tail end of last year, on 30 December 2022. “Wikipower has played a major role in the group energy purchases market for the past 12 years, especially in the French-speaking part of Belgium,” Vansina says. “This acquisition gives us access to their platform and know-how, which supports our ambition to become a major player in group energy purchases in Flanders as well. We intend to achieve this by leveraging our own strong brands and existing partnerships, and by launching collaborations with provinces and cities.”

Wikipower is the largest player in comparing energy online in Wallonia. The Liège-based company employs 35 people. “By bundling their Comparateur-Energie.be with Monenergie.be, we will strengthen our position, not only in Flanders but throughout Belgium,” Vansina says. “Wikipower is also skilled at helping consumers switch contracts by providing

*“With the acquisition of Wikipower, we will hold a unique position in Belgium”*

advice over the phone. We now want to use their call centre expertise in Flanders, at Mijn Energie and other Online Services brands.”

#### REAPING THE BENEFITS IN 2023

At the time of writing, in 2023, consumers are increasingly finding their way back to energy comparison sites. That means that, as memorable as 2022 may have been, it's time to move on. “We prefer to help customers by offering sound advice, but if there's no available product it's like we're standing in an empty shop,” Independer's Joris Kerkhof concludes. “I'm proud that we never stopped believing, and that we're still excited about making energy a success. Before the energy crisis, we had two fantastic years of growth. When the market bounces back, we'll definitely benefit from the foundation we have now. We've established ourselves as an authority when it comes to energy.”



# Campus 19

**TRAINS IT PROFESSIONALS:  
OPEN 24/7, FREE OF CHARGE**

**No more textbooks and endless lectures at university: at Campus 19, students are trained to become IT professionals in the most innovative and accessible way possible. Prior qualifications aren't a must. What you do need is a healthy dose of common sense, a good amount of willpower and the ambition to become the most sought-after person on the job market: an IT professional.**

**T**he first floor of DPG Media's Antwerp headquarters is abuzz with students, night and day. Campus 19 opened its doors there on 19 October 2022, and they haven't closed since. The campus is open 24/7, allowing students to work at their own pace.

The innovative coding school is part of Ecole 42, which has proved successful



in many different countries. After its launch in 2013, the concept grew to more than 40 campuses across the world in nine years. Since 2018, the originally French IT campus has had a branch in Brussels under the name '19, where 350 students receive training every year.

#### FLEMISH TALENT IN HIGH DEMAND

As a financial partner for the Brussels campus, DPG Media could not resist the request to help set up a campus in Flanders. After all, companies across the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium are looking for qualified IT workers, and the labour market is tight. And it's not just tech companies that are looking for new talent – the demand is also high in other sectors. For the past several years, this has made IT professionals some of the most coveted targets for recruiters.

Together with six other companies based in the Antwerp area, DPG Media decided to put down the funds to open Campus 19 in Antwerp. Needless to say that each of these partners believes in the learning concept, but other considerations also played a role. Christian van Thillo, who helms DPG Media as its executive chairman, explains: "I don't know many projects that offer young people these kinds of opportunities to build a successful career. It's a social, inclusive and multicultural project that allows young people to become role models for others."

#### ACCESSIBLE AND HIGH-QUALITY

Thanks to the unique partnership in Antwerp, Campus 19 is able to offer its courses to students free of charge. A diploma isn't required – anyone over 18 can apply for training without any prior knowledge – and the project targets both young people who have dropped out of school and adults looking for a career change. There are 150 spots available in Antwerp.

*"I'm now much more motivated to go for it"*

Candidates first go through a four-week vetting process, which mainly looks at whether they have enough motivation to stay the course. They then embark on a learning pathway that's both unique and the same all over the world: students learn how to code in an interactive and innovative way, without being taught by professors. They go to campus to access the training programme, which offers online tutorials and allows them to acquire basic skills at their own pace.

#### PEER LEARNING

Because all campuses are open 24/7, each student can create their own personal learning schedule. Participants help each other with the exercises and lessons throughout the programme, providing support and enabling efficient knowledge transfer.

"The assignments are structured in a way that forces you to do your own research," says Campus 19 student Casper Caluwe. "You have to use a search engine or get a fellow student to help you if you don't know something or get stuck. To me, that's a much more appealing system than sitting in class, listening to a professor, trying not to drift off. When I can look things up and try things myself, I'm much more motivated to go for it."

Students who have mastered the basic skills can opt to specialise further in subjects such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and e-gaming. Depending on the level students want to attain, the pathway takes between two and five years to complete. That's still a long way off for the first cohort of students at the new Antwerp campus. As first-year students, they've only just started to discover the wonderful world of coding, taking their first steps towards what will hopefully be a successful career.

[www.campus19.be](http://www.campus19.be)

# “EVERY TALENT

*should be seen  
and nurtured”*



**Melanie van Hemert was appointed DPG Media’s head of HR for Belgium and the Netherlands in 2022. What’s her background, and what are her thoughts on diversity, training, networking and returning to the office?**

**F**or someone who loves working with people as much as she does, Melanie van Hemert did not have an easy start at DPG Media. The integration of Sanoma Netherlands (where she helmed the HR department) happened to coincide with the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. As DPG Media’s brand-new head of HR for the Netherlands, she suddenly found herself sitting at home, talking to new colleagues through a screen instead of meeting them in person, as she would have preferred.

No surprise then that she was “tremendously relieved” when the pandemic finally faded into the background in 2022 and people returned to the office en masse. But 2022 was also a memorable year for Melanie in other respects: she was appointed head of HR for Belgium and the Netherlands, joined DPG Media’s Executive Committee and got to experience – finally, after working remotely for more than two years – her first DPG Media staff party.

**YOU’RE NOT JUST THE ONLY WOMAN IN THE EXCO, BUT ALSO THE ONLY TAX ADVISOR.**

“That’s right! I studied tax law and joined PwC at 23 as a tax consultant. But to be honest, I realised fairly quickly that I was much more interested in the clients than in taxes. So after a while, I came to the conclusion that I would have to take certain steps if I wanted to do something I felt truly passionate about. That’s how I ended up in HR at PwC, and I eventually became head of the department there. Bringing people’s ambitions together with a company’s ambitions gives me so much energy, still to this day.”

*“Bringing people’s ambitions together with those of the company”*

**YOU BEING IN THE EXCO IS ALSO GOOD FOR DIVERSITY AT THE COMPANY.**

“You could see it that way. For me, diversity means differences. We all have different backgrounds and competences, and we all look at the world from different perspectives. In terms of the male-female ratio, we now have a pretty good balance at DPG Media – just not at the executive level yet. We also need to do more to increase our cultural diversity. As media creators, our products help people connect with each other, and in doing so we create social impact. So if we want to appeal to all the people who make up our society, which is so diverse, we need to show all perspectives. And you can only do that with a diverse staff.”

**WHAT CAN WE DO TO MAKE THE ORGANISATION MORE CULTURALLY DIVERSE?**

“To give an example, we’ve launched a traineeship for journalistic talent. It’s open to everyone, but the idea is to look for people who might not see journalism as an obvious career path due to their cultural background. So far, we’ve already received 450 applications. There was room for twelve participants, and nine ended up being assigned to a newsroom, for instance at NU.nl. The second cohort will start this year.”

**WHAT DOES THE IDEAL DIVERSE ORGANISATION LOOK LIKE?**

“I want to create an organisation where every talent is seen and nurtured, and where people are given the space and freedom to disagree with each other. This is only possible if there is a sense of trust – if you know that you can safely express your opinions. In that sense, 2022 was a turbulent year in the Netherlands with the scandals surrounding *The Voice of Holland* and *De Wereld Draait Door*. In a socially safe working environment, you need to feel free to tell someone if they’re misbehaving, and you need to be able to have a conversation with them. Open dialogue – that’s something we consciously started working on last year.”

**HAS THAT ALSO BEEN INTEGRATED INTO DPG MEDIA’S CAMPUS AND ACADEMY PROGRAMMES?**

“We’re investing in three pillars: leadership, craftsmanship and digital transformation. Leadership is relevant at every level of the organisation. We must all take responsibility for our own individual tasks and at the same time for the team we’re part of, as a whole. That also means you have to take an interest in others, listen to their input and give feedback. If you manage to do that as a collective, you can be very successful.”



*Melanie van Hemert*  
47, HEAD OF HR, BELGIUM & THE NETHERLANDS

*“We want to create a learning culture”*

“We want to create a learning culture at DPG Media. Because the company is changing rapidly, and only by continuing to learn can we become even better and more agile. We have such incredible in-house professionals, and we need them to exchange their expertise with each other. That’s why we’re launching ‘Learning from the best’ this year: various training programmes in which you share knowledge and learn from your colleagues.”

**ISN’T THAT ALSO A MATTER OF KNOWING HOW TO FIND EACH OTHER? DPG MEDIA HAS BECOME SUCH A BIG COMPANY THAT PEOPLE MIGHT NOT KNOW WHO TO TURN TO SOMETIMES.**

“That’s why we’re also investing in networks that bring together the best people in their respective fields and connect their expertise. We want to get people out of their offices and put them together so they can build on each other’s knowledge. That’s how you create connections within the organisation that aren’t just functional, but built on a steady foundation of trust, appreciation and recognition of each other’s expertise.”

**IS THE END OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC, AND WITH THAT THE END OF WORKING REMOTELY FULL-TIME, ESSENTIAL IN THIS CONTEXT?**

“Absolutely. In 2020 and 2021, we were very successful working from home, and we really did an amazing job together. But we are and remain a company of media creators, and coming together is essential to inspire creativity. Now that the pandemic seems to be behind us, we can return to normal, popping in on colleagues at the office and learning from each other again. Because learning from the best is not just something you do at the Academy or Campus – the best way to learn is in practice. What makes DPG Media so unique is our creativity. There’s a buzz when we come together, and you feel the DNA of this company. That’s something we need to cherish.”

# “ESG MUST BECOME SECOND NATURE”

**ESG stands for Environmental, Social and Governance. It’s a framework used by DPG Media to take social responsibility. “Last year, we came together and chose six areas in which we can and should make a social difference,” says Paul Vereijken, who is responsible for setting up DPG Media’s ESG policy. “Everyone at DPG Media contributes to our efforts in these areas with the choices we make every day. Our awareness of that must increasingly become second nature.”**



## STRONG AND INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM

“Our editorial teams must be free to cover the news independently. In doing so, they contribute to a strong and connected society. That’s in our DNA. We ensure that independence through a strict separation of the commercial side of our business and our editorial staff, and by continuing to invest in journalism itself. Our Campus for journalists is an example of that, and so is our director of journalism, who’s committed to developing the profession.”

- DPG Media employs 2,034 journalists, as well as many freelancers who contribute to our titles every day.
- Over the past year, our Campus taught 151 unique journalism courses in Belgium and the Netherlands.
- Our news publications all have an editorial statute ensuring their independence. There are also six foundations affiliated with DPG Media titles.



## RESPONSIBLE USE OF DATA

“We use enormous amounts of data every day, which comes with great responsibility. We have to avoid filter bubbles, and the use of personal data is always in accordance with the agreements between us and our customers. We don’t resell customer data, and we keep it secure.”

- Launch of [privacy.dpgmedia.nl/.be](https://privacy.dpgmedia.nl/.be) and [privacyrechten.dpgmedia.nl/.be](https://privacyrechten.dpgmedia.nl/.be). Consumers can use these portals to learn more about how we collect and use data, and to view, amend or delete their data.
- DPG Media collaborates with Dutch universities to facilitate PhD research on the application of artificial intelligence in media.
- We support the industry-wide initiative to develop an independent data safe in which users can store their personal online data.



## DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH OF OUR EMPLOYEES

“The digital transformation our media is going through requires

different competencies and skills from our employees. That’s why we’re making targeted investments through our training institutes (Academy and Campus), focusing on a distinctive mix of digital skills, leadership qualities and craftsmanship. We believe it’s important that our employees benefit from continuous development and growth opportunities.”

- The Academy and Campus offered a total of 1,023 training courses last year.
- Together, DPG Media staff completed 49,735 hours of training in Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands.
- At least 20,000 hours were devoted entirely to digital skills.



## REDUCING OUR ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

“In 2022, we started mapping our company’s carbon emissions in accordance with the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, which classifies emissions into three scopes. We’ve also launched a reduction plan.”

- In 2022, carbon emissions from our buildings added up to 13.2 kilotonnes, while our vehicle fleet emitted 4.2 kilotonnes. Together, scopes 1 and 2 (electricity, gas and fuel consumption) accounted for 17.4 kilotonnes of carbon.
- Emissions from purchased materials, services, waste, commuting and more (scope 3) are currently estimated to be around 180 kilotonnes. The final emissions report is due in 2023.
- The number of kilotonnes in scopes 1 and 2 will have to be reduced in the coming years through more sustainable and lower energy consumption in our current premises, faster electrification of the vehicle fleet and the implementation of a sustainable mobility policy. The completion of the new Mediavaert office in Amsterdam in 2024 will also contribute to this. As the largest wooden office building in Europe, it will be highly energy efficient.



## DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

“With the Executive for a Day programme, we invested in the next generation of female leaders

in 2022. We also ensured more cultural diversity in our editorial teams through our traineeships for talented journalists. The second cohort has now started. To raise our awareness when it comes to cultural diversity, we held a number of roundtable sessions with employees from bicultural backgrounds.”

- 44% of employees at DPG Media are women. Women make up 30% of the leadership team (senior management).
- Our traineeships for talented journalists provided a much-desired increase in cultural diversity within DPG Media’s editorial teams last year.
- DPG Media scored 8.3 when it comes to workplace safety in an employee survey.



Paul Vereijken  
35, ESG MANAGER,  
DPG MEDIA



## SOCIAL COMMITMENT

“DPG Media uses its knowledge, resources and media to help the next generation. Because motivated, engaged and well-supported young people possess the power to shape the future.”

- In the Netherlands, our media are committed in various ways to helping anyone who has difficulty reading or is still learning. We’re an official partner of Children’s Book Week, NU.nl makes sure its articles are easy to understand and we published a special edition of Libelle for people who find reading difficult, as well as special Donald Duck editions for children with dyslexia. > see page 53
- In 2022, we launched JEZ! in Flanders, which focuses on young people. > see page 68
- At Campus 19 in our Antwerp headquarters, young people are trained to become IT professionals. > see page 79
- In the interest of press freedom, critical, independent Russian journalists were given shelter at DPG Media’s Amsterdam office. > see page 38

*“Paper prices rose to record levels in 2022 and the tight labour market made itself felt”*

# “A YEAR MARKED BY SHARP COST INCREASES”

**To what extent did rising costs affect DPG Media’s 2022 bottom line? CFO Piet Vroman, 55, explains the figures and takes stock.**

In 2022, the Board of Directors of DPG Media decided to prepare the group’s consolidated financial statements in accordance with the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) going forward. As part of this transition, the 2021 figures were also adjusted to fit the new framework. This has led to a lot of changes, the most important of which are:

- Consolidated goodwill will no longer be amortised on a linear basis, but instead be subjected to an annual impairment test. This will eliminate more than €100 million of amortisation annually.
- Joint ventures will no longer be consolidated proportionally, but only for their share of net income. This affects the consolidation of Streamz and RTL Belgium.
- Leases are now recorded on the balance sheet and subsequently amortised. This increases EBITDA and the balance sheet total.

#### REVENUES

DPG Media closed the 2022 financial year with a revenue of €1.83 billion, approximately the same as last year. Subscription revenue experienced some slight pressure, coming in at €866 million. Advertising revenue performed better, growing to €612 million, while affiliate and classifieds revenues remained fairly stable at €127 million.

However, the financial year was mainly characterised by a sharp rise in costs, especially in Publishing. Paper prices rose to record levels last year, partly as a result of high energy costs. Despite declining consumption, this had a negative impact of over €25 million for the group. The tight labour market in particular made itself felt in the Dutch distribution network, which saw cost increases, while in Belgium automatic wage indexation led to higher personnel costs. These cost developments are expected to weigh even more heavily on the income statement in 2023.

#### RESULTS

Ultimately, EBITDA came in at €365 million last year, approximately 8 percent below the 2021 level. After deducting leasing costs, €342 million remains. After deducting financial results, taxes and the results of the subsidiaries, the group’s net result came to €200.9 million, a decrease of 4.7 percent. Like last year, significant results were achieved through the sale of discontinued operations. In 2021, the sale of Mobile Vikings led to a result of €118 million. Last year, the sale of Aldipress contributed €26 million. The group’s final result for 2022 thus came to €226.7 million.

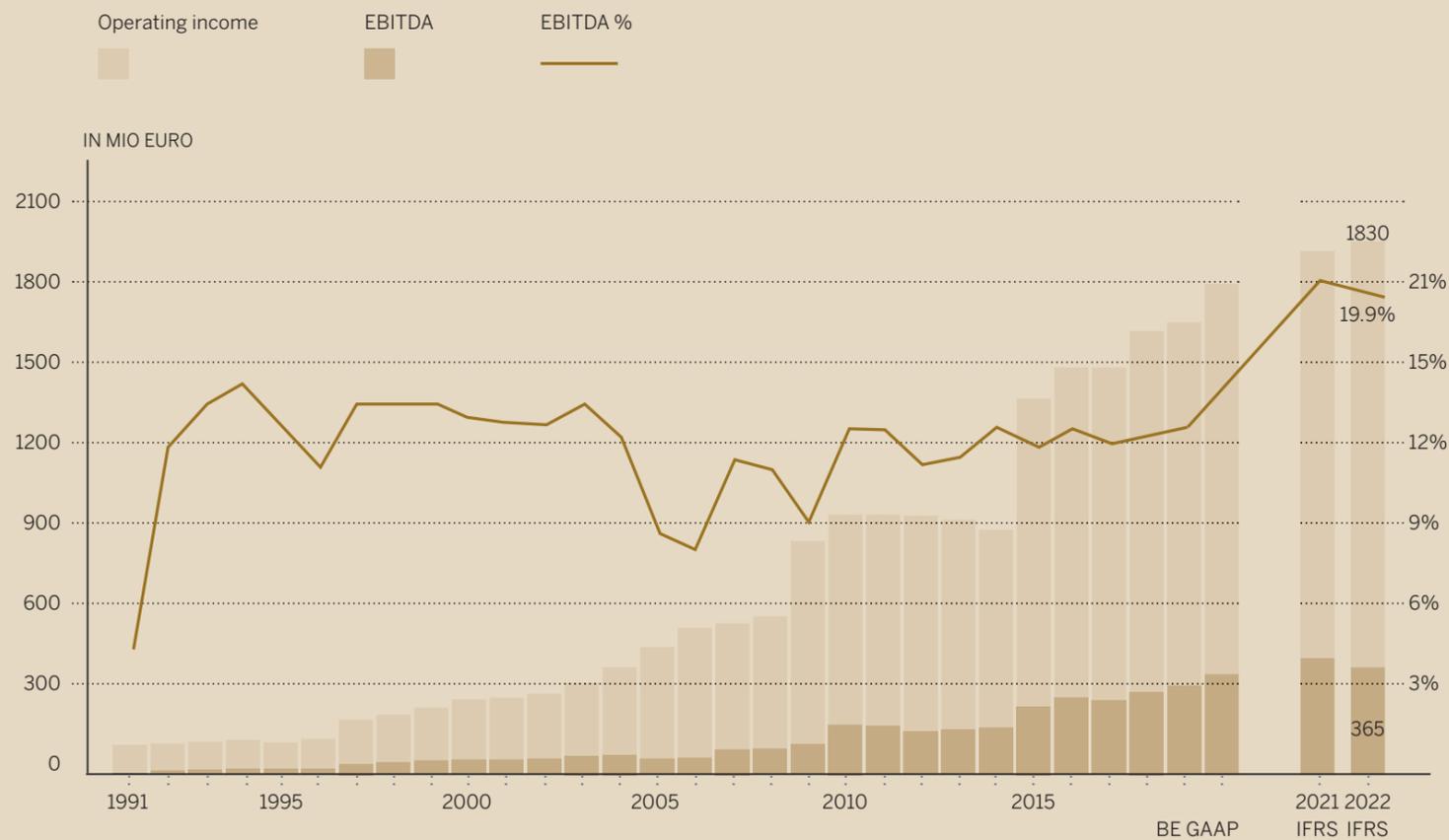
#### BALANCE SHEET

Group equity grew to €761 million, or 43 percent of total assets. Free cash flow was affected by movements in working capital, but mainly by the investment in Mediavaert, the new building in Amsterdam, and the acquisition of a 50 percent share in RTL Belgium. Net financial debt came to €314 million, €286 million of which consists of long-term loans with a fixed interest rate. This means that the European Central Bank’s interest rate hikes have little impact on our current debt levels.

# 2022 figures

OVERVIEW

## DPG Media: 30 years of growth in revenue and returns



## Consolidated profit and loss account

	(in KEUR)	2021	2022
Revenue		1,781,519	1,767,160
Other operating income		38,577	63,446
<b>Revenue and other operating income</b>		<b>1,820,096</b>	<b>1,830,605</b>
Production and transmission costs		-214,233	-241,266
Services and miscellaneous goods		-687,276	-699,635
Personnel expenses		-516,582	-520,721
Other operating expenses		-4,685	-3,841
<b>Operating result before depreciation, amortisation and impairment</b>		<b>397,320</b>	<b>365,142</b>
EBITDA margin		21.8%	19.9%
Depreciation, amortisation and impairment of fixed assets		-73,829	-69,816
Impairment of current assets		-2,139	-7,754
<b>Operating result</b>		<b>321,353</b>	<b>287,573</b>
Financial result		-14,970	-8,377
Share of company results under the equity method		-16,409	-8,079
<b>Result before tax</b>		<b>289,974</b>	<b>271,116</b>
Deferred tax		6,378	-1,486
Cash taxes		-85,617	-68,715
<b>Result from continuing operations</b>		<b>210,735</b>	<b>200,916</b>
Attributable to			
The Group		207,362	199,449
Minority interests		3,373	1,467
Result of discontinued operations		118,292	25,806
<b>Result of the financial year</b>		<b>329,027</b>	<b>226,722</b>

## Segment Reporting

	(in KEUR)	Belgium		The Netherlands		Denmark		Eliminations		Total	
		2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022
		Revenue	648,707	655,944	1,108,004	1,109,274	101,784	98,345	-76,976	-96,403	1,781,519
Other operating income	34,232	45,951	10,731	16,286	8,392	21,467	-14,779	-20,258	38,577	63,446	
<b>Revenue and other operating income</b>	<b>682,939</b>	<b>701,896</b>	<b>1,118,736</b>	<b>1,125,560</b>	<b>110,176</b>	<b>119,811</b>	<b>-91,755</b>	<b>-116,661</b>	<b>1,820,096</b>	<b>1,830,605</b>	
Production and transmission costs	-153,365	-151,478	-65,985	-96,443	-2,928	-3,027	8,045	9,682	-214,233	-241,266	
Services and miscellaneous goods	-273,233	-278,162	-450,457	-481,058	-47,654	-47,715	84,067	107,300	-687,276	-699,635	
Personnel expenses	-144,754	-147,213	-323,102	-320,355	-48,408	-52,844	-318	-309	-516,582	-520,721	
Other operating expenses	-2,489	-1,096	-2,121	-2,685	-36	-49	-40	-12	-4,685	-3,841	
<b>Operating result before depreciation, amortisation and impairment</b>	<b>109,099</b>	<b>123,947</b>	<b>277,071</b>	<b>225,019</b>	<b>11,151</b>	<b>16,176</b>			<b>397,320</b>	<b>365,142</b>	
Depreciation, amortisation and impairment of fixed assets	-37,239	-33,844	-31,990	-30,474	-4,599	-5,498			-73,829	-69,816	
Impairment of current assets	-2,139	-7,700		-54					-2,139	-7,754	
<b>Operating result</b>	<b>69,721</b>	<b>82,403</b>	<b>245,081</b>	<b>194,491</b>	<b>6,551</b>	<b>10,678</b>			<b>321,353</b>	<b>287,573</b>	
Financial result	-4,739	-610	-10,077	-7,642	-154	-125			-14,970	-8,377	
Share of company results under the equity method	-17,137	-6,833	59	90	670	-1,336			-16,409	-8,079	
<b>Result before tax</b>	<b>47,845</b>	<b>74,960</b>	<b>235,062</b>	<b>186,939</b>	<b>7,067</b>	<b>9,217</b>			<b>289,974</b>	<b>272,116</b>	
Deferred tax	2,425	-1,631	3,871	160	82	-15			6,378	-1,486	
Cash taxes	-21,999	-23,230	-63,663	-45,484	45				-85,617	-68,715	
<b>Result from continuing operations</b>	<b>28,272</b>	<b>50,099</b>	<b>175,270</b>	<b>141,615</b>	<b>7,194</b>	<b>9,202</b>			<b>210,735</b>	<b>200,961</b>	
Attributable to:											
The Group	28,272	50,099	171,901	140,148	7,190	9,202			207,362	199,449	
Minority interests			3,369	1,467	4				3,373	1,467	
Result of discontinued operations	114,943	517	3,348	25,290					118,292	25,806	
<b>Result of the financial year</b>	<b>143,215</b>	<b>50,616</b>	<b>178,618</b>	<b>166,904</b>	<b>7,194</b>	<b>9,202</b>			<b>329,027</b>	<b>226,722</b>	

## Consolidated balance sheet

## Cash flow statement

Assets (in KEUR)			Liabilities (in KEUR)			in KEUR		
	31 Dec. 2021	31 Dec. 2022		31 Dec. 2021	31 Dec. 2022		2021	2022
Intangible assets	39,294	49,091	Share capital	190,000	190,000	<b>Operating result</b>	<b>321,353</b>	<b>287,573</b>
Goodwill	880,626	891,803	Reserves, retained earnings and translation differences	418,430	571,331	Depreciation, amortisation and impairment of fixed assets	73,829	69,816
Tangible fixed assets	126,776	167,839				Impairment of current assets	2,139	7,754
Operating leases	87,488	73,745	<b>Equity attributable to the Group</b>	<b>608,430</b>	<b>761,331</b>	<b>Operating result before depreciation, amortisation, impairment and provisions</b>	<b>397,320</b>	<b>365,142</b>
Financial assets	1,459	3,401	Minority interests	11,184	2,175	Share-based compensation	4,073	6,724
Trade and other receivables	11,792	2,613	<b>Total equity</b>	<b>619,613</b>	<b>763,506</b>	Change in provisions and employee obligations	1,652	-13,559
Deferred tax assets	33,578	31,882				Change in impairment of right-of-use assets	10,437	-1,694
Investments accounted for using the equity method	12,198	101,439				Changes in working capital	6,883	1,267
<b>Fixed assets</b>	<b>1,193,210</b>	<b>1,321,813</b>	Bonds	149,303	149,458	<b>Cash flows from operating activities before income tax paid</b>	<b>420,365</b>	<b>357,880</b>
Inventory	85,866	88,746	Bank loans	16,000	100,000	Paid income taxes	-54,112	-89,012
Trade and other receivables	291,362	275,134	Lease obligations	78,050	64,646	<b>Net cash flow from operating activities</b>	<b>366,253</b>	<b>268,868</b>
Tax receivables	2,846	2,516	Provisions and employee obligations	35,177	32,453	Acquisition of subsidiaries	-6,707	-115,292
Other current assets	3,245	2,054	Derivative financial instruments	1,264		Proceeds from divestitures	136,751	4,175
Derivative financial instruments	289	232	Trade payables and other liabilities	10,329	10,317	Payments for tangible fixed assets	-39,529	-62,704
Cash and cash equivalents	33,881	28,362	Deferred tax liabilities	14,383	13,972	Proceeds from the sale of tangible fixed assets	24,862	
Deferred expenses and income received	35,233	34,716	<b>Total long-term liabilities</b>	<b>304,505</b>	<b>370,846</b>	Payments for intangible assets	-23,951	-34,063
<b>Current assets</b>	<b>452,721</b>	<b>431,760</b>	Lease obligations	22,361	19,976	Proceeds from the sale of intangible assets	0	0
<b>Assets</b>	<b>1,645,931</b>	<b>1,753,572</b>	Bank loans	76,000	58,000	Received financial income	1,508	1,729
			Provisions and employee obligations	19,476	8,641	<b>Net cash flow from investment activities</b>	<b>92,935</b>	<b>-206,155</b>
			Derivative financial instruments	0	23	Income from loans		100,000
			Trade payables	238,112	210,750	Repayment of loans	-330,000	-34,000
			Tax liabilities	42,488	21,860	Lease payments	-21,491	-23,536
			Other taxes, employee benefits and social security	119,632	118,297	Loans from related parties	1,000	-17,750
			Other current liabilities	5,645	2,361	Paid financing costs	-17,087	-10,799
			Accrued expenses and deferred income	198,098	179,313	Acquisition of preferred stock	-33,136	
			<b>Total short-term liabilities</b>	<b>721,813</b>	<b>619,220</b>	Incoming / outgoing dividends from joint ventures / minority interests		-2,148
			<b>Total liabilities (long and short-term)</b>	<b>1,026,318</b>	<b>990,066</b>	Dividends paid	-40,000	-80,000
			<b>Liabilities</b>	<b>1,645,931</b>	<b>1,753,572</b>	<b>Net cash flow from financing activities</b>	<b>-440,714</b>	<b>-68,232</b>
						<b>Net cash flow</b>	<b>18,474</b>	<b>-5,519</b>
						Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the financial year	15,407	33,881
						Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the financial year	33,881	28,362
						<b>Net increase / decrease in cash and cash equivalents</b>	<b>18,474</b>	<b>-5,519</b>

# “THE GREATEST RESPECT FOR EFFORT AND IMPACT”

In 2022, we were finally able to put two bewildering years of Covid behind us. Amid the considerable uncertainty of the pandemic, the public craved information, analysis and especially entertainment. DPG Media managed to meet these needs exceptionally well, with results to match.

But there was no time to kick back and relax in 2022. The war in Ukraine caused global disruptions and we faced steep price increases. Consumers were forced to become more discerning, paper prices reached record highs and the labour market became so tight that we struggled to maintain distribution.

Still, DPG Media is once again able to present strong figures – not a given at times like these. But, as the results show, a company with a sound foundation can weather a few storms. The installation in 2022 of a compact Executive Committee allowed us to make quick adjustments moving forward. We also finetuned our existing digital strategy, which continued to prove successful. We are making significant advancements on this front, for instance through the acceleration we managed to achieve last year with our own Trusted Web.

Besides focusing on journalism and our commercial activities, we are also increasingly taking social responsibility in the areas of environment, society and governance. We identified six social themes where DPG Media can start making a difference, a development that was encouraged by the Board of Directors.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to present DPG Media’s consolidated financial statements for the 2022 financial year. Another year of impressive figures. But they only become meaningful when we recognise the hard work, commitment and professionalism of DPG Media’s employees in the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark. Their effort and the impact they made deserve the greatest respect. With this in mind, the Board of Directors is confident that 2023 is going to be another great year.



**Ludwig Criel**,  
CHAIR OF THE BOARD  
OF DIRECTORS

## CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

### BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

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Director, Executive Chairman



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**Katrine Gundel Harmens**  
Director & Employee Representative



**Ivar Carstensen**  
Director & Employee Representative

#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



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**Piet Vroman**  
CFO



**Anders Krab Johansen**  
CEO Berlingske Media



**Kris Vervae**  
COO (and CEO, DPG Media Belgium)



**Dirk Lodewyckx**  
Managing Director, Entertainment



**Erik van Gruijthuisen**  
Managing Director, Publishing



**Bert Willemsen**  
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**Stefan Havik**  
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**Melanie van Hemert**  
HR Director



**Adil Bouchmal**  
Director of Strategy

## COLUMN

# Gazzetta

Don't ask me when we 'celebrated' Equal Pay Day or Earth Overshoot Day in 2022. But Personal Betrayal Day, that's a day that's etched into my memory. Personal Betrayal Day is the first day of the year I cheat on my employer by paying for a title that isn't published by DPG Media. In 2022, I lasted until 2 April.

When I'm at home, I'm usually able to avoid temptation. Last spring, the postman erroneously dropped De Standaard in my letterbox two days in a row. I call that harassment, and I believe I was well within my rights to sic the dog on the miscreant, as indeed I did. He retaliated this past autumn by delivering De Telegraaf. That really crossed the line, as I'm sure the judge will agree.

But when I find myself in Italy, I have no choice but to cheat. So, on 2 April 2022, I stood in front of the newsagent's on Piazza Carlo Marx in Tavernelle, Umbria, which is run by a woman named Simona who knows me as 'that Belgian'. I paid 2 euros for the Saturday edition of the Gazzetta dello Sport. "I do so love that pink paper," I said. "You're in luck," Simona replied. "Soon that paper will be yours." A bewildering statement. "What do you mean?" I asked. Simona laughed. "Haven't you heard? Your DPG Media is acquiring RCS MediaGroup, which publishes the Gazzetta and the Corriere della Sera."

She had learned this from her sister-in-law, she said, who runs an ice cream parlour in Rome. One of her customers was a Volkskrant journalist with an insatiable appetite for ice cream, among other things. "That Dutchman told her," Simona said. So I rang de Volkskrant. "That's right, our investigative unit is working on a story about this. We don't have a primary source yet, but rumours are flying around at De Morgen, that's where we got it." So I rang De Morgen. "Funny you should ask us that," they say. "This isn't our scoop – we got it from you guys at HLN."

So I rang HLN. "It's a bit complicated," I'm told by one of my own colleagues. "One of our showbiz reporters is the sister of a producer at Qmusic, and that producer is friends with Libelle's creative content manager. That's where we got the lead." So I rang Libelle. "The thing about the Gazzetta? We got that from a very reliable source." Do tell. "It was in last week's Donald Duck."

Long live investigative journalism! Long live DPG Media! I'll never betray you again!

**Jan Segers is a columnist for HLN**



## PUBLISHER'S DETAILS

### DPG Media Belgium

Headquarters and registered office  
Mediaplein 1, 2018 Antwerp  
Tel. +32 2 454 22 11

### DPG Media The Netherlands

Headquarters  
Jacob Bontiusplaats 9,  
1018 LL Amsterdam  
Tel. +31 20 562 9111

### Berlingske Media Denmark

Headquarters  
Pilestraede 34, 147 Copenhagen  
Tel. +45 33 75 75 75

**Editorial board:** Fenna van Loenhout,  
Sven Remijnsen, Tessa Robijns,  
Babet Verstappen

**Editors:** Control Taal Delete,  
Up | Copywriting Communications

**Photo editor:** Bart Hoogveld

**Design:** Marlijn van der Lans

**Copy:** An Goovaerts, Erik van Gruijthuisen,  
Lynn Guillaume, Leo van Marrewijk, Philippe  
Remarque, Sven Remijnsen, Jan Segers, Bart  
Vanegeren, Jeroen Visser

**Photography:** DPG Media, Shody Careman,  
Thomas Geuens, Johan Jacobs, Joost  
Hoving, Marco Okhuizen, Pim Ras, Philippe  
Vogelenzang, Erik van 't Woud

**Printer:** Hakker van Rooijen

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