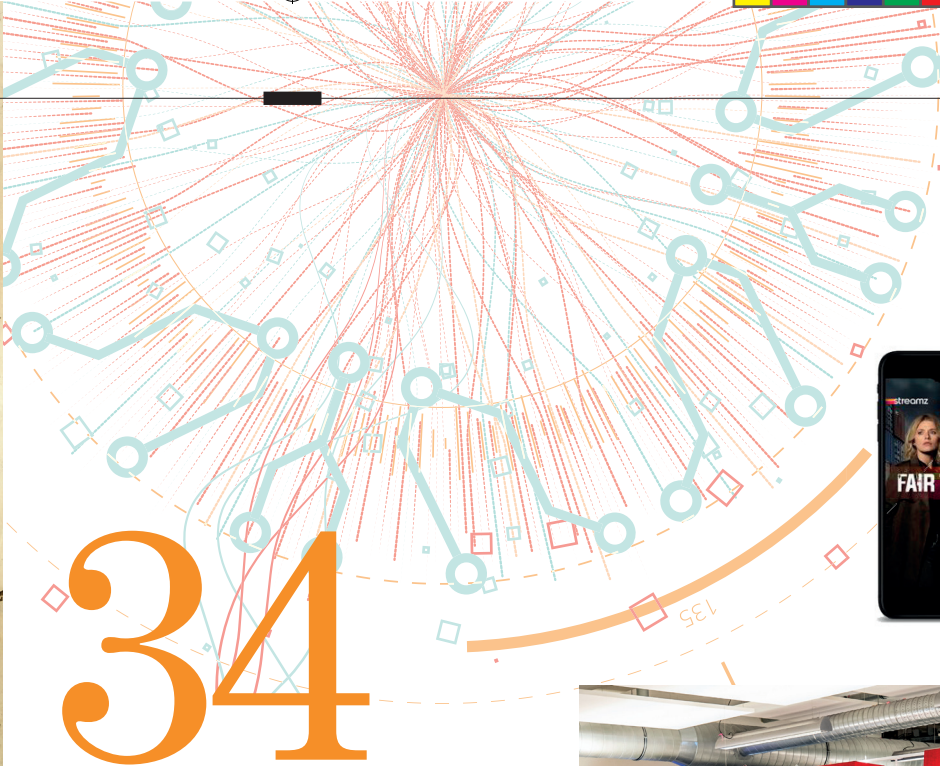


ANNUAL REPORT *2021*





10



content

- 06** Christian Van Thillo: Who saved the newspaper?
- 08** DPG Media in 2021: facts & figures
- 10** CEO Erik Roddenhof: "We achieved exceptional results in exceptional times"

NEWS MEDIA

- 14** News media in 2021: facts & figures
- 15** Why investigative journalism is so important
- 21** Vision Philippe Remarque: Journalism is alive and kicking
- 24** Weekendavisen: growing by being idiosyncratic
- 26** A cool head and a warm heart: de Volkskrant celebrated its centenary
- 28** The year of the female editor-in-chief
- 32** Max & Wout: The importance of sporting icons for news media
- 34** Learning from data: how editorial, marketing and advertising leverage data



AUDIO/VIDEO

- 38** Audio/video in 2021: facts & figures
- 39** The secret of Qmusic
- 42** The new way of watching tv: VTM, VTM GO and Streamz
- 47** Rising new medium: How podcasting is rapidly gaining ground
- 50** Julie Neyman: "cross-media reach makes us unique"
- 52** Watching the news on your phone
- 54** Kris Vervaeet: "RTL Belgium becomes one of the family"



42



76



71



86

ONLINE SERVICES

- 58** Online Services in 2021: facts & figures
- 59** Independer's annual sprint for the finish line
- 61** The growth of price comparison website mijnenergie.be: "In just five minutes you can save money"
- 63** Tweakers testlab goes all in for unique content
- 66** Car websites stronger together

MAGAZINES

- 70** Magazines in 2021: facts & figures
- 71** vtwonen: the number one expert for the home
- 74** Nina & Mezza: "A weekend with a silver lining"
- 76** How Libelle and Donald Duck went digital
- 80** IT & digital acceleration
- 82** The future: Generation Stronger

FINANCIAL REPORT

- 85** Ludwig Criel: "Proud of what our employees achieved in 2021"
- 86** CFO Piet Vroman: "2021 an exceptional year"
- 88** Financial results DPG Media 2021
- 94** Corporate Governance

Who SAVED *the newspaper?*

Fifteen years ago, The Economist published a striking cover story entitled: *Who killed the newspaper?* The demise of the newspaper was imminent – that was the prediction of the usually well-informed weekly magazine.

Young readers wanted nothing more to do with newspapers and only read their news online. With this prognosis, the weekly suggested that online news would no longer come from newspapers. Advertisers could reach their target group much better online, with the result that newspapers would also see this source of income dry up.

The Economist even argued that perhaps it wasn't such a bad thing that the swan song of the newspaper had begun. New players such as Google News, bloggers and citizen journalists would step up to replace the Fourth Estate. The crucial role that the traditional press had always played in our democratic society would simply be taken over by others.

Fifteen years on, we know better. For publishers who have had the vision and the ambition to reinvent journalism, the internet has turned out to be a blessing. After all, the World Wide Web is a unique distribution channel. News titles can provide their readers with professional journalism round the clock, wherever they happen to be. New sources have joined the fray, but newspapers continue to dominate the world of news, in print as well as in digital form. Ambitious editorial boards and excellent journalists play a key role in the transformation from daily paper to multi-platform news medium, but they are

“For publishers, the internet has turned out to be a blessing”

not alone in this. The real key to success is the coordination between content, technology, marketing, advertising and management. There must be digital expertise in all of these areas, together with optimum cooperation. This means being enterprising across the board, and without an instruction manual.

There's great satisfaction in seeing all these elements come together and our news media's new lease of life in terms of structural growth. Our next campaign is to achieve the same with the magazines we purchased from Sanoma in 2020. This will mean a new quest for the digital formula that works, but we see great opportunities here too. In the meantime, we will continue to foster our printed newspapers and magazines. Because printed matter continues to be remarkably popular with many readers.

TELEVISION

After the newspapers, it was the turn of television to face sombre predictions. The rapid growth of Netflix, YouTube and other streaming platforms is pushing traditional viewing to the margins. For many trend watchers, this immediately spells the end of commercial television.

In our view, a doomsday scenario can be avoided here, too, by seizing all the opportunities offered by the internet to serve viewers even better. We do this by investing in new streaming platforms, such as VTM

GO and Streamz. But also by devising programme formats for an optimum viewing experience on all screens, large and small.

The exciting thing about the television sector today is that everyone is searching for the earnings model of the future, with the new global players leading the way. Netflix, Disney, Amazon and Apple are currently spending untold sums of money on new content, with the aim of winning over as many subscribers as

possible. But financially, this does not add up. New competitors are emerging everywhere: there are now over 100 streaming services in the United States alone. This only serves to increase the chaos.

Needless to say, this situation is not sustainable in the long term. But it does enable us to consider the best strategy for DPG Media as a local player. One thing is certain: home-grown programmes continue to be extremely popular. The trick is to use a robust earnings model to deliver them to viewers on all platforms, both free and paid.

The fact is that television remains extremely popular with advertisers who invest in brand advertising. TV commercials have unrivalled emotional value.

The medium still has a huge reach and many people still watch TV together as a family. These are unique assets that are greatly valued by advertisers. Online advertising is better at nudging consumers towards making a purchase. But TV is still the most effective way to give your brand an emotional charge.

Thanks to Streamz, which is pay-per-view, we have the opportunity to develop a second source of income. Last year was a great one for television, after a difficult 2020. This was also true of radio, where we had an extra boost thanks to Qmusic Nederland, which became market leader for the first time. A fantastic achievement.

ONLINE SERVICES

Online services are the third cornerstone of our company, alongside publishing and broadcasting. This is journalism in a different form: offering people specialised platforms to help them make better choices in their daily lives.

We have experts in a variety of markets, such as insurance, energy, loans, interiors and electronics. We compare all that the market has to offer and look for the best solutions for each customer profile. This is done using algorithms, but also with advice from our experts.

Now we want to expand this activity to all domains relevant to consumers. People feel a strong need for guidance, support and inspiration amid the endless range of digital services. And we want to be leaders in this field.

CREATING GREAT MEDIA

For us, 2021 was an absolutely record year financially, with impressive growth in all our activities. Creating great media in a great company has always been our aim. To achieve this, we combine two key elements: an outspoken love for our profession and effective management with a long-term vision.

That's what drives us. It has brought results that enable us to keep on working to expand this wonderful company that we're so proud of. And like every year, I'm extremely grateful to all our staff for these achievements.

Christian Van Thillo (60)

Executive Chairman DPG Media

**The
Economist**

AUGUST 24TH - SEPTEMBER 1ST 2006 www.economist.com

Alaska, America's welfare state
Ending Iran's spin cycle
Has America's housing bubble burst?
The limits of air power
A step forward for stem cells

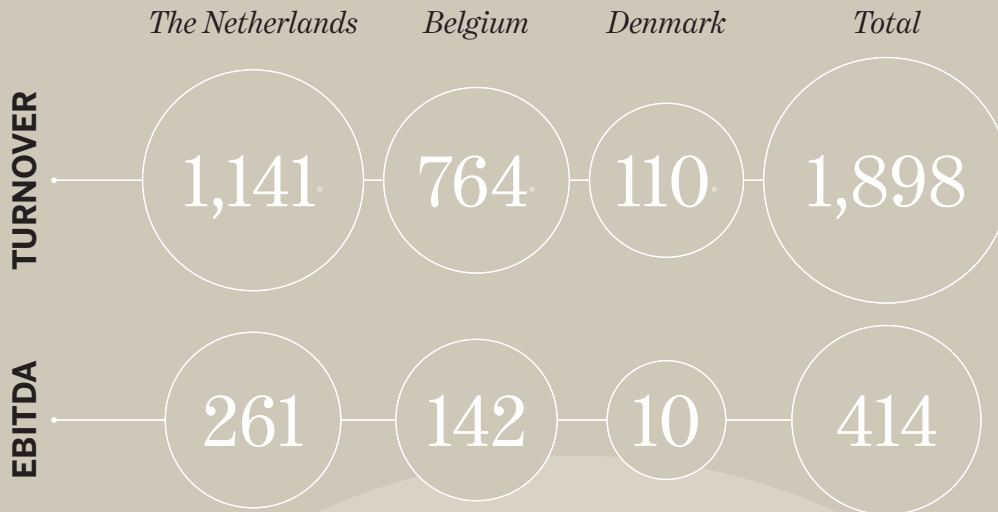
WHO
Killed The
NEWSPAPER?

The cover of The Economist on 24 August 2006,
predicting the end of the newspaper.



*“An outspoken
love for our
profession
and effective
management
with a long-
term vision –
that’s what
drives us”*

DPG MEDIA IN 2021:



* turnover by country before consolidation elimination

Th

News media



Belgium

News media



TV & Online video



Magazines



Online Services



Radio



The Netherlands

Magazines



Online Services

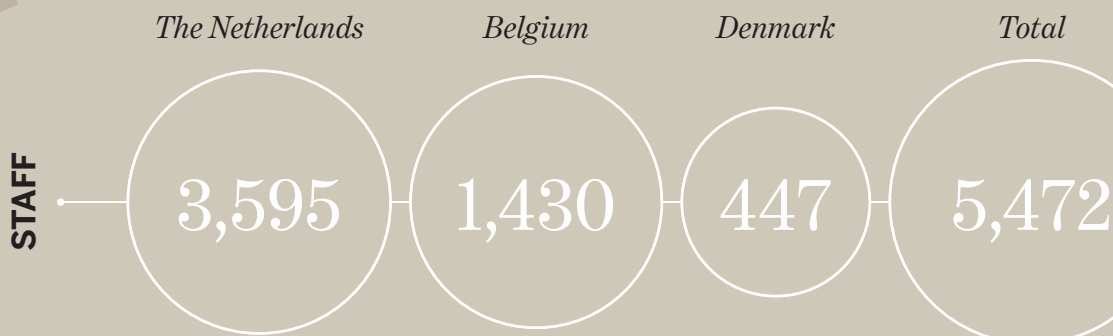


Radio



Denmark

News media



“We achieved exceptional results IN EXCEPTIONAL TIMES”

How was 2021 for DPG Media? CEO Erik Roddenhof (50) takes stock.

Profit growth of 22 per cent in the middle of a global pandemic – how did you manage that?

“It’s about more than just the Covid crisis. At a time when there are a multitude of opinions and ‘alternative truths’, a time marked by a kind of overall resentment, there’s a strong need for reliable, independent journalism. Consumers value our efforts. We see this in the reach of digital media, which gave a real boost to our advertising income. But the rise in digital subscribers is even more revealing: up 15 per cent from 2020. We now have over 800,000 digital subscribers for news media and magazines.”

So world news determined the result? “Not on its own, because 2021 was also a good year for our audio-visual activities. VTM, and especially its streaming service VTM GO, booked very impressive results.

All our radio stations extended their reach, and the outstanding achievement by Qmusic Nederland was one we won’t forget anytime soon. Q cornered a market share of nearly 20 per cent, making it by far the biggest radio station in the Netherlands. All down to excellent programming and a strong team. Success with viewers and listeners translated into turnover, which largely bounced back to pre-pandemic levels – and in many cases higher still. We grew by 15 percent compared to the previous year.

In 2021, DPG Media delivered exceptional results in exceptional times. For the second year in a row, all our employees and freelancers had to find ways to

collaborate from home and through video links. From my own personal experience, with four kids at home, I know how hard that can be at times. But we did it again, thanks to the real dedication and perseverance of our team. I’m proud to be the CEO of such an organisation.”

“Look at the growth in digital subscribers: up 15 per cent”



These were not easy times for journalists. You talk about resentment, but nowadays the mood can often be downright threatening.



“We have seen the threats directed at our journalists become more frequent. The low point for me was the day we had to evacuate our News City office in Antwerp and move the TV news broadcast to another location in response to a threat. I’m proud of the fact that in barely an hour, the editorial team succeeded in putting together a complete news broadcast from Vilvoorde, but also deeply saddened that this should be necessary in order to do our work. We make no concessions whatsoever on that score and do everything possible to ensure that our people can do their work safely.”

Back to the results: was the strong growth in turnover mainly achieved online?

“Yes, to a great extent that was down to the digitisation of our media. That has become a strong focus of investment for us. In 2021, we launched our own DPG Network and further developed DPG Ads. With DPG Ads, we brought an independent and reliable ecosystem for advertisers to market, an alternative to the ad systems run by the big American tech companies. At the beginning of 2022, DPG Media took out a loan of €100 million with the European Investment Bank as part of a €250 million planned investment package in digitising our media over the coming years.



Digitisation itself is not new, but the speed at which it is being implemented is as high as ever. Consumers are increasingly reading, viewing and listening online. Despite the knocks to their credibility, the US digital giants continue to grow, and consolidation is still the buzzword in today’s media market. Our digital transformation strategy in recent years has proved successful and we will continue to pursue this course in years to come. The need to accelerate our digital activities remains as great as ever. It’s a strategy that brings our media together in far-reaching cooperation and the search for synergies. The benefits of this approach enable us to reinvent our media in digital form and de-





velop appropriate business models, as we have done recently at Libelle and Donald Duck. It should also set us up to develop new business lines, focusing on the growth of our Online Services, such as Independer, e-commerce and live events.”

How are those Online Services developing? And what makes DPG Media believe so strongly in activities other than news?



“Our Online Services, with brands such as Independer, Mijnergie.be, Nationale Vacaturebank, Tweakers and AutoTrack, help consumers find sound information and advice, and bring supply and demand together in a way that makes comparisons easy. It’s an approach that helps consumers make the best purchases. A role like this is part of our company’s DNA: our media inform and inspire consumers reliably and independently. These services were a feature of our newspapers long before the age of the internet. Consumers value these services, as demonstrated by the fact that we’ve been growing for years, with an increase of over 7 per cent last year alone. It was a disappointing year for e-commerce and live events due to Covid. We were unable to organise any events, such as the Libelle Summer Week, and e-commerce ticket sales stagnated due to the limited range of activities on offer. We expect this market to recover to some extent in 2022, but we shall have to wait and see.”

Will DPG Media break financial records again in 2022? “As I said: 2021 was exceptional. Looking ahead, we expect 2022 to be a more challenging year. The increased cost of paper, the general inflation rate and the huge shortage of staff – particularly for delivering our newspapers in the Netherlands – will put pressure on our operating expenses and our results. But rest assured, we’re maintaining our current course with great conviction.”





*“The need to accelerate
our digital activities
remains as great as ever.”*



NEWS MEDIA



Since January 2021, Nicholas Lataire (42) has been the director of News City in Antwerp. News City founded an investigative editorial board last year and made an immediate impact with its high-profile stories. Investigative journalism continued to gain momentum in the Netherlands in the past year as well.

Read more
on page 15

facts
& FIGURES

14,300,000

Daily digital reach of news media (DPG Media Group)

925 *million*
NEWS MEDIA TURNOVER
DPG MEDIA GROUP

1.8 *million*
PRINT + DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS
(DPG Media Group)

800,000
Total digital subscribers to news media

15% Growth in digital
subscriptions
(DPG Media
Group)

2,034 **JOURNALISTS** working for
DPG Media

WHY

investigative- journalism

IS SO IMPORTANT

Investigative journalism became an even more prominent part of DPG Media's activities in the Netherlands and Belgium last year. We produced in-depth stories that often took weeks – sometimes even months – to complete, and which were highly praised. “With well-thought-out reporting, news outlets can really make a difference.”



A clear head and free hands – that’s the idea behind the ADR-wide investigative unit, which was formed in 2020. As part of this unit, journalists from AD and our seven regional publications can immerse themselves in subjects for longer periods of time, without the distractions of the daily news cycle and the evening and weekend shifts they normally have to deal with.

On 1 March 2021, Joris Roes started his one-year tenure as head of this new team, which aims to deliver thought-provoking stories, podcasts and videos. And deliver they did, says Roes, with stories about the world behind ransomware, large-scale fraud in the horse-trading industry and a seven-part video series about fake designer clothing, to name just a few. As far as Roes is concerned, the debate about whether news media should devote more attention to investigative journalism has long been settled. It’s more a question of how many reporters you are able – or willing – to commit to long-term projects. “We have very precise data about how our readers engage with the stories we publish. We know which stories attract the highest number of readers, and we can see exactly how long we’re able to hold the reader’s attention. All the data shows that in-depth stories are highly appreciated, and that it’s precisely those high-profile, thoroughly researched articles that draw in new subscribers.”

But investigative reporters also have to stomach plenty of disappointments, Roes stresses. Because some of the work they do never turns into a finished story. “We’ve certainly had our share of failures, but that’s okay – stories are allowed to go nowhere. The trick is to decide when to pull the plug on an investigation.”

All in all, though, the team had a very successful year, with many lessons learned. “We had a great team of reporters who were given the opportunity to develop and distinguish themselves as investigative journalists for either six months or a year.” Because that’s how the investigative unit is set up: after a six- or twelve-month stint on the team, journalists return to their regular jobs, bringing back a wealth of experience that allows them to help their colleagues tackle complex stories.

ON ALL PLATFORMS

In Belgium, News City has a permanent, four-person investigative team that operates independently of any specific medium, with a broad scope. Jonas Muylaert serves as head of the unit and also contributes stories of

his own. His team produces work ‘for all platforms’ – depending on the subject, some scoops go to VTM, while others turn into newspaper articles. Muylaert agrees that investing more time and energy in investigative journalism pays off. “Fast news doesn’t cut it anymore if you want to distinguish yourself as a news medium. The declining trust in mainstream media is also a factor in this – with well-thought-out reporting, news outlets can really make a difference.”

There’s no fixed set of criteria a subject or story needs to meet for Muylaert’s team to delve into it. “But we definitely want all our subjects to appeal to a broad audience, and it’s always important to show the human beings behind the stories we tell. Personally, my interest is piqued whenever I come across a big story that hasn’t received much attention from the major news outlets for a while.”

As an example, he mentions the reporting he did on 3M, a factory that caused serious pollution by releasing harmful chemical substances into the Western Scheldt, and which was shut down following coverage by VTM Nieuws and Het Laatste Nieuws. “If every single journalist jumps on that story, it’s hard to stand out from the crowd with a unique angle.”

“The goal we’ve set for ourselves as a team is to break an impactful story at least twice a month.”

FULL AUTONOMY

That’s not to say that investigative reporting becomes easy once the news storm subsides. “For three weeks, I didn’t think this story would go anywhere,” Muylaert says. Whenever you get stuck like that, being part of a team and being able to vent to your colleagues can be really helpful. It’s also essential to know that you have the confidence and support of your superiors. “We have full

autonomy when it comes to choosing our subjects and deciding how we should spend our time. The goal we’ve set for ourselves as a team is to break an impactful story at least twice a month. This past year, we were more than able to accomplish that, but it’s not a goal that’s imposed on us externally – we impose it on ourselves.”

As the amount of attention being paid to investigative journalism increases, the way people think of it might also be changing. Long gone are the days of pipe-smoking old men spending six months on one story. “We have a young team,” Muylaert says, “and we also regularly produce ‘quick stories’. Sometimes it can take just a few days to get to the bottom of a subject.”



Joris Roes (50),
HEAD OF ADR’S INVESTIGATIVE UNIT IN 2021. HE IS ALSO THE DEPUTY EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF BRABANTS DAGBLAD.



Jonas Muylaert (37),
HEAD OF NEWS CITY’S INVESTIGATIVE UNIT SINCE 2021. PRIOR TO THIS, HE SERVED AS THE DEPUTY EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF VTM NIEUWS AND HEAD OF POLITICS AT DE MORGEN.



The makers and their stories:

BRUNO STRUYS (37)

DE MORGEN JOURNALIST SINCE 2017. BEFORE THAT, HE WORKED IN VARIOUS ROLES AT MEDIALAAN.

BRENDA STOTER BOSCOLO (39)

DUTCH FREELANCE JOURNALIST WHO WRITES ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST. SHE IS ALSO A COLUMNIST FOR AD ROTTERDAMS DAGBLAD.

BELGIAN INVOLVEMENT IN YEZIDI GENOCIDE

NEWS MEDIUM: DE MORGEN

It was a winning combination of intrepid determination and thorough investigative journalism that broke the story of Belgian IS members who kept women as slaves in their homes – a special Flemish-Dutch co-production by Brenda Stoter Boscolo and Bruno Struys. Brenda Stoter Boscolo is a freelance journalist and columnist for DPG Media and author of the book *The Forgotten People*, about the Yezidis. She usually travels solo through the Middle East. Bruno Struys is an investigative journalist at De Morgen who often writes about the Middle East, but mostly from Belgium.

“THERE WERE TIMES WHEN WE THOUGHT IT WOULDN'T LEAD TO ANYTHING”

“I approached Brenda because she’s an expert on the Yezidis,” Struys recounts, “and I needed help to substantiate my hypothesis: that Belgian nationals were involved in the Yezidi genocide. It was clear to me that I didn’t have enough knowledge to dig up the kinds of stories I was after.”

Together, they travelled around Iraq for just under a month, and they found what they were looking for: women who told in detail how they had been enslaved and humiliated by Belgian IS fighters. But there were certainly challenges along the way. “We would sometimes travel around for days chasing a lead,” Stoter recounts, “and all we’d have to go on was someone’s first name.”

Luckily, the two journalists were able to lift each other’s spirits when things got tough, says Struys. “There were times when we thought it wouldn’t lead to anything. But fortunately, one of us would always keep faith.”

Stoter: “I don’t like desk journalism – I want to go out and talk to people. But I have to admit that Bruno was able to get things done very quickly thanks to his connections. So I think we were able to learn

from each other.” Their work led to resolutions recognising the fate of the Yezidis in both the Belgian and Dutch parliaments. The two journalists agree that their Flemish-Dutch collaboration – in this case between two outlets belonging

to the same parent company – should inspire many more to come. Provided the right conditions are met, Struys notes. “You have to be open to collaboration, trust each other and be willing to share information. That’s not something most journalists are used to.”



The makers and their stories:

JOPPE NUYTS (25)

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST AT NEWS CITY SINCE 2020. BEFORE THAT, HE WAS A FACT CHECKER AT DPA AND WORKED AS A JOURNALIST FOR VRT.

SOCIAL FRAUD AND CHILD LABOUR AT POSTNL BELGIUM

NEWS MEDIUM: VTM NIEUWS
AND HET LAATSTE NIEUWS

It was a bombshell story: in November 2021, investigative journalist Joppe Nuyts published hidden camera footage exposing social fraud, exploitation and child labour practices at the Belgian branch of PostNL. Nuyts received thank-you notes from exploited parcel deliverers, the PostNL depot in Wommelgem was shuttered and a large-scale criminal investigation was launched. In addition, the Belgian government is working to amend the country's labour laws to prevent social fraud involving subcontractors.

**“JUST LIKE THE
EXPLOITED DRIVERS,
I WAS WORKING
14 OR 15 HOURS A DAY”**

“Of course I’m proud of this investigation,” says Nuyts, who worked as a delivery driver for just under two months to gather enough conclusive evidence. “As an investigative journalist, you have to gather evidence knowing in the back of your mind that there might be lawsuits after you go public. The evidence has to be irrefutable.”

Nuyts’ plan eventually succeeded brilliantly, after a lot of hard work. “Just like the exploited drivers, I was working 14 or 15 hours a day. But I was doing it out of curiosity, not because I had to.” In addition to delivering packages, he spent his time talking with subcontractors and desperate parcel deliverers, some of whom were children. Meanwhile, he lived in constant fear of being exposed as a journalist. The support of his colleagues at News City helped him cope. In the end, his efforts yielded more than just in-depth exposés at VTM and HLN – the legal fallout has yet to settle. It’s a great example of a story with social impact. And perhaps that’s what Nuyts, who previously worked as a factchecker, finds most important. “I’ve noticed that more and more people now think twice before carelessly ordering another package. Because they’ve seen the questionable system behind that delivery.”

Belgische 11-jarigen verkrachten en behandelden ze als bedienden

'Ze was pas 11 jaar toen hij haar verkrachtte'

Onderzoek van De Morgen in luik toont aan dat verschillende Belgische social entrepreneurs van de stuwering van prostitutie, Jacobs wettelijk gebodgen voor de directe betrokkenheid van Belgische slachtoffers bij de gerechtelijke opsporingen. Hij was alleen aardig als hij gemeenschap met ons wilde.

Deze vrouwen worden vaak gezien als de 'grote' van de prostitutie. Ze worden vaak gezien als de 'grote' van de prostitutie. Ze worden vaak gezien als de 'grote' van de prostitutie.

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Ze had langere seks liek, maar na een tijdje werd ze er voor terug. Het is niet bang maar lief.



Deze vrouwen worden vaak gezien als de 'grote' van de prostitutie. Ze worden vaak gezien als de 'grote' van de prostitutie. Ze worden vaak gezien als de 'grote' van de prostitutie.

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PUBLICATION: BELGIAN IS MEMBERS KEPT WOMEN AS SLAVES IN THEIR HOMES NEWS MEDIUM: DE MORGEN

18° 4" | dinsdag 23 november 2020

MEROL, DE GROOTSTE MOND UIT DE SLIMSTE MENS

«TIJDENS EEN DRONKEN NACHT KROOP IK PER ONGELUK BIJ MIJN BUURMAN IN BED»

HLN HET LAATSTE NIEUWS

ONZE REPORTER GING UNDERCOVER BIJ POSTNL
MEER DAN 450 LEVERINGEN PER DAG, SHIFTS VAN 16 UUR

Zelfs 13-jarigen ingezet om pakjes te bezorgen

«BRANDBOM IN MIJN SLAAPKAMER BIJ CORONARELLEN»

WAAROM VOETBAL NERGENS ZO CHARMANT IS ALS BIJ UNION

GROEPSIMMUNITETE MOETEN WE DAT IDEE STILAAAN OPGEVEN?

De Croo en vier federale ministers in quarantaine, én twee Vlaamse ministers blijven besmet

Black Tuesday.

18 IN DE BUURT | 19 SPORT | 20 PUZZELS | 21 DIALOGO | 22 ZAP | 23 BEURS | 24 SHOWBIZZ

PUBLICATION: WORKING UNDERCOVER AT POSTNL SOCIAL FRAUD ON A FAIRLY LARGE SCALE NEWS MEDIA: VTM NIEUWS AND HET LAATSTE NIEUWS



PUBLICATION: THE FAKE DESIGNER CLOTHING INDUSTRY
 NEWS MEDIA: AD AND THE REGIONAL PUBLICATIONS (ADR)

de Verdieping Trouw DINSDAG 21 NOVEMBER 2023

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Verifiëren

Olympische Spelen
 De Winterspelen in China kunnen niet zonder nep sneeuw
 de Verdieping 4

Groene claim
 Hoe duurzaam is het om te winkelen bij bol.com?
 duurzaamheidsrapportuur 7

Black Friday
 Een reis van de eenwoold in het dominicaanse klooster in Zwolle
 religie&filosofie 8

K-Hit
 De opmars van literatuur uit Zuid-Korea
 cultuur&media 10

PUBLICATION: TAX AUTHORITY MAINLY PURSUED
 LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS NEWS MEDIUM: TROUW

The makers and their stories:

JORINA HASPELS (46)

JOURNALIST AT AD HAAGSCHE COURANT SINCE 2012,
BEFORE THAT AT AD ROTTERDAMS DAGBLAD.

EXPOSING THE FAKE DESIGNER CLOTHING INDUSTRY

NEWS MEDIA: AD AND THE REGIONAL
PUBLICATIONS (ADR)

It took some getting used to for Jorina Haspels, going out with a camera peering out of her buttonhole. Still, as an experienced journalist at AD Haagsche Courant, she already had a penchant for sleuthing in her 'regular job'. "But most of my sleuthing took place at my desk then, and I never worked on an article for more than a week."

That changed when she transferred to the ADR investigative unit for a year on 1 March 2021. Her most high-profile story was her exposé on the world behind fake designer clothing and jewellery, which led her to Poland and Turkey, among other places. The result: an investigative video series plus written content, the former of which was a first for ADR Nieuwsmedia. The most important results of Haspels' investigation were published in the spring of 2022.

"Fake designer clothing is sold openly everywhere. But where exactly does it come from? And what does the part of the industry that we don't see look like? Those were the main questions. I loved being able to focus on one subject for so long. At the same time, there was also some frustration because I missed writing about the daily news in The Hague at first. Whenever

I would come across a juicy bit of local news, I'd be champing at the bit. As an investigative journalist, there's less daily time pressure, but the stress is actually greater. Because in the end, you want to dig up something special."

**"AS AN INVESTIGATIVE
JOURNALIST, THERE'S LESS
DAILY TIME PRESSURE,
BUT THE STRESS
IS ACTUALLY GREATER"**

Her time at the investigative unit paid off on several fronts. "We're seeing a growing desire among news media to stand out with solid stories and productions. Personally, I saw my foray into investigative journal-

ism as a great opportunity to develop myself more broadly. Working with the video editors, thinking in images, getting stuck into complex subjects, tracking criminal activity – it was a huge learning experience."

Of course, going down the rabbit hole of the criminal underworld sometimes takes you to seedy places, and investigative journalists don't always receive a

warm welcome. But Haspels isn't easily fazed. "As a reporter for AD Haagsche Courant, one of my beats was Duindorp, a working-class neighbourhood in The Hague. Suffice it to say I've experienced my fair share of intimidation."



The makers and their stories:

JAN KLEINNIJENHUIS (41)

TROUW JOURNALIST SINCE 2007

THE DUTCH CHILDCARE BENEFITS SCANDAL

NEWS MEDIUM: TROUW

He was named Journalist of the Year in 2019 (together with Pieter Klein), and he's known as 'the man who exposed the childcare benefits scandal'. Through his investigative reporting, he continued to make headlines in 2021 (for instance with his follow-up on the benefits scandal, which revealed that the Tax Authority had mainly pursued low-income households). All in all, you'd be forgiven for thinking Jan Kleinnijenhuis's professional life is an endless succession of victory parades. But reality is far less glamorous. "The childcare benefits scandal was nowhere near as big a story back when I was most intensely involved with it," Kleinnijenhuis says. At the time, his investigation was mostly time-consuming and frustrating, especially when he became the target of a government smear campaign. Press officers tried to ruin his reputation by claiming that he was publishing unseemly stories about things that had never happened. But in the end, an enormous cesspool of government corruption was revealed and several politicians stepped down. A personal victory for Kleinnijenhuis? Not exactly. "It does mean that the people who suffered as a result of the government's actions, and who had to fight that same government for years, finally got recognition. The fact that the scandal caused Menno Snel to step down as deputy minister and the Cabinet to resign in January 2021 doesn't interest me. As an investigative journalist, it's my job to publish the facts. If you have lingering questions after you've worked on a story, if you're convinced that you need to dig deeper to find out what's really going on – that's when you know you're onto something. I also

**"IF THE GOVERNMENT
IS ADAMANT THAT YOUR
STORY IS NONSENSE,
THERE'S PROBABLY
SOMETHING THERE."**

hope that more journalists will learn to trust their instincts."

Kleinnijenhuis feels fortunate to work for a newspaper that allows him to do just that. "Trouw gives anyone with a well-thought-out idea the time and space they need to really get to the heart of the matter," says Kleinnijenhuis. He also emphasises that he never operated solo. "Deputy editor-in-chief Martijn Roessingh was my go-to person at Trouw when I had a question or needed to blow off steam, and during my collaboration with Pieter Klein (then a journalist for RTL Nieuws) we would also constantly bounce ideas off each other. 'What am I missing here?', 'Where can we verify this?' – asking those kinds of questions can prevent you from developing tunnel vision."

At Trouw, Kleinnijenhuis now coaches young journalists who want to hone their research skills. One of his tips: "If the government is adamant that your story is nonsense, there's probably something there."



JOURNALISM IS alive AND kicking

*Large companies are not a threat
but in fact a guarantee of quality*

A large company such as DPG Media, with many media titles, is not a threat to journalism, but will instead safeguard it – under certain conditions. Journalism Director Philippe Remarque on the course ahead for journalism in these turbulent times.

As a young man, I learned the craft of journalism in the field. I walked among the Russian protesters resisting the tanks of the Soviet old guard in Moscow. The Soviet Union collapsed. Thirty years later, Vladimir Putin's actions have made this region headline news again.

Back then, armed with a notebook and youthful *Sturm und Drang*, I couldn't have foreseen that one day I'd be discussing the future of journalism with Dutch members of parliament. But that's what happened last year. Because some MPs are worried about the fate of Dutch newspapers, now that they belong for the most part to DPG Media and Mediahuis.



GUARANTEE

I hope I was able to reassure them: journalism in the Netherlands is in good shape. And those big companies are a guarantee for the future, rather than a threat. Of course, companies always say such things. Should you believe them? I'll explain my reasoning, then you can judge for yourselves.

Everyone who reads this will have seen their own media behaviour change drastically over recent years. And it's all due to the little screen in everyone's pocket and the overabundance of information, services and entertainment on it. It's a blessing, but also a revolution. The creative destruction of Austrian economist Schumpeter is part of this – particularly in the media. The new opportunities mean that a lot of money is now flowing to big tech companies, which don't pay for any editorial staff.

This could have negative consequences for journalism – and this has happened in a few places in the world. But if you look at the Dutch and Flemish journalistic landscape, you can't help but be astounded at how well things are actually going.

NEED

First of all, it seems that even in the digital era, there's a great need for quality journalism, produced by professional journalists who have the time and the skills to dig deeper. In recent years, when current affairs have had a major impact on people's lives, they've reached out in large numbers for that kind of journalism. They've also been prepared to pay for it. All our news titles are growing.

And they're not the only ones. Investigative journalism in the Netherlands has never been as varied as it is now: existing media – ours or those

of the competition – new online titles such as De Correspondent, and numerous initiatives and funds are committed to it. Journalism proves itself time and again to be a check on power and a pillar of our democracy. Examples are the childcare benefits scandal in the Netherlands and PostNL in Belgium.

WORKING TOGETHER

But this precious commodity cannot survive by itself. It's a lot of work – and difficult. Especially in this era of digital transition. Journalism has to reinvent itself and invest heavily in digitisation in order to be visible on that little screen in everyone's pocket. We're in direct competition with the apps of Big Tech. To be able to fund this, newspaper and magazine titles that used to exist independently need to work together in larger associations.

“A check on power and a pillar of our democracy”

That's the story behind these two media companies. The best illustration is NDC, publisher of regional papers Nieuwsblad van het Noorden, Leeuwarder Courant and Friesch Dagblad. It didn't face competition in its area, but it still

recognised the need to be affiliated with a large media company to secure the future of its regional journalism. NDC turned to DPG Media and Mediahuis, the latter of which it is now a part.

Smaller titles survive by being incorporated into a large group. Looked at in this way, these large companies are good for diversity. The bulk of original regional reporting – vital to our society and a source of concern for politicians – comes from our company, with national newspaper AD and seven regional titles working together in ADR Nieuwsmedia. They're growing again thanks to this cooperation.



DIVERSITY

Is that the whole story? No. Because those concerned voices are quite right: with such concentrated ownership, the diverse range of newspaper titles must be safeguarded. Large groups bear great responsibility for this cornerstone of our democracy. However, as I was able to explain to the MPs, we also see that responsibility as a moral duty. Journalism, in whatever form, is the core of our business.

Editorial teams need two things to guarantee diversity: independence and sufficient resources. The publisher must be committed to providing these. Whatever else you might think about DPG Media, that independence is solid. In the nine years that I was editor-in-chief of national daily newspaper Volkskrant, nobody ever said anything to me about what we had to write. And that's how it should be.

Now that I am myself a publisher and journalism director, and responsible for appointing new editors-in-chief together with the editorial team and sometimes foundations, I sense once again how beautiful and precarious that balance is. A newspaper is an enterprise, but also a cultural asset and the intellectual property of an editorial team.

Editorial statutes, which are also included in our company's articles of association, are the firm guarantee

“Editorial teams need two things to guarantee diversity: independence and sufficient resources”

Philippe Remarque (56),
JOURNALISM
DIRECTOR SINCE
2019. PREVIOUSLY
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF
DE VOLKSKRANT
FOR 9 YEARS.

that editorial staff will remain independent. And the resources? They'll always be a subject of discussion, but the key thing is that editorial teams have to be able to grow. And the company must invest substantially in digital transformation.

SUBSIDIES

I asked an MP who proposes breaking up large media companies how those independent titles are supposed to survive in this digital landscape after his intervention. With subsidies, he said.

Dutch newspapers as museums of some kind, while we already have public broadcasting, is not my idea of diversity, I said. A free press requires entrepreneurial freedom. And most important of all: we're alive and kicking, and growing, without subsidies, and far removed from any museum. Journalism is flourishing.



WEEKLY
NEWSPAPER
Slotte til idioter

founded in

1971



46712
THE NUMBER OF COPIES ROSE BY 6,000 TO NEARLY 47,000

WEEKEND AVISEN *growing by being idiosyncratic*



Martin Krasnik (50),
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF
WEEKENDAVISEN
SINCE 2017. HE
STARTED AT THE PAPER
IN 1995. ALSO KNOWN
IN DENMARK AS A
TV INTERVIEWER.

Lengthy articles on politics, science and culture, a preference for the broadsheet format and high, almost literary ambitions. How the Danish weekly newspaper Weekendavisen does everything differently and is still a success.

Weekendavisen is an idiosyncratic phenomenon in the Danish media landscape. The newspaper, which celebrated its 50th anniversary a few months ago, is published once a week and focuses strongly on lengthy articles covering politics, science, literature and culture. While other titles compete on speed, scoops or clicks, Weekendavisen mainly aims for well-informed, beautifully designed and well-written articles that subscribers will read from start to finish. So it's not any old newspaper that you scan quickly at the breakfast table.

A distinguishing feature of Weekendavisen is that employees have great freedom of choice regarding topics and genres alike. The newspaper offers a platform for essays and personal stories, as well as analyses and investigative journalism. But there's one key requirement: the paper has high, almost literary ambitions for the articles that writers deliver. "Our journalists have to be able to write very, very well," says editor-in-chief Martin Krasnik.

Weekendavisen originated in 1971 from the newspaper Berlingske (founded in 1749). The initiators of the weekly newspaper found inspiration in English-language weeklies such as The Economist and Newsweek. Its readers are currently from all parts of the political spectrum. "Above all, we're culturally conservative," says Krasnik. "Culture, knowledge and history – those are things that we and our readers find important."

Weekendavisen's concept was unchallenged for a long time, but many dailies have now set their sights on Saturday newspapers. Krasnik: "They're focusing on our principal target group: highly educated people with broad interests and who love to read. For that reason, we can't allow ourselves to be complacent."

Since Krasnik took over as editor-in-chief five years ago, Weekendavisen has dealt with more topical subjects. The paper was also given a makeover and in 2021, it was awarded the title of 'best designed newspaper' by The Society for News Design. The two innovations, combined with the trusted top-quality journalism, paid off: the number of copies rose by 6,000 to nearly 47,000.

The newspaper also demonstrated its idiosyncrasy in its choice of new design. While many newspapers switched to tabloid format, Weekendavisen's cultural supplement instead adopted the larger, old-fashioned broadsheet style. "Management asked: is that what you really want? We were quite sure. It's just much better for form and content," says Krasnik.

A MINOR REVOLUTION

The challenge now for Weekendavisen is to secure loyal readers online as well, without abandoning its recipe for success based on in-depth journalism. One-fifth of subscribers read the newspaper exclusively online. They include many students who, according to Krasnik, continually have to be lured back to the app and the website. For this reason, the weekly will soon be posting a daily commentary online.

And reviews are published online before they've appeared in the print newspaper – a minor revolution. "You'll sit and read a newspaper for half an hour or an hour, but our digital readers come and go. This means that you have to keep offering something new, as otherwise they'll run away at some point. We have to be there for them every day, without losing sight of our well-known recipe."



Pieter Klok (49),
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
OF DE VOLKSKRANT
SINCE 2019. HE
STARTED AT THE
PAPER IN 2000 AND
PREVIOUSLY SERVED
AS A FINANCIAL
REPORTER AND
DEPUTY EDITOR-
IN-CHIEF.

A COOL HEAD *and a warm heart*

De Volkskrant celebrated its centenary in 2021. How do you live to be a hundred? By not blindly chasing after the latest fads, writes editor-in-chief Pieter Klok.

On 1 October 1921, a large number of couranten (newspapers) were published in the Netherlands, including De Locomotief, Het Overijsselsch Dagblad, De Maasbode, De Nieuwe Hoornsche Courant, De Standaard, De Opregte Steenwijkse Courant, De Preanger Bode, La Gazette de Hollande, Het Huisgezin, De Tijd, De Banier, Het Vaderland, De Vrije Socialist, Het Nieuwsblad van het Zuiden, Voorwaarts and at least fifty other titles. It was also the day that the first daily edition of de Volkskrant appeared – a relatively obscure newsletter for Catholic workers with a few thousand subscribers. So why has de Volkskrant managed to outlive all but a few of its contemporaries?

First of all, there's the name: Volkskrant is Dutch for 'the people's paper'. With a name like that, it's almost impossible to go under, because as long as there's a people, there will be a Volkskrant.

There's also a long list of illustrious former editors-in-chief. Perhaps the most important of these was Joop Lückner, who managed to rapidly transform the humble Catholic newsletter into a mass medium after World War II.

Over the years, de Volkskrant proved to be capable of putting itself in its readers' shoes while also continuing to learn from its competitors. Now, thanks to digitisation, we're even better able to understand what our readers want from us. Data experts can measure very precisely which articles are read and which are ignored, while social media allows our editors to track exactly how readers respond to specific pieces.

DARWIN

Darwin's law of natural selection also applies to newspapers: the faster you're able to adapt to changing conditions, the greater your chance of survival. But a newspaper shouldn't blindly chase after all the latest fads. An editorial board needs to have a heart, as well as an existential purpose.

Keep your head cool and your heart warm, that's the motto that informs everything we do. Behind that lies an ambition to contribute to a healthy, harmonious society. If there's one constant in our paper's history, it's that we have always tried to strengthen democracy, by ensuring that the public debate centres around the issues that really matter, informed by reliable data and strong arguments. We also make sure that everyone feels heard, helping to prevent social rifts.

In the paper's early years, this was mainly done by presenting our readers with whatever opinions were considered to be 'correct' at the time. In recent decades, we've mostly tried to offer the best possible information so that they can make up their own minds.

DEMOCRACY

When the first daily edition of de Volkskrant rolled off the presses, our fledgling democracy – universal suffrage had been introduced in 1919 – was fragile. The paper's founders were particularly concerned that the Catholic workers would be swayed by communism. Later, the main threat became fascism.

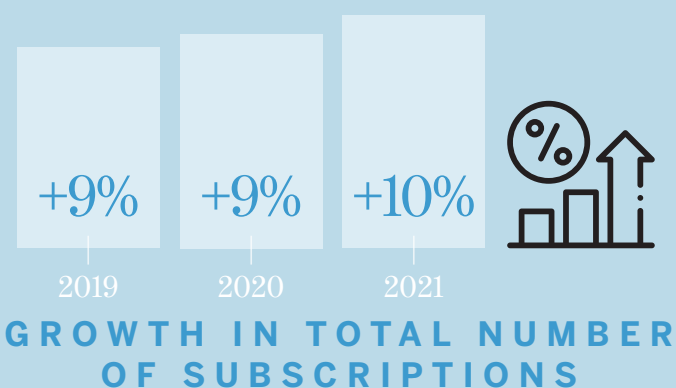
Now democracy is under pressure once again. In the US, in Eastern Europe, but also here in the Netherlands. It's not for nothing that we're seeing an unusual interest in the interwar period: once again there's fear that extremists will seize power. In the face of these threats, de Volkskrant's mission to protect democracy is no less important than it was in 1921. And it will remain important for centuries to come.



founded in **1921** 

5,009,000
READERSHIP

 **350,000**
TOTAL SUBSCRIPTIONS
(print, hybrid and digital)





Happy Birthday!

De Volkskrant marked its centenary in 2021, but other DPG Media titles also had anniversaries to celebrate: the Danish Weekendavisen (50), Algemeen Dagblad (75) and Het Parool (80, founded during wartime in 1941). Brabants Dagblad even celebrated its 250-year existence. To mark the occasion, King Willem-Alexander visited the paper's newsroom in Den Bosch in July 2021, where he talked to editors and readers. He ended his visit on a hopeful note: "On to the next 250 years!"

NEWSPAPERS IN 2021

- Berlingske: **272 years old** (1749)
- PZC: **263 years old** (1758)
- Brabant Dagblad: **250 years old** (1771)
- de Gelderlander: **173 years old** (1848)
- Tubantia: **149 years old** (1872)
- Het Laatste Nieuws: **133 years old** (1888)
- Eindhovens Dagblad: **110 years old** (1911)
- B.T.: **105 years old** (1916)
- de Volkskrant: **100 years old** (1921)
- Het Parool: **80 years old** (1941)
- Trouw: **78 years old** (1943)
- Algemeen Dagblad: **75 years old** (1946)
- Weekendavisen: **50 years old** (1971)
- De Morgen: **43 years old** (1978)
- BN DeStem: **23 years old** (1998)*
- de Stentor: **18 years old** (2003)*

* MERGED PAPERS

de Volkskrant

100

VRIJDAG 1 OKTOBER 2021

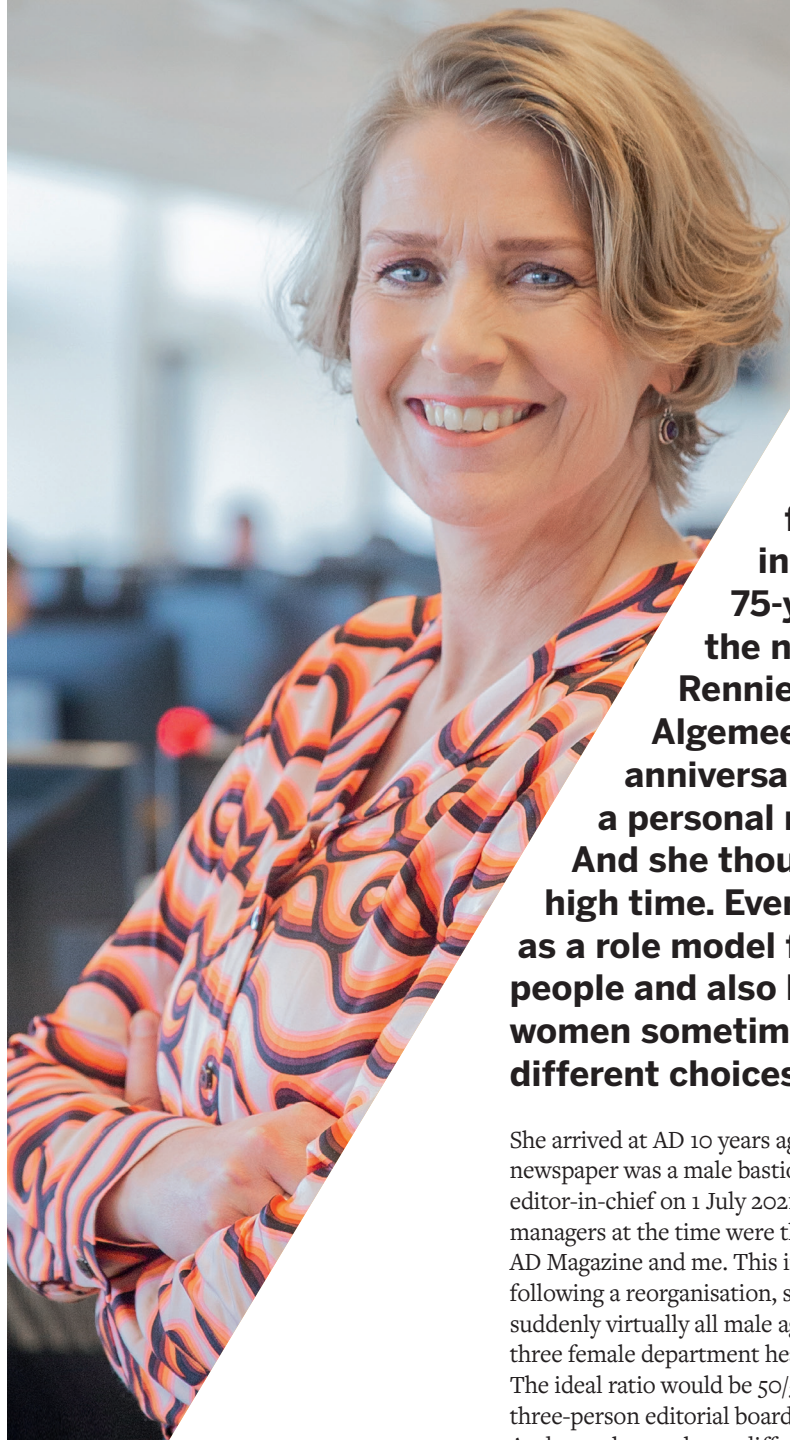
**Jan van der Zouwen
is vandaag 100
geworden, net als
de Volkskrant**



De Volkskrant's front page on its centenary

THE YEAR OF THE *female* *editor-in-chief*

AD, de Stentor and Het Parool appointed new, female editors-in-chief in 2021. What changes have Rennie Rijpma, Sylvia Cools and Kamilla Leupen seen in the editorial teams and editorial culture over recent years? And what course are they planning to follow?



The first female editor-in-chief in the 75-year history of the newspaper: for Rennie Rijpma, the Algemeen Dagblad's anniversary was also a personal milestone. And she thought it was high time. Even if it was only as a role model for young people and also because women sometimes make different choices.

She arrived at AD 10 years ago, at a time when the newspaper was a male bastion. Rijpma, who became editor-in-chief on 1 July 2021: "The only female managers at the time were the department head of AD Magazine and me. This improved later on, but following a reorganisation, senior management was suddenly virtually all male again. AD currently has three female department heads versus seven men. The ideal ratio would be 50/50. Two members of our three-person editorial board are women, though." And yes, that makes a difference. "We recently had a front page featuring only women. That attracts attention. And in a completely female editorial conference that we once held, we were struck by something else: men are keen to express their opinions, while women mainly ask questions." This requires a disclaimer, according to Rijpma. Not every woman is equally feminine, and not every man is equally masculine. "Maybe because I grew up with brothers, I can very easily play one of the guys. I only realised later that you should actually be aware of your feminine side." What's more, she says, diversity goes a lot further than counting the number of men and women. "I

RENNIE RIJPMAN (50),

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF AD SINCE 2021, HAVING WORKED THERE SINCE 2011. SHE WAS PREVIOUSLY JOURNALIST AND DEPARTMENT HEAD OF NEWS AGENCY ANP.

"Men express their opinions; women ask questions"

regularly emphasise our need to be diverse in our choice of subjects and of who we put forward as interview candidates. In addition, as an editorial team, we're still extremely white, and that causes blind spots. As a newspaper, we have to reflect society better."

In this society, it isn't appropriate as editor-in-chief to decide everything on your own. Rijpma: "I feel the ultimate responsibility very strongly, but I haven't felt lonely, and I certainly don't have the feeling that I have to do things on my own. I frequently consult my two deputy editors-in-chief, the department head, management and other ADR editors-in-chief."

This also fits in with the creed of the native Frisian, who is known as an 'energetic connector'. "The urge to connect is mainly part of a natural attitude of: how can we do it together?"

She developed this personality trait during her unusual academic career: among other things, she first studied social work and then went on to study law. "In social work, I mainly learned to be a good listener; in my law studies, I learned to think systematically. It's often helpful to break big problems down into steps."

The next steps for the AD were conceived in 2021 and will become more noticeable this year. Specifically in all online violence, it's important to continue to search for the social component, according to Rijpma. "Our readers see the newspaper as a friend of the family. We must make sure that this feeling, this love of the newspaper reader for the strong AD brand, is communicated more fully to the online visitor, so that the digital visitor also feels increasing affection for the AD."

Her second goal – not surprisingly – also relates to 'cooperation'. "We've now been working for six and a half years with the regional titles within the major news organisation that is ADR Nieuwsmedia. There's still a lot more potential in this collaboration."



Her appointment was met with unanimous applause. For all those involved, it was obvious that Sylvia Cools, who became editor-in-chief of de Stentor on 1 October 2021, was the best choice to head the proud ADR regional title. After all, she was already deputy editor-in-chief and, based on her previous job (13 years with regional broadcaster Omroep Gelderland), she was firmly rooted in the journalism of the east of the Netherlands.

“I briefly hesitated about applying,” Cools reflects. “Am I up to it? And will I enjoy it? Those were questions I asked myself.” Now she knows the answer. “It’s fantastic fun and an honour to do this job in an area where our readers still really call themselves ‘members of the newspaper’. The involvement, the feeling of belonging to the region is huge.”

As editor-in-chief, she wants to expand that involvement further. “De Stentor is already very much a multimedia platform, but I think there’s still much to gain when it comes to engaging with our readers. We’ve restored the comment function under articles, which is already a good move. The next step is to be active in working with those comments. In the run-up to elections, for example, we travel around the region in an old VW Beetle and ask readers the question: what

SYLVIA COOLS (44),

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF DE STENTOR SINCE 2021, HAVING WORKED THERE SINCE 2018. PREVIOUSLY, SHE WAS HEAD OF NEWS AT BROADCASTER OMROEP GELDERLAND.

“Diversity is more than just the male/female ratio”

needs to happen; what problems do you come up against? Those personal stories from readers can provide us with the starting point for new articles.”

Cools is also keen for the de Stentor editorial team to take this broad view of the news. And that goes beyond the proportion of women in the editorial office. “My predecessor, Allard Besse, was very active on diversity; half of our department heads are women. Diversity is more than just the ratio of men to women. I also think it’s good if people from various sectors – not just people who’ve been trained as print journalists – work in an editorial team.”

She is herself an example of this. “When I had just transferred from broadcasting to the newspaper, I was asked the question: how many words can I write? I had no idea. I was very image-focused and thought in minutes and seconds. Fortunately, there are clever, experienced people working here at de Stentor who have already taught me a lot about how to make the newspaper.”

That team spirit, supporting one another and making the best use of one another’s qualities, is firmly embedded in the paper. “It’s possible that the average woman shows more empathy in leadership than the average man, but I also know many empathic men. I think it just depends on the type of person. Even in periods when we work a lot from home – and still succeed in producing good stories – I try to be very accessible. I’m open to people and to other opinions, and, above all, I don’t want to impose my ideas from above. I want to help people, but I don’t think that’s feminine. It is human, though.”



She experienced something of a baptism of fire. In her first year as the person with final responsibility, Kamilla Leupen, editor-in-chief of Het Parool since 1 January 2021, guided her publication through the transition from afternoon to morning paper. Add to that the transition to *digital first*, the exhaustion of working from home and the murder of reporter Peter R. de Vries, which hit the editorial staff hard, and the verdict that it was ‘a difficult year’ is more than justified.

Het Parool, with a rich history as a newspaper of the resistance, was preparing itself in 2021 for a new future as a morning newspaper and a simultaneous change to *digital first*. “Of course, the transition took some getting used to,” says Leupen. “Now that we’re working completely *digital first*, there are multiple deadlines each day.” What remained unchanged was that we continued to work every day with great dedication on the print version of the paper. Leupen’s love for the paper goes back a long way. She joined the newspaper as a trainee in 1999, never dreaming at the time of becoming editor-in-chief. “I never gave it a thought. I didn’t think when I arrived here: one day I’ll be the boss. I mainly wanted to do my work as well as possible at all times.”

KAMILLA LEUPEN (49),
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF HET PAROOL
SINCE 2021, HAVING WORKED
THERE SINCE 1999.

*“We’re important
as a role model”*

However, thanks to her career path (from city correspondent to department head and since 2015 deputy editor-in-chief), she grew to be the ideal candidate to succeed Ronald Ockhuysen. “I thought that the next editor-in-chief had to be a woman and also someone who – because of everything that needed to happen and due to the pandemic – already knew the editorial team well.” She has of course seen changes in the culture of the editorial team since 1999. “The editorial team of Het Parool was always a kind of family, but at that time it was more hierarchical. Managers were mainly male and things were sometimes said to women, including me, that are really not acceptable now.” Quite a lot has changed as regards the hierarchy and Leupen has her own management style. “I’m quite a good listener, I’m open to other opinions, and I want to do things together. That’s in tune with our times and it’s also in tune with my personality.” Another thing that has changed: “Fortunately, you see ever more women at the top of organisations. It’s no coincidence that at DPG Media, three female editors-in-chief have been added in one year. It’s important as a role model: young women see that you really can get ahead in an organisation.” The ratio of men to women on the editorial team, including in senior positions, is now balanced. However, there’s more to be done on diversity. Leupen is pleased with the way DPG Media prioritises diversity policy. “As a city newspaper, we need to reflect the city better. This is proving more successful than before in the newspaper itself, but quite a lot still needs to happen in the editorial team.” And in the meantime, the editorial staff of Het Parool is mainly pursuing ambitions related to the capital city. Leupen: “I’m proud that in spite of the many changes, we publish good stories every day. We want to focus more emphatically on Amsterdam and become the indispensable online news brand for everything that has to do with Amsterdam.”

MAX & WOUT

The importance of sporting icons for news media

In 2021, the number of logins to DPG news media in the Netherlands and Belgium rose by 30 percent. The successes of sporting icons contributed to that. Thanks to Max Verstappen and Wout van Aert.



Joost Nederpelt (38),
FORMULA 1 REPORTER FOR NU.NL SINCE 2016. HE ALSO PUTS TOGETHER THE FRONT PAGE OF NU.NL.



Stijn Vlaeminck (39),
CYCLING REPORTER VTM/HLN SINCE 2020. PRIOR, HE WAS A PRESENTER FOR STUDIO BRUSSEL AND REPORTER AT SPORZA.



MAX VERSTAPPEN

On Sunday 12 December 2021, sitting on an uncomfortable chair behind an uncomfortable desk in the media centre in Abu Dhabi, Joost Nederpelt witnessed a historic moment. In a crazy and unforgettable denouement Max Verstappen became world champion. And what did the Formula 1 reporter of NU.nl do?

“I remained calm and continued typing, because the report had to be on the website as quickly as possible.”

Once he got home he was able to take the time to watch the images again and to enjoy all those Dutch people having the time of their lives. And to enjoy the NU.nl visitor numbers: in the final months of the thrilling season the pieces about Formula 1 were – proportionally – the most frequently read pieces in the sports section. At certain times, motorsport’s elite class overtook *football* as the most popular sport on NU.nl.

“The success of Max Verstappen is indisputably a success for us too,” Nederpelt

acknowledges. “If he hadn’t been Dutch, the number of page views and clicks would have been considerably smaller. Max is a guarantee for success, but apparently we ourselves are doing it right as well, otherwise visitors would go to other websites.” In the course of the years, NU.nl has become an authority on F1 with an extensive package of liveblogs, podcasts, videos, news reports and explanatory stories. Since 2021, visitors have had to log in with their DPG Media account to read the somewhat more in-depth pieces, under the heading of NU+.

A major step for a free app and website – and a successful one. “Thanks in part to Verstappen’s success, in the past year many people have become accustomed to having to log in on NU.nl for particular stories. That has speeded up the standardisation and smoothed the way for others: we have now rolled out NU+ for Climate and other sections,” says Nederpelt. “Not only was 2021 a great year for Verstappen, it was a great year for us too.”

WOUT VAN AERT

When Wout van Aert crossed the finishing line on the Champs-Élysées as the winner of the mass sprint on Sunday 18 July 2021, Stijn Vlaeminck’s microphone was the first to be shoved under his nose. “That was a moment I will never forget,” says the cycling correspondent of VTM and Het Laatste Nieuws. “It was spectacular for me, imagine what it must have been like for him.”

The winning sprint was the highlight of a Tour de France in which Van Aert achieved an unprecedented series of stage victories. On the day before Paris, he had won the individual time trial in Saint-Émilien. And a week earlier he had excelled in a different discipline by winning the mountain stage on Mont Ventoux.

No wonder that Van Aert is Belgium’s most popular sports person. This is also to the benefit of VTM and HLN, in Vlaeminck’s view. “Everything Wout van Aert touches turns to gold. There are many clicks on HLN.be on everything we report about him



Most frequently read articles about Max Verstappen on NU.nl

3,267,279

Protests by Mercedes rejected, Verstappen keeps world title

1,328,699

Verstappen grabs historic F1 world title after nerve-racking duel with Hamilton

1,250,927

Verstappen happy with text message from Mercedes boss Wolff: ‘It was nice of him’



Most frequently read articles about Wout van Aert on HLN.be

602,170

Van Aert takes silver at the end of a great race in Tokyo

558,436

Roglic destroys opposition, Van Aert misses out on medal

499,321

A couple of millimetres apart! Van Aert wins Amstel Gold Race

and the mid-form videos we make about him on the website are extremely popular.” Thanks to a partnership with Van Aerts’s team Jumbo-Visma, Vlaeminck has a good relationship with the cyclist. That enabled him to interview Van Aerts extensively and exclusively last season. He also got unique access behind the scenes. This resulted in the spring and autumn of 2021 in two exclusive documentaries on VTM, entitled *Wout*. They attracted a lot of viewers as well.

Both Vlaeminck and Van Aert are making sure that the relationship does not become too intense. “Just as sportsmen need the media, we need ‘heroes’ too. They are communicating vessels: he has to ride as quickly as possible, I have to perform my tasks as a media maker without being biased or implausible. Needless to say, as a sports fan I can genuinely enjoy his achievements, which were unique in 2021.”



HOW EDITORIAL, MARKETING AND ADVERTISING LEVERAGE DATA

LEARNING FROM

Data



The use of data has become indispensable at DPG Media. Analysts in various departments are working with all kinds of data to optimise products individually for every reader or customer. But how exactly do they do it? We drop in on editing, marketing and advertising.



“Look,” says Thomas Boeschoten, pointing to the collection of figures and graphs on his screen. “Here, halfway through the article, everyone suddenly stops reading. Let’s see what the problem is. A photo in portrait format, maybe?”

He opens the article on the website of a DPG newspaper, scrolls down to the halfway point and, indeed, a photo in portrait format has been inserted as an illustration. “That’s a real drop-off moment,” says Boeschoten. “The photo is so big that you can’t see the end of it. The text continues underneath but readers have gone before they get to it.”

Drop-off moments: Boeschoten, Team Lead of the News Analytics Team (NAT) of DPG Media, knows several. For example, an intro that does not match the header. “Then the reader’s expectations are not fulfilled.” Or an intro that contains a lot of institutional jargon. “That’s another reason for people to drop off.”

SCROLL DEPTH

The News Analytics Team gains those insights by studying a variety of data. Everything is measured and displayed in graphs and tables, including what is known as the scroll depth: how far down an article do readers scroll? In that way you can see precisely where they stop reading. Preferably at the end of the article, of course, but the data shows that this is definitely not always the case. Indeed, if 50 percent of the readers finish reading your article, statistically you have done very well.

If the data shows that there is a ‘problem’ in an article or if there are any other ideas for improving an article or its scope, the News Analytics





Team provides feedback to the editorial team in question. “We ourselves are not editors but we can give advice based on our knowledge.”

SUBSERVIENT, NOT LEADING

Aren’t they on shaky ground here? After all, editing relates to the content. “Yes, we hear that a lot,” says Boeschoten. “We believe that data is just one of the many sources from which you can derive information; you weigh it up against the other information at your disposal. Insights derived from data have to be subservient, not leading.”

That also applies to the digital newspaper, where the News Analytics Team can gauge how thoroughly articles are being read. “Sometimes we see way back on page 36 an article that’s very much in demand. Perhaps it ought to have been given a better position. Or vice versa: a front-page article that attracts very little attention.” The editorial team itself can obtain such insights from the daily reports, possibly using them to good effect when they put tomorrow’s newspaper together.

The News Analytics Team works closely with the editorial teams of news media and magazines in both the Netherlands and Belgium and in 2021 started providing training for hundreds of editors. The aim is to train data-savvy editors who are able to interpret data and take advantage of it in their own work and that of their colleagues. “We want to develop a culture in which we are receptive to data and can learn from it,” says Boeschoten.

MARKETING

Data also provides interesting insights in the domain of marketing. Margot Rozendaal,



“We use data to try and predict the future behaviour of visitors”

Director Data & Analytics at DPG Media, heads a Dutch-Belgian marketing team with more than 30 colleagues who work in support of the news media and the magazines. Their mission is to get a clearer image of the readers. “We use data to try and predict the future behaviour of visitors,” Rozendaal explains. “We can then focus our marketing campaigns on it.”

Data provides support to visitors throughout their visit, whether they are incidental visitors, frequent visitors, frequent visitors who log in, or frequent log-in visitors who ultimately decide to take out a subscription. “We predict what the *next best action* is for a reader. Should we offer you a subscription straight away or should we first get you to the point where you log into the website? Or if you haven’t got that far yet, should we first offer you a newsletter so that you are periodically reminded of our existence? We do this step by step and, needless to say, in line with privacy laws.”

The figures show that this approach pays off. “We see that visitors who emerge at the top of our prediction models with a high conversion probability are indeed more likely to convert and take out a subscription. Would we have found them otherwise? You can show everyone a subscribe banner, of course. Then you might find the person you are looking for, but you also miss out on many others who you may have invited to subscribe at too early a stage.”

ADVERTISING

The use of data is handy for advertising as well. Starting this year, advertisers can

use the internally-developed data platform, which allows them to choose target groups so as to be able to target their advertising better. With Datalab, DPG Media is able to offer a secure environment, thereby guaranteeing to advertisers that data is reliable and is not being misused. Privacy laws are becoming stricter, so this is an important step going forward.

What is new is that advertisers can now also prevent their advertisements from turning up alongside content with which they do not wish to be associated. DPG Media is the first publisher in Europe to roll out its own system for scanning all the content that is published on DPG websites. It makes use of advanced *natural language processing* techniques (a form of artificial intelligence) to classify every new article accurately. This enables advertisers to ensure that their advertisements are not placed alongside articles that do not fit in with their brand.

“Our own *brand suitability* model is a major step in the strategy of setting up a trusted and secure advertising ecosystem,” says Pim van Boekhold, Business Development Manager Data & Demand at DPG Media. “We want to assure brands that advertising on our network is always appropriate and secure, at no extra cost.”



Thomas Boeschoten (35)
NEWS ANALYTICS
TEAM LEAD



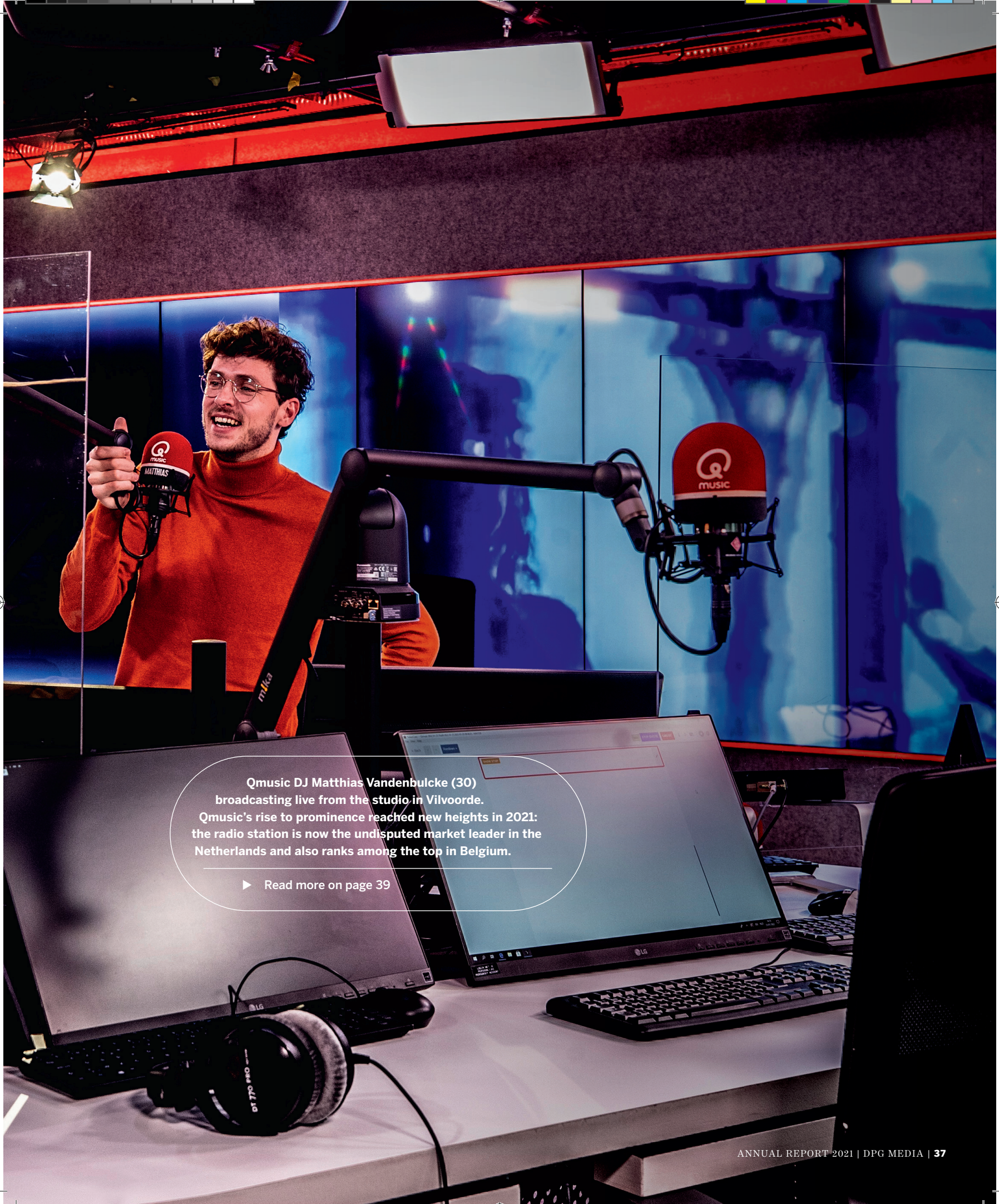
Margot Rozendaal (43)
DIRECTOR DATA &
ANALYTICS (B2C)



Pim van Boekhold (34)
BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER DATA &
DEMAND



AUDIO VIDEO



Qmusic DJ Matthias Vandebulcke (30) broadcasting live from the studio in Vilvoorde.

Qmusic's rise to prominence reached new heights in 2021: the radio station is now the undisputed market leader in the Netherlands and also ranks among the top in Belgium.

▶ Read more on page 39

facts
& FIGURES

715,000
average number of individual VTM GO users per month

37.5%
MARKET SHARE OF VTM CHANNELS

440 *thousand*
STREAMZ SUBSCRIBERS

2.8 *million*
listeners per week to Qmusic Nederland

2.3 *million*
listeners per week to Qmusic & Joe België

178,000,000
views VTM GO in 2021

THE SECRET *of* Q

Qmusic had a banner 2021, both in the Netherlands and Belgium. In the Netherlands, the radio station became the undisputed market leader. Here's what employees – and a listener – have to say about the appeal of the number one radio station.



“It’s a bit like winning the Champions League”

How does it feel to become market leader? “Very good,” says Robert Bernink, managing director of Qmusic Netherlands & Entertainment. “It’s a bit like winning the Champions League.”

In recent years, the station’s main goal was to become market leader among 20- to 49-year-old listeners, a key commercial demographic. To achieve this, Qmusic’s strategy focused on fresh new programming. “We wanted to present a more mature sound.”

The strategy’s pillars: *Mattie & Marieke* in the morning, Domien Verschuuren in the afternoon and the *Top 40* on Friday afternoons. *Het Foute Uur* every weekday, strong programming during office hours and evening shows that spotlight talented new artists. The weekend roster was reinforced with Tom van der Weerd and Bram Krikke. “As a result of all that, we’re actually number one now. First we became market leader for our 20-49 key demographic, and since August 2021 the figures show that we’ve also taken the top spot in the 10+ demographic, which means all ages.”



Robert Bernink (44)
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF
QMUSIC NETHERLANDS &
ENTERTAINMENT



Marlies Hartendorf (42)
FINAL EDITOR AT
THE MORNING SHOW
MATTIE & MARIEKE



Martijn de Vente (40)
QMUSIC LISTENER
FROM DAY ONE



Michael Dujardin (45)
STATION MANAGER AT
QMUSIC BELGIUM



Dorothee Dauwe (32)
CO-HOST OF
THE MORNING SHOW
MAARTEN & DOROTHEE



Manu De Coninck (38)
AUDIO-VISUAL
SALES EXPERT

The numbers are almost staggering. Qmusic Netherlands had a towering 19.7 percent market share in 2021 in the 20-49 demographic, the highest share of any station this century. The last time a radio station achieved a similar annual figure was in 1999. Another milestone was reached in December when, for the first time since 2015, Qmusic beat out NPO Radio 2 and its popular *Top 2000*. The station’s market share was 18.7 percent overall and 18.1 percent in the 20-49 key demographic.

ADDICTIVE SOAP OPERA

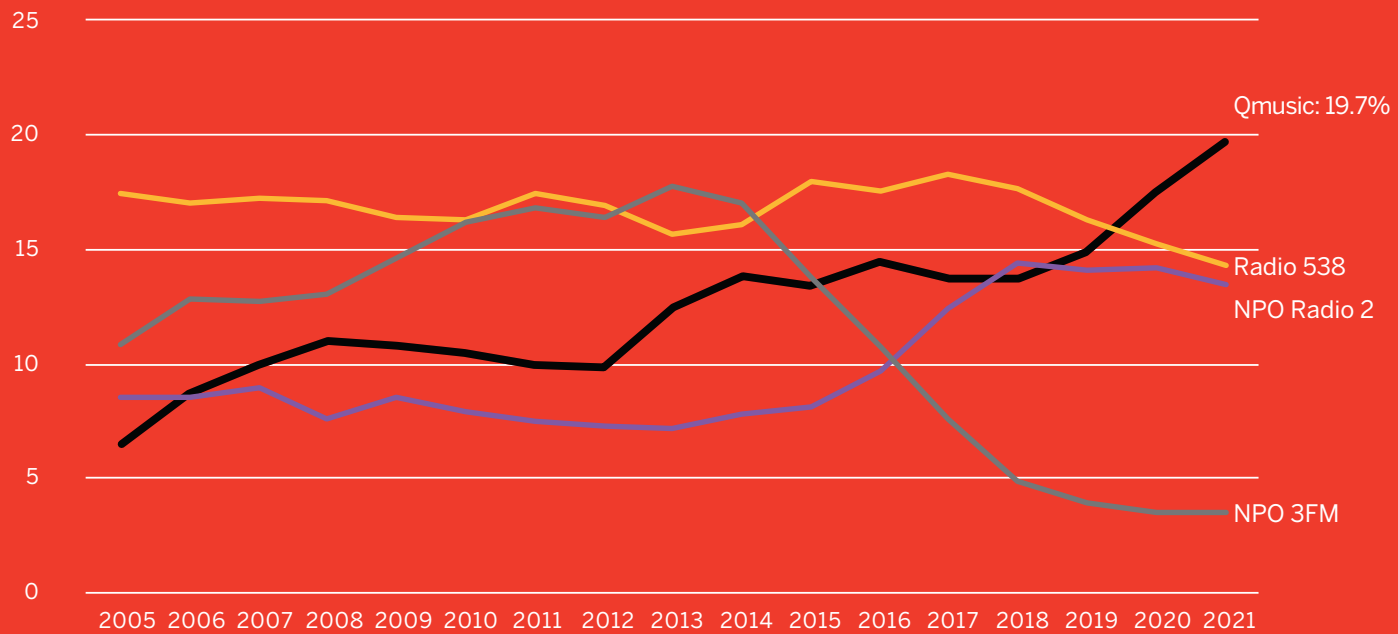
A big part of the reason behind the new programming’s success is the content of the shows. “We make a show with lots of personal stories,” says Marlies Hartendorf, final editor at the morning show *Mattie & Marieke*. “Mattie, Marieke, our newscaster Annemarie and characters like Intercom Tom and Joe the Intern – they all become part of the show’s story world. It’s like an addictive soap opera. That’s also clear from the response to the show: every day we get messages from listeners saying how much they enjoy it.”

Martijn de Vente, a Qmusic listener since day one, can attest to that. He always looks forward to hearing the DJs’ personal stories, which he can listen to all day while working as a coach driver. “Stories about Marieke’s evil cat, Kai’s pregnancy or Menno’s weekend away at Disneyland Paris. It almost feels like I know them personally.”

He also really likes the interaction between the DJs and the listeners, who are actually involved in the show. “You can send them messages and they will read them out or call you back, and there are also games and special events... When I’ve got Q on, time just flies by.”

COMFORTABLE POSITION

Qmusic has been on the air in the Netherlands since 2005. In Belgium, where the station was founded, it all started back in 2001. There, Qmusic is now market leader in the key commercial demographic and the second largest station in Flanders. “That’s a comfortable position to be in,” says Michael Dujardin, who’s been Qmusic Belgium’s station manager for over a year now. The secret behind the station’s success in Belgium?



Development of annual listening figures in the Netherlands. Source: GfK/NLO, Mon-Sun, 6am-12pm, 20-49 key demographic.

Dujardin: “We made sure we had a clear, recognisable programme schedule on the one hand, and surprising stunts and campaigns on the other.”

FAMILIAR VOICES

Talking about the programme schedule, Dujardin explains that people are creatures of habit. “For our listeners, the DJs are familiar voices that accompany them throughout the day. That’s why we’ve built our programming around those familiar voices.” Like *Maarten & Dorothee* in the morning and Vincent Fierens in the afternoon, Tom De Cock late at night, Regi – the country’s best-known DJ – on Saturdays and, in cooperation with Qmusic Netherlands, Armin van Buuren’s show.

Dorothee Dauwe has co-hosted the morning show *Maarten & Dorothee* together with Maarten Vancoillie since September 2020. As someone who has been with Qmusic since 2010, she has witnessed the station’s development up close. She started out as a newscaster and producer, and later went on to become a DJ.

“Over the years, I’ve seen Qmusic change from a steady radio station to a brand that seemed a bit unsure of itself,” she says. “But we always kept faith that it would all work out in the end. It took a while, but now we’ve got the perfect mix of jingles, music and shows,

which is why we keep attracting more and more listeners. We’re back on the right track, and we’ve got a solid foundation that we’ll be able to build on for years to come.”

CREATIVE STUNTS

And then there are all those surprising stunts and campaigns. These are partly the result of creative partnerships: all the advertising outside the commercial breaks. These can be weekly integrations, such as the *Birthday Wheel* (a collaboration with M-Line Mattresses) and *Shower Singing Star* (with X²O Bathrooms). But there are also spectacular, creative promotional stunts that are tailor-made for commercial partners. And with revenue from creative partnerships up by 30 percent, these efforts have been paying off.

“The success is mainly the result of Q DJs incorporating ads into their content in a way that feels authentic,” says Manu De Coninck, audio-visual sales expert at Qmusic Belgium. “And meanwhile, we’re making a positive change in Flanders. We really try to galvanise our listeners. A campaign we did together with Hyundai during the thousandth episode of *Maarten & Dorothee* was so successful that we received 1.9 million calls, overloading the network of Belgium’s largest telecom company – which also generated lots of free publicity. That was priceless.”

“We make a show with lots of personal stories”

THE REINVENTION OF TELEVISION: *the viewer is always right*

THE NEW WAY OF WATCHING TV



*Dirk
Lodewyckx (51)*
HELD A VARIETY OF
POSITIONS AT
MEDIALAAN AND HAS
BEEN GENERAL
DIRECTOR OF TV,
STREAMING & RADIO
IN BELGIUM
SINCE 2018

Watching TV is not what it was five years ago. In a short space of time, we have evolved from ‘the box on the wall’ to a diverse landscape of devices and streaming options. The creators take us behind the scenes of the entertainment business in Flanders, where one fact still holds true: *the show must go on.*

According to Dirk Lodewyckx, General Director of TV, Streaming & Radio, there are three things we need to know about the new way of watching television:

1 THE VIEWER WANTS EVERYTHING
“In the past five years, an abrupt switch has taken place from live to catch-up to streaming. Viewers of all ages have taught us that they want all three, anytime, anywhere. They want live TV when it’s relevant and urgent, and catching up or binge-watching in comfort if that’s what takes their fancy. Because of COVID-19 these new ways of watching have become the norm for more or less everyone.”

2 THE BAR IS STILL JUST AS HIGH
“Every channel needs to be fully aware of its raison d’être. Where live TV is concerned, the focus is entirely on the experience. For drama, the binge factor is key. Viewers have been treading that radical path for a long time. Whether it’s entertainment, news, human interest or a show, mediocrity is a thing of the past.”

3 A STORM IS ON ITS WAY
“The amount of content is now so vast that nobody is able to watch it all. In the next five years, there’s going to be a shake-out that will bring the market back into balance. We are in the same storm as all our national, international and global competitors. DPG Media will survive that storm thanks to our solid local base, our broad perspective and our creativity. Along with data and market expertise, it takes guts: the courage to be enterprising and take that leap of faith. And those are our strengths as a company.”

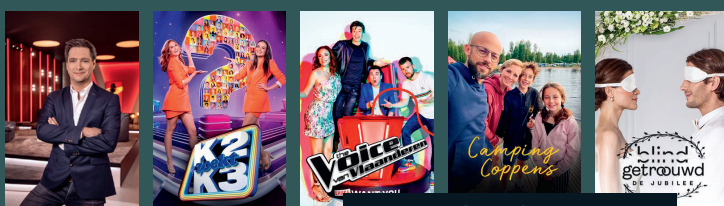
VTM

IN 2021

37.5%



VTM CHANNELS MARKET SHARE



5 TIMES MORE THAN

1 million

VIEWERS

(Rode Duivels, K2 zoekt K3, The Voice van Vlaanderen, Camping Coppens, Blind Getrouwd)



BEST MARKET SHARE FOR DECADES



36.5%

Top soap FAMILIE

VTM GO and Streamz

IN 2021



94,682,720

... HOURS IN TOTAL ...

WATCHED
ON VTM GO



Wednesday



IS THE FAVOURITE

VTM GO-DAY

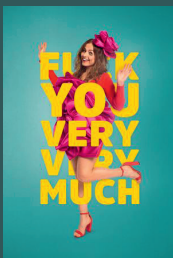
281

NEW PROGRAMMES
on VTM GO

NEW
ITEM

Top 3

MOST WATCHED
series in 2021 on Streamz:





TV terminology

SVOD:

- subscription video on demand
- paid, no commercials
- Streamz, for example

AVOD:

- advertising-based video on demand
- free, with commercials
- VTM GO, for example

Linear TV:

- television as we all know it
- VTM and RTL, for example

BEHIND THE SCENES: *VTM, family of channels*

“WE WANT TO BE DECEPTIVELY SURPRISING”



Maarten Janssen (40),
VTM CHANNEL MANAGER SINCE 2020.
BEFORE THAT HE WAS NETWORK MANAGER AT KETNET.

Focusing entirely on the experience: a criterion that is close to Maarten Janssen’s heart. “As a viewer, you want to feel that you have experienced something, otherwise the programme wasn’t worth your attention,” says the VTM channel manager. “There was a time when Flemish drama series were landmark viewing, but that has faded away with the arrival of streaming. With something like *Squid Game*, it’s a question of whether you’ve seen it or not. Linear TV does give everyone the chance to watch the same programme on the same day. On Saturdays, everyone talks about who the parrot might be in *The Masked Singer*. Our entertainment programmes set the tone in Flanders.”

The pressure to create an experience is huge: everything has to be sensational. But Janssen still believes there is still room for more challenging topics. “You have to dispense that ‘experience effect’ carefully. You can’t be compelling and sensational twice every evening, week after week. We also broadcast smaller format shows like *Da’s Liefde*, *Cupido of zo* and *Make Belgium Great Again*. There needs to be room for big, spectacular shows and for little gems. *Da’s Liefde* didn’t top the ratings but it was still nominated for an International Emmy Award; that can be just as important.”



NAUGHTY AND MISCHIEVOUS

Fresh, modern and respectful are VTM’s cornerstones, but the brand also evolved in 2021. “We want to allow real people to shine. That means showing the natural and authentic side of the ordinary people of Flanders as well as the famous ones. For all their little quirks, they too deserve a chance to shine. In addition, we want to be even more deceptively surprising than we are today. Many people have a clear image of VTM. That’s a strong point but there’s a risk of becoming predictable. So we always need to have something up our sleeve. Just because we serve a wide audience doesn’t mean that we can’t be a bit naughty and mischievous. And VTM embraces life with open arms. Everyone is welcome, inclusion and diversity are part of that.”

Viewers now watch whenever it suits them, but Maarten Janssen’s still sees a need for finely tuned broadcasting schedules. “No other medium enters our homes so easily. To distinguish ourselves, we are determined to show home-grown programmes. In days gone by, you knew that people would be sitting in front of the TV screen. Nowadays viewers have a million other options and they aren’t going to sit and watch something that bores them. There’s no mercy. Viewers are always on the look-out for brand-new content and local stories. So we are less inclined to buy content from major Hollywood studios and put more emphasis on Flemish productions. On VTM, every night of the week is Flemish night. It’s a total package with real appeal, because advertisers continue to choose VTM channels with great enthusiasm.”

“At VTM there needs to be room for big, spectacular shows and for little gems.”

BEHIND THE SCENES: *VTM GO, fully personalised*

“HERE YOU HAVE EVERYTHING YOU WANT AND YOU CAN CARRY ON WATCHING”



Maarten Devillé (35),
HEAD OF
RECOMMENDATION
& SEARCH. BEFORE
THAT HE WAS TEAM
LEAD OF VIDEO
PERSONALISATION
& INSIGHTS.

Watching VTM GO, you would scarcely know that it's a newcomer to the market. “In two years we have managed to create a fully personalised product,” says Maarten Devillé, Head of Recommendation & Search. “We are now starting to mature. We compile your home page to reflect your interests. We match our selection to your preferences and try to ensure that you discover as many programmes as possible. If you find yourself wondering why you are being offered a particular programme, that means we haven't got our recommendations right.”

One of the cornerstones of personalisation is a customer's viewing habits. “We build a pattern by linking what we know about our viewer to what we know about our content. Our wide reach and the amount of content means we can work at scale. For instance, we have noticed that avid film watchers are often interested in programmes like *The Voice van Vlaanderen* too. Based on that info, we build a profile of every viewer and every item of content and we can calculate the *match rate* between a viewer and a programme.”

TAILOR-MADE TRAILERS

Home-page personalisation is an eye-catching feature but there's a lot more to it than that. “Personalisation is everywhere. Most viewers come

to VTM GO for a specific programme. Of course, we make sure that they can find it quickly. But we also let them see that we have all kinds of other things they want, so that they can carry on watching. We often also show trailers for other programmes during the breaks. At present, these trailers are not personalised but that's something we're working on as part of our roadmap for 2022, so during a commercial break you are more likely to see a trailer that's right for you.”

“We can calculate the match rate between a viewer and a programme”

A lot of hard work has gone into the digital promo machine in the past year. “TV is mass communication. VTM GO is not: everything there is personalised. Our system is good at predicting what you will enjoy, but you

still have to be invited to watch it. That was one of our biggest achievements of 2021: all our communication is now tailor-made, from banners to emails and push messages. Only viewers with at least a 60 percent match for the telenovela genre will be informed when the new season of *Lisa* starts.”



BEHIND THE SCENES:

Streamz, a streaming service with a very particular position

“FOCUS ON LOCAL STORIES”



Dorien Rausch (39),
DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING & PRODUCTION AT STREAMZ SINCE 2020. BEFORE THAT SHE WAS CONTENT & ACQUISITION MANAGER AT TELENET.

If a blank page can lead to writer's block, how huge is the pressure when you have an entire streaming catalogue to fill? “We build it up month by month. Appealing local stories are our basis,” says Dorien Rausch, Director of Programming & Production at Streamz. “For international titles we have ongoing contracts, with HBO for example. In addition, we pick and choose titles from the market: last year these included *Clarice* and *Dexter*. Local content is clearly the *driver* of our product, so we use that as the basis for the productions, from the pitch to casting proposals to feedback on montages.”

Rausch does not have a checklist of features for a typical Streamz title. “The common thread is the refreshing or surprising way a story is told. On a pay-to-view platform, the content can be a bit bolder and more explicit. Last year, *Red Light* and *F*** You Very, Very Much* were extremely popular. *Red Light* gives viewers a layered narrative in a bold setting. *F*** You Very, Very Much* is all about hard-hitting humour with a sharp edge.”

“On a pay-to-view platform the content can be a bit bolder and more explicit”

MAPPING VIEWING HABITS

No platform nowadays can manage without data, and that is also the case with Streamz. “We map our customers’ viewing habits right from the start. This enables us to give every customer recommendation based on what they watch. We also give the producers a specific brief based on that data. The results will be seen in 2022 and 2023, because producing a drama series is a time-consuming process. Documentaries move at a quicker pace; our aim is to show one documentary a month in 2022.”

Dozens of streaming services have been launched in recent years, yet Streamz has managed to establish its own unique position in that landscape. “What makes us stand out from the crowd is our local content. We broadcast new series and documentaries every month, though the blend of national and international programmes remains important. People are looking for local stories, a refreshing take on familiar themes, so that’s where our focus will increasingly lie in years to come.”

RISING NEW
MEDIUM:

How



Iwan Reuvekamp (49),
AUDIO & VOICE INNOVATION MANAGER IN
2021, NOW INTERIM PROGRAMME DIRECTOR
AT QMUSIC NETHERLANDS.

podcasting

*is rapidly
gaining
ground*

These days, it's hard to imagine the media landscape without podcasts. A report on DPG Media's digital audio activities, written during a trip from Denmark to Belgium, by way of the Netherlands.

DENMARK

In a way, it's fitting that this trip starts in Denmark. "Denmark is one of those countries where they never had the best radio network," says Iwan Reuvekamp, who until recently served as DPG Media's audio & voice innovation manager. "And that certainly has its advantages. Because in countries where radio coverage leaves a lot to be desired, podcasts are more likely to gain ground."

It's therefore no surprise that Denmark has already established an impressive podcasting culture over the past decade. "In the Netherlands and Belgium, podcasts haven't yet reached the masses. The situation in Denmark is different: listening density is high."

“The Danish audio app should serve as an example for the Benelux”

The company 24syv, for instance – which is now fully owned by DPG Media – delivers customised news through a special audio app. Users who upload their data and specify some preferences can listen to a 5-, 10- or 20-minute news bulletin specially tailored to their profile. The 24syv app also offers a wide range of podcasts. “That’s turned out to be a huge draw,” Reuvekamp says. “We’re working hard to create a special audio experience like that for our news brands in the Benelux as well, supported by our colleagues in Denmark.”

Last year, DPG Media’s Danish podcasts (from Berlingske, B.T., Weekendavisen and Euroinvestor) were downloaded 35 million times, which is especially impressive considering the fact that Denmark has a population of ‘only’ 5.8 million. “That’s why it’s so inspiring to see what’s happening there.”

NETHERLANDS

But even in Denmark, podcasts aren’t very profitable yet. As we cross the border into the Netherlands, Reuvekamp says: “There too, people are still searching. Podcasting has a high penetration level in Denmark, and there are plenty of good long-term deals with advertisers, so it’s not like companies are losing money on digital audio there. In that respect, Denmark is ahead of the Netherlands and Belgium.”



DENMARK



Millionær Klubben | The Millionaires Club (Euroinvestor)

Very popular podcast about investing in stocks and cryptos, including investment tips and analysis of annual figures.



Søren Franks Vinkælders | Søren Frank’s Wine Cellar (Berlingske)

Weekly podcast in which Søren Frank and Søren Jacobsen Damm pick the best wines to pair with various foods, like oysters or game.



Reporterne | The Reporters (24syv)

A bold and inquisitive morning programme that sends out reporters every day to check the claims made by those in power.

But the Benelux is also starting to see commercial partnerships, leading to sponsored and branded podcasts. Moving forward, Sales will also be looking for opportunities to tell stories together with commercial partners.

Podcasts still have only a tenth of the listenership share that radio has, but our research shows that the medium is rapidly gaining ground, especially on mobile. Moreover, podcast listeners consume much more audio than traditional radio listeners.

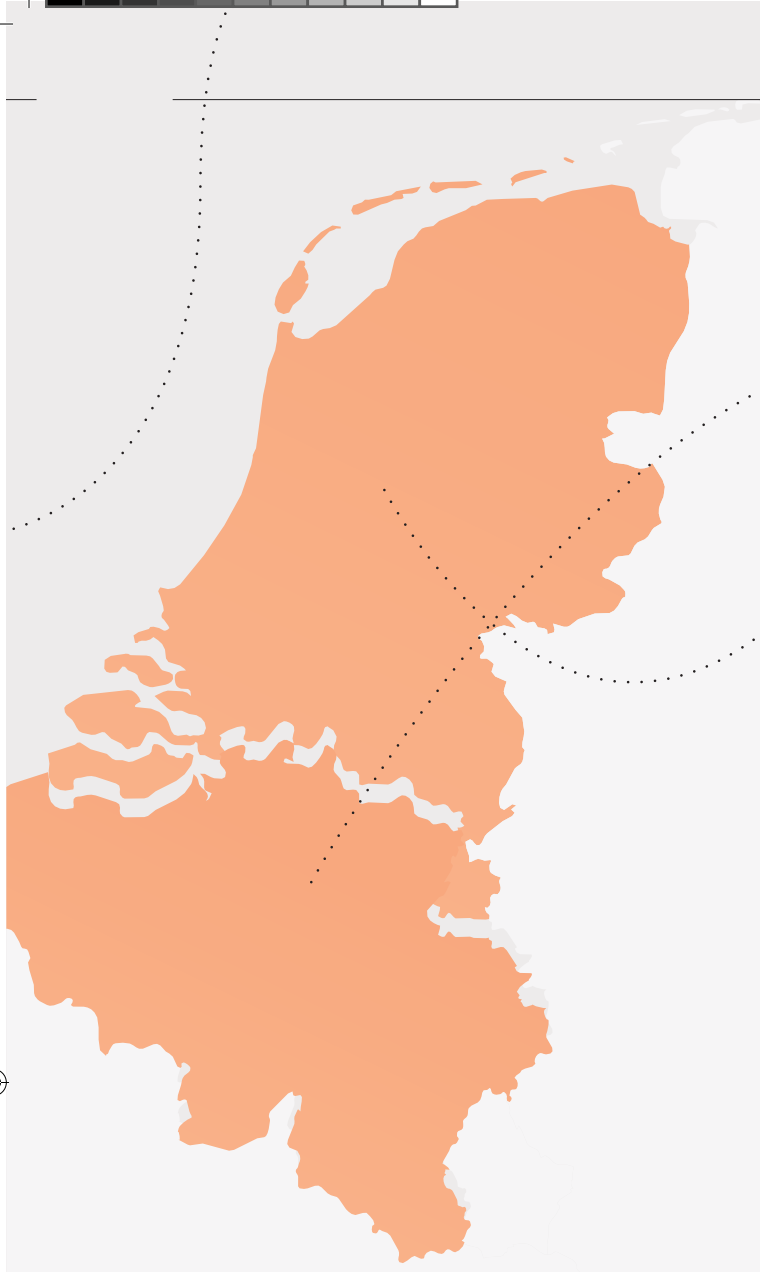
All in all, 21 million Dutch podcast episodes were downloaded last year. Across DPG Media, 160 different podcasts were produced for the Dutch market. The current offering can be divided into three categories: Today, This Week and Timeless. “Where the first two are fleeting and impermanent, the latter is not. You start with the first episode and then listen to all five, six or seven, like binging a Netflix series. By bundling these podcasts – like you would with printed media at a newsstand – you create value.”

DPG Media plans to create more content like this. Audionize expert teams, of four people each, have been set up especially for this purpose in both Belgium and the Netherlands. “They will focus on development, storytelling, recording and editing, receiving input from DPG Media reporters with expertise in their respective fields.”

BELGIUM

In Belgium, we’re joined by Steve Van den Audenaerde, who heads up the new Audionize team in Belgium. Recently, they developed the podcast series *The Crown Witnesses*, with input from VTM News and Het Laatste Nieuws (HLN), among others.

Van den Audenaerde acknowledges that Belgium has some catching up to do. “With the exception of a few isolated productions,



virtually no title has made a strong strategic commitment to podcasting. There are projects started by individual employees here and there, but because of the lack of a cohesive strategy ideas sometimes end up dying on the vine.”

Some existing podcasts are set to return with new episodes. “And we’ll also be making podcasts geared towards television – shows that support TV programmes or further explore certain topics.”

In Belgium too, podcasting has the potential to become an established medium. “Research has shown that podcasts in Belgium are particularly popular among young adults. That’s a very interesting demographic.”

• NETHERLANDS



De Deventer moordzaak | The Deventer Murder Case (de Stentor)

Why, twenty years later, is the Deventer murder case still shrouded in mystery? A four-part hit series with 540,000 downloads.



Een soort god | A Kind of God (Volkskrant, Audionize)

Over the span of seven episodes, Volkskrant journalists Simone Eleveld and Anneke Stoffelen investigate how sensible people can end up in a cult.

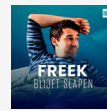


Tweakers podcast | Tweakers Podcast (Tweakers)

There’s so much more to talk about when it comes to things like space telescopes and smart-watches. This podcast gives tech the in-depth treatment it deserves.



• BELGIUM



Freek blijft slapen | Freek Sleeps Over (HLN)

What’s it like inside the homes of Flemish celebrities? News anchor Freek Braeckman sleeps over and finds out.



Duidelijk | Clear (De Morgen)

Once a week, journalists and experts bring clarity to the news stories that matter.



De Kroongetuigen | The Crown Witnesses (HLN and VTM, Audionize)

Thrilling murder cases, adapted from a popular TV documentary series.

“Moreover, podcast listeners consume much more audio than traditional radio listeners”

“THE CROSS-MEDIA REACH *makes us unique*”

JULIE NEYMAN,
ADVERTISING SALES
DIRECTOR BELGIUM

Julie Neyman started her new job as Advertising Sales director Belgium in 2021. There are big challenges in this market where you're up against Big Tech, but there is also lots of confidence. “We want to be the advertiser's preferred partner.”

As National Sales Director at DPG Media Belgium, Julie Neyman gained considerable experience of creating successful client relationships. She's been Advertising Sales director since April 2021. A busy job. “It's very tricky to combine work and private life,” says the mother of three. “If possible, I relax by going running or cycling, and I try to keep in contact with friends. And then there's the sea. I now live in Heusden, near Ghent, but I'm originally from



“As a sales organisation, we face the challenge of bringing together all the brands in a cross-media offering for advertisers”

Ostend. I love going back to the coast. It's always like coming home and gives you a bit of a holiday feeling.”

How did you find the transition to your new job? “Fortunately, I was already familiar with the sales team. The job is now a lot broader. As Advertising Sales director, I'm also responsible for everything creative, because we attract advertisers in a creative way with our content. I have a broader view of the organisation, which means that I'm also involved in the plans of News City and the Entertainment department, for example. It has been a challenge, because we work with big teams, but I really enjoy doing it.”

In what way do you try to get the best out of your people? “I think it's very important for people to be empowered. If you can focus on your own strengths and use them to the best of your ability in your job, then you can get the best out of yourself and put in a top performance. And I'm convinced that you'll then develop your other competences further and better. Furthermore, I have a down-to-earth management style. I'm keen on honest and open communication, and a culture in which everyone is accessible and approachable. And has a voice.”

05 Julie Neyman (EN def).indd 51



What is the key to success in a sales organisation?

“Team spirit. Camaraderie, cooperating and trusting each other’s expertise. As a sales organisation, we face the challenge of bringing together all the brands in a cross-media offering for advertisers. We can only do this if we pool all our expertise and approach our advertisers in this way. And a *can do* mentality: spirit, drive and passion are very important in a commercial organisation.”





What are the major challenges?

“Competition has increased. You see a lot of new e-commerce platforms emerging. Look at Instagram, where online commerce has become a big sector. In addition, there are more video players and apps that also offer a service. Using the KBC bank app, you can watch a football match, for example. In this way, they also attract other advertisers. A second challenge is globalisation. Belgium is a small country. When an advertiser decides where to invest his money, Belgium isn’t always the country with the highest priority. The bigger companies become, the more international deals they have with YouTube or Facebook. That really puts our digital offering under pressure.”

How can DPG Media face up to these global players?

“Google and Meta are indeed global players with very strong platforms. Just like them, we want to focus on strong advertising products, a better quality user experience and efficient ways of purchasing. But we can make ourselves more distinctive. We achieve that with our local, relevant content and our reliable brands. The multiplicity of our brands and platforms makes for a strong cross-media offering with a wide reach. And our most important trump card is perhaps the fact that we’re close to advertisers and their brands. Thanks to our knowledge of the local market and culture, we want to be their point of contact for connecting brands with each other. We must always ask ourselves how we can create a stronger reach. The fact that we’re closer to them and can talk to them is an advantage that we have over the bigger players. Thanks to our knowledge of local consumers, our





connection with advertisers and a strong understanding of their objectives, we can make a difference in the market. In this way, we want to become the preferred partner.”

How can DPG Media’s platforms respond even better to customers? “We always try to propose a cross-media plan. If a customer advertises on TV, we also propose a radio campaign or a display campaign on HLN.be. At the same time, content can run on VTM GO. The cross-media reach is what makes us unique.”

What are the plans for the near future? “We want to concentrate on three main pillars: operational excellence, customer centricity and a strong cross-media offering. The aim is to become more customer-centric and focus on customers and their brands. We’re improving our services thanks to enhanced expertise, the after-sales service and making our offering more accessible through tools. We’re focusing on a digitally inclusive sales approach and we train our people thoroughly. We want to meet and reach more customers, become real partners and support our customers more in thinking about their business.”

Can DPG Media become even more customer-centric? “Definitely. Advertisers see DPG Media’s offering as a single whole. They’re looking for a strong plan in order to reach their target group. If we want to become more customer-centric, we must objectively understand customers’ wishes in detail and offer them a solution across all our media. The question we always ask ourselves is: how can each content platform and each brand maintain its individuality and how can we as a management team then offer this as a single solution to advertisers?”



“We want to concentrate on three main pillars: operational excellence, customer centricity and a strong cross-media offering”

Julie Neyman (39),
ADVERTISING SALES
DIRECTOR BELGIUM SINCE
APRIL 2021. SHE PREVIOUSLY
HELD VARIOUS POSITIONS
AT DPG MEDIA.

Watching THE NEWS on your phone

Within just a few minutes, a news video can catch you up on all the important news from home and abroad. Many online news consumers enjoy being kept informed in this way. It allows them to stream their news at their own convenience, which they mostly do on their phones. Responding to these shifting preferences, newsrooms have started producing more and more videos. “It’s almost impossible for visitors to overlook them.”



Michiel Ameloot (41),
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF AT
VTM NIEUWS, ONLINE
VIDEO AND SPORTS AT
NEWS CITY SINCE 2021.

The videos DPG Media puts out through its apps and websites have greatly improved in quality over the last several years, making it more and more appealing to watch the news instead of reading it. A good video doesn’t just offer a pleasant, well-edited visual experience, but also tells a compelling story. And it must always have a news angle, according to Michiel Ameloot (editor-in-chief at VTM Nieuws and Online Video) and Bouke van der Veer (head of Video at ADR Nieuwsmedia).

HLN: 24 HOURS LIVE

In March 2021, exactly one year after the beginning of the first Covid lockdown, HLN broadcast a 24-hour livestream of performances by various artists from an empty Sportpaleis, Antwerp’s music arena. Over 2.2 million people watched the event, with an average viewing time of over one hour. The free livestream, which received an enormous amount of attention on social media, boosted the HLN brand. In January 2022, there was another edition of 24 HOURS LIVE, to once again support the music industry and as a sign of hope during a difficult time in the pandemic.

MILLIONS OF VIEWS

The pivot to ‘video’ in newsrooms is an important change. Het Laatste Nieuws publishes new videos every day, which now have an average total reach of about 2 million daily views. ADR (AD and the seven regional newspapers in the Netherlands) reports similar numbers. “The videos are prominently featured on the digital platforms of our news brands,” Van der Veer says. “They really draw the eye – it’s almost impossible for visitors to overlook them.”

Video editors use a variety of formats. Videos can be used in combination with written articles, to provide additional context and analysis, or to paint a certain mood. In other cases, the images speak for themselves, with small text blocks offering sufficient





explanation. Short documentaries can give insight into someone's life, or shed new light on ongoing stories.

LIVE

DPG Media news brands stream press conferences and other major news events live on their own websites. There are also livestreams for special events, such as HLN: 24 HOURS LIVE and ADR's *What's your question?* Q&As.

This year, HLN will also be focusing on entertainment videos – a relatively new market in Belgium. “We’re seeing really great numbers for entertainment content,” says Ameloot. “But we always approach it from a news angle. We cover TV programmes much like football matches, with a preview and post-match commentary, and a live blog with highlights during the show. It’s full steam ahead for us on this kind of content.” Like HLN, ADR always approaches entertainment from a journalistic perspective as well.

SMARTPHONE

Younger visitors (up to age 44) especially like to follow the news by watching videos.



Most viewed videos HLN 2021

1,164,041

PROMO CODE-CRACKERS: How to find promo codes for online shops

1,140,068

Tragedy strikes at Euro Cup: Eriksen collapses on the field

797,916

EXPLAINED: Here's what you need to know about bitcoin



Most viewed videos ADR 2021

816,731

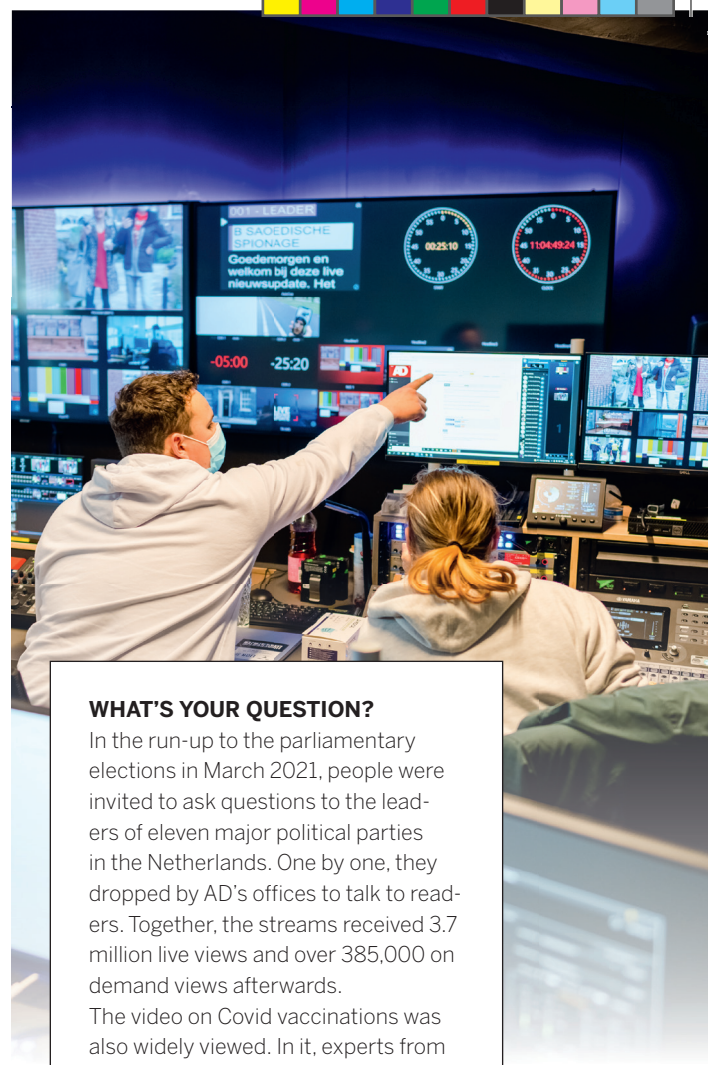
Hothead picks a fight with jiu-jitsu world champion

770,046

Woman knocked down by water cannon at protest

656,146

Sex workers: 'Treat us like the other contact professions'



WHAT'S YOUR QUESTION?

In the run-up to the parliamentary elections in March 2021, people were invited to ask questions to the leaders of eleven major political parties in the Netherlands. One by one, they dropped by AD's offices to talk to readers. Together, the streams received 3.7 million live views and over 385,000 on demand views afterwards.

The video on Covid vaccinations was also widely viewed. In it, experts from the Erasmus University Medical Center in Rotterdam fielded a large number of questions from vaccine sceptics. Given its success, ADR is planning to use the format again for new videos.



Bouke van der Veer (40),

HEAD OF VIDEO AT ADR NIEUWSMEDIA SINCE 2017. HE PREVIOUSLY WORKED AT TMG.

They do so on their smartphones, which is possible now thanks to technological advances: videos can be played anywhere, anytime. “In addition, it’s increasingly common for people to have unlimited data, so it no longer matters how many megabytes a video gobbles up. It used to be that videos would eat up all your data,” says Van der Veer.

Although the video trend is expected to continue, text and images will always coexist, Ameloot and Van der Veer predict. Watching and reading can go hand in hand. People will consume news in a variety of ways, although they usually have a preference. Text, audio (podcasts) and video all complement each other, and DPG Media wants to cater to the full spectrum of modern news consumers' needs.

Kris Vervaeet:

“RTL BELGIUM BECOMES ONE OF THE FAMILY”

In June 2021, DPG Media, along with Groupe Rossel, acquired RTL Belgium. Kris Vervaeet, CDO and CEO Belgium, told us what makes this duo so strong, and what their ambitions are for RTL Belgium.

*Kris Vervaeet (50),
CEO DPG MEDIA BELGIUM
SINCE 2018. PREVIOUSLY
WORKED FOR EDF.*

DPG Media and Groupe Rossel took over RTL Belgium together. Why go for a fifty-fifty acquisition? “DPG Media and Rossel really complement each other. We believe that together we can make RTL stronger, using what each of us has to offer. Rossel really knows Wallonia and is solidly anchored in the region. We have a lot of experience in radio and television, plus extended digital capabilities. With these collective qualities, we can strengthen RTL Belgium and bring it even closer to its consumers. We received positive responses to the fact that the acquisition of RTL involved two local market players, because foreign companies had also expressed their interest.”

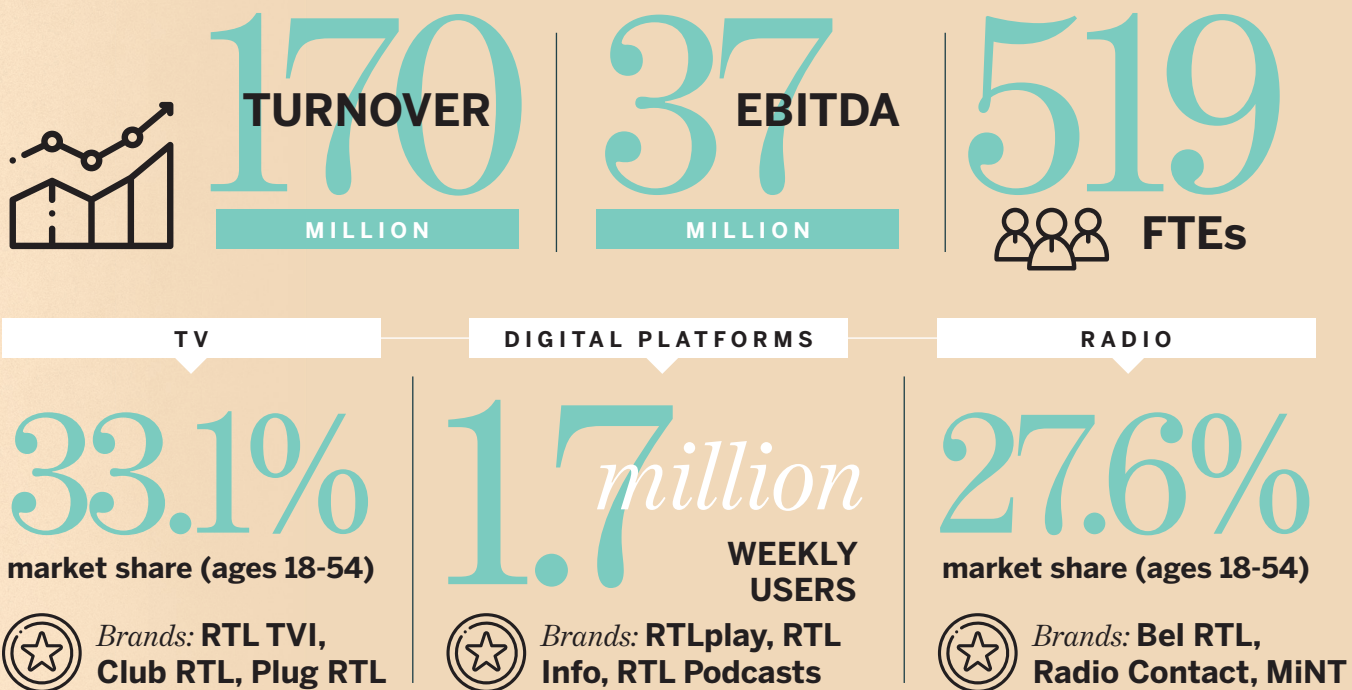
Groupe Rossel is not unfamiliar to DPG Media. “That’s right. We go way back.” He smiles. “For thirteen years we partnered to run Mediafin, which publishes De Tijd and others, and have already worked together extensively. We know each other well and there’s a lot of trust. You need that, if you want to be 50/50 shareholders.”

What ambitions do you have for RTL? “First and foremost: RTL is a healthy company with strong brands to its name. We believe that in the coming years we can primarily strengthen RTL in its digital transformation, to use a fancy word. Consumer viewing, listening and reading is increasingly digi-

tal. DPG Media has invested enormous amounts in recent years in digitising its brands: not only digital apps and platforms for consumers, but also advertising tools for our advertisers. We are now in a position to make those tools, platforms and knowledge available to RTL Belgium. Playing our digital card to the fullest is the best way to arm ourselves against digital giants like Spotify and Netflix.”

“Secondly, we can also support RTL by making high-quality local content that appeals to Francophone Belgians. This is more like collaborating in the creative process. In the longer term we want to work more cross-media to build bridges, as we already do between VTM Nieuws and HLN. We’ve noticed that both VTM Nieuws and HLN have become stronger in the process. I really believe that this kind of cross-media collaboration will also make RTL stronger.”

What are the next steps in this process? “After approval by the Belgian competition authority (BMA), we’re going to make a concrete action plan. We’re really looking forward to teaming up with the people at RTL, and putting our passion and expertise at their service. They’re going to be one of the family. We’re not planning on getting stuck at the idea stage. We want to be able to present something to the consumer by the end of this year.”

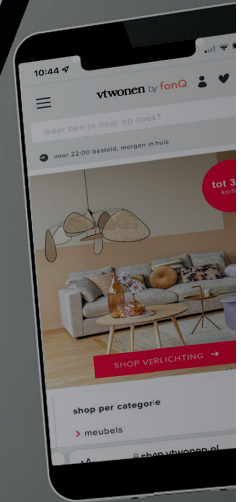
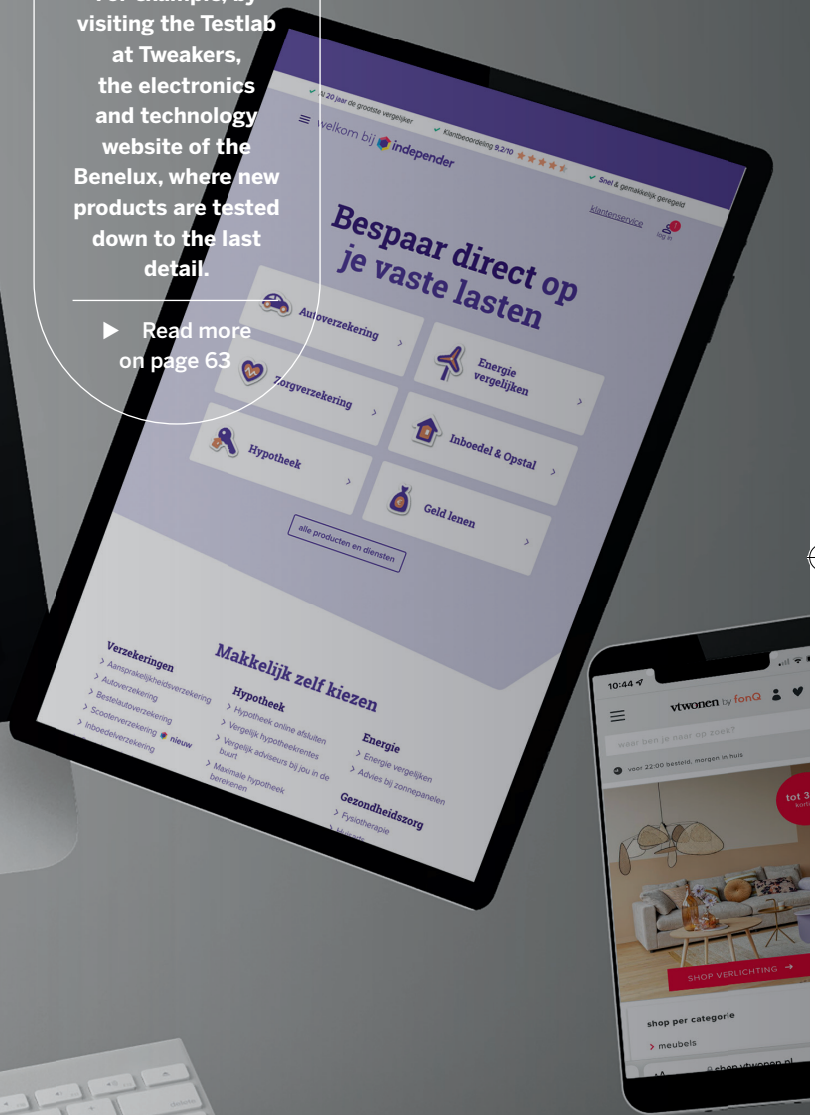


SERVICES



The objective of DPG Media's Online Services is to inform and inspire people and to help them make the best purchase. For example, by visiting the Testlab at Tweakers, the electronics and technology website of the Benelux, where new products are tested down to the last detail.

► Read more on page 63



facts
& FIGURES

17,303,521

Total number of comparisons
(Independer, Spaargids.be, Mijnergie.be)

34%
GROWTH

AutoTrack customers since joint
venture with Mediahuis

294,750

vacancies posted on
Nationale Vacaturebank & Intermediair

77
million
MONTHLY PAGE VIEWS FOR TWEAKERS

Independer

NUMBER

comparison site
in the Netherlands

1



Independender's **ANNUAL SPRINT**

for the finish line

In the final weeks of the year, comparison website Independender always needs more hands on deck than usual. The entire company jumps in to provide each and every customer with the right advice about their health insurance. The end of 2021 was another peak – and busier than ever!

Once a year, from mid-November, people in the Netherlands have the opportunity to switch between health insurance companies. Most people wait until the very last minute to make that change. During the holiday season in particular, thousands of visitors get in touch every hour with queries about their health insurance. They contact Independender for advice on the website, but also by phone and through WhatsApp. “On the last day of the year, the website reaches its peak with over 14,000 comparisons per hour,” says team leader Warner Michel.

KICK

It takes plenty of manpower to deal with all these help requests. “The whole company joins in to ensure

the necessary capacity. Even staff from the HR departments and the management board pitch in and work shifts. Everyone puts their shoulder to the wheel. This level of teamwork is a great source of pride for us. It's always a very hectic time, but you get such a kick when you succeed in pulling it off yet again."

Approximately sixty people are at the ready to respond to chat, phone and WhatsApp messages every day during this busy period. The staff mainly consist of experts in home, travel and other types of insurance. They reserve space in their schedules during the closing weeks of the year so that they can help out during the peak season.

MODERN MINDSET

The number of phone consultations has decreased significantly in recent years. This is not surprising, given that the website is now able to provide customers with more and more targeted information. Michel explains, "People have no trouble finding the information they need online. Besides, this approach is best suited to the modern mindset. People prefer to make their own arrangements online if it's a straightforward enough process."

"Even staff from the HR departments and the management board pitch in and work shifts."

From the data it receives from every conceivable insurer, Independer generates a clear and an easy-to-understand overview to accommodate customers. Michel is convinced that the comparison site enables consumers to find the best insurance for the best price. "We are geared towards giving the customer the best possible assistance."

MAKING LIFE EASIER

Independer also tries to make life easier for its customers as they switch between insurers. "We take care of everything. Through us, customers sometimes end up receiving a small discount or additional accident insurance: many people have no idea that dental damage caused by an accident is often not covered by a basic insurance plan.

At any rate, they never pay more than they would if they took out insurance directly with the insurer."

All this extra help pays off. Independer receives great reviews, along the lines of 'quick, clear, simple, organised'. "Our customers are very satisfied," Michel says. "They are confident they have chosen the right plan for them, which means that we have done our job right."



Warner Michel (30),
TEAM LEADER AT INDEPENDER SINCE 2019. HE PREVIOUSLY WORKED AS A NON-LIFE INSURANCE ADVISOR.

12,769,567 
COMPARISONS ON THE SITE IN 2021

 9.2
SCORE GIVEN BY
Independer's customers

14,000 
comparisons (per hour):
on 31 December 2021

THE GROWTH OF PRICE COMPARISON WEBSITE MIJNENERGIE.BE



“IN JUST FIVE
MINUTES YOU
CAN SAVE
MONEY”

The energy market went through a turbulent time last year. So Mijnergie.be became more relevant than ever. The cooperation within DPG Media helps a lot with the growth of the price comparison website.

In 2021 Mijnergie.be helped 178,112 people to get a better energy contract. That is 18 percent more than in the previous year. “Because of high energy prices and suppliers that ceased trading, the interest in our website increased enormously and gave us a boost,” says Business Manager Kristof De Paepe.

The price comparison website was founded in 2007 by Bertrand Rochez and was acquired by DPG Media in the spring of 2018. “That was a great success,” says De Paepe. “The turnover started to grow substantially from the moment that we joined DPG Media. In just a couple of years we have achieved a substantial market share of the price comparison website market.”

The figures speak for themselves. In 2018 Mijnergie.be had 100,000 visitors per month. The website really took off after the integration into DPG Media. Last year visitor numbers rose to 186,000; and 178,112 contracts were concluded via the website, in comparison with 109,000 in 2019.

CAMPAIGNS

De Paepe does not need much time to think about an explanation for the growth. “Our presence on the platforms of DPG Media, which reach a very wide audience, has enabled us to make large numbers of people aware of opportunities to save money. We are running campaigns on VTM and Qmusic, for example. The message always stresses the potential for making savings. That catches people’s attention. It persuades people that they can and should do something about their contract.”

“We created examples that explain why people have switched. For example, there is someone who says, ‘I helped my mother, it took five minutes and now she’s saving a lot of money’. And someone else says, Football star ‘Kevin De Bruyne earns so-and-so euros per minute, in five minutes you can also earn money by switching to another supplier’. As soon as we appear in the media, we see further growth.”

A satisfied customer generally comes back. That is not the case with Mijnergie.be, but of course it is not necessary either. “Conclude a better contract and then come back a month later to see if you can get something even cheaper? No, not a good idea. When you switch, you also pay a sort of subscription fee, which you don’t get back. So the advice is switch, make the most of the discounts you get via Mijnergie.be and then do it all over again a

“The turnover started to grow substantially from the moment that we joined DPG Media”

178,112
ENERGY CONTRACTS

concluded via Mijnergie.be in 2021
(18% more than in 2020)

1,747,609
COMPARISONS concluded on the website in 2021

year later. Our customers are satisfied and are not afraid to say so. They refer to Mijnergie.be regularly on social media.”

SUPERMARKET

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that Mijnergie.be is actually a supermarket for gas and electricity. After all, the website compares the prices of all the suppliers on a daily basis. Just as a supermarket looks at the competition and guarantees the lowest prices, Mijnergie.be puts forward the keenest prices on the energy market.

“We keep our eye on rates and promotions every day, so our prices are always up to date.” Just like a supermarket? De Paepe laughs. “It sounds like it, doesn’t it? But a supermarket also sells products, we only make comparisons. When someone signs up, they do it directly with the supplier, not with us. So how do we earn money from it? When a visitor to the website takes advantage of an offer via the link, we get a commission from the supplier.”

Visitors to the website come in all ages, from 18 to 98. As a visitor you get an offer based on the information you give about where you live, your current consumption and type of meter, and whether you have solar panels installed. A calculation is then made. “Many people are extremely worried about energy prices at the moment. Comparisons help people to make savings: there can be hundreds of euros difference between the cheaper contracts and the more expensive ones.”

CONVINCING

Because of the energy crisis 2021 was an auspicious year and Kristof De Paepe believes that further growth is possible. It is a question of convincing people to surf to Mijnergie.be and make a comparison.

In fact, a lot of people do not. There are a lot of possible reasons for that. “Uncertainty, doubt and ignorance, for example,” says De Paepe. “The fear of being without electricity. There are still people who think they run that risk if they switch suppliers, although in reality it isn’t possible. However, during the lockdown lots of people found their way to a comparison website. They were staying at home, they had time and salespeople were not allowed to come to the door. Moreover, energy prices were low at the beginning of the COVID crisis, in contrast to today. People go looking for interesting offers at times like that, too.”

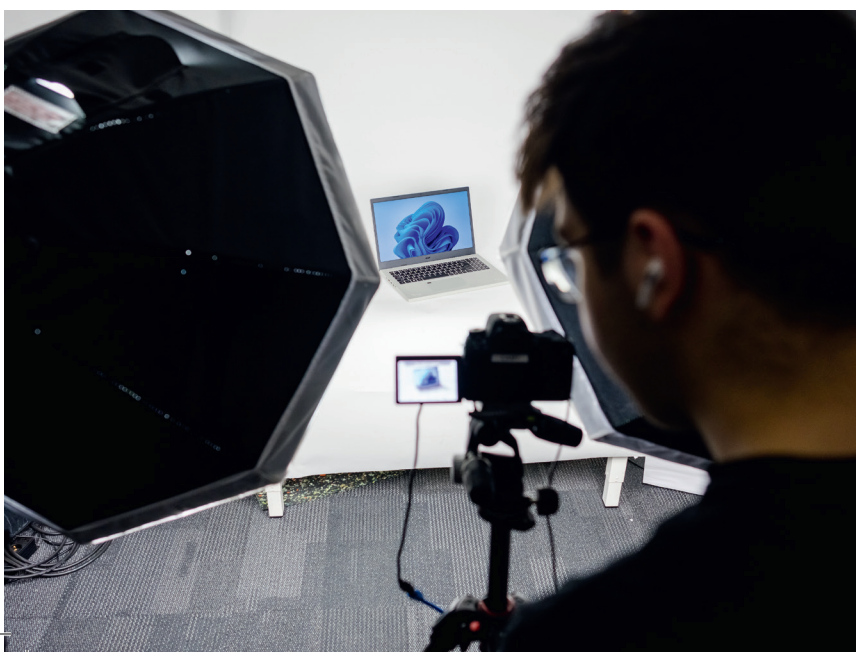


Kristof De Paepe,
BUSINESS MANAGER
MIJNERGIE.BE
SINCE 2019.



**TWEAKERS TESTLAB GOES ALL
IN FOR UNIQUE CONTENT**

**“If you want to
test a monitor
thoroughly,
YOU NEED A WHOLE DAY”**



With around five million unique visitors per month and almost one billion page views in a year, Tweakers was once again Benelux's biggest tech and electronics website in 2021. One of the reasons for its success is its test lab, where the latest tech products are tested down to the smallest detail. A look behind the scenes.

The TV screens, all lined up neatly on a trolley, are the first thing that catch your eye when you walk into the INIT building in Amsterdam. Not to mention a whole range of laptops, peripherals, computer screens and a separate TV testing room. Marc van Lom, team lead at the test lab, confirms your first thought on seeing all these gleaming devices: parcel delivery drivers are in and out all the time.

Manufacturers are eager to get their products tested at the Tweakers test lab. And that's understandable: a good review (or a Tweakers Award in the categories 'Excellent', 'Great Value', 'Innovation' or 'Ultimate') represents a substantial boost in sales.

But this is of no concern to the specialists at the test lab. "We are completely independent; we test the devices and materials we think are of interest to the general public," Van

Lom explains. "Most of what you see here comes on loan from the manufacturers. And if a manufacturer is unable or unwilling to supply a product we consider relevant, we purchase it ourselves. Everything we test has been here in the lab. We have unpacked it, installed it and tested it thoroughly in numerous areas. Working from home is not an option. We test everything here, in a controlled environment."

ASSESSMENT

Yes, manufacturers are sometimes disappointed with the final assessment. "That happens from time to time," Van Lom confirms. "A major electronics manufacturer even boycotted us once because they were unhappy with a review. Not that it makes much difference to us. In that case, we simply purchase the device."

On the whole, Tweakers has an excellent relationship with the manufacturers, not least because they know that Tweakers is the real deal. "Our tests are performed in accordance with meticulous protocols. In recent years, we have built devices ourselves and even developed software to test everything objectively."

An excellent example is the *texture analyser*, a device most people would struggle to find a use for. The test lab built it as a high-precision tool for measuring keyboard performance. "This device gives you very precise measurements of how much force you need to press a key. And we measure this for each key individually. Some keys on a particular keyboard can have a much lighter or heavier touch than others. Most other tech websites that claim to test products base this kind of assessment on a general impression. They might write something like, 'The keyboard feels comfortable'. With our measurement data, we can show exactly why a keyboard is good or not."

OBJECTIVE

The temperature or battery life (measurements continue 24/7) of a laptop, the range of a router or the depth of colour of a monitor: everything is tested and, where possible, measured objectively. Whether a laptop or keyboard 'looks good'

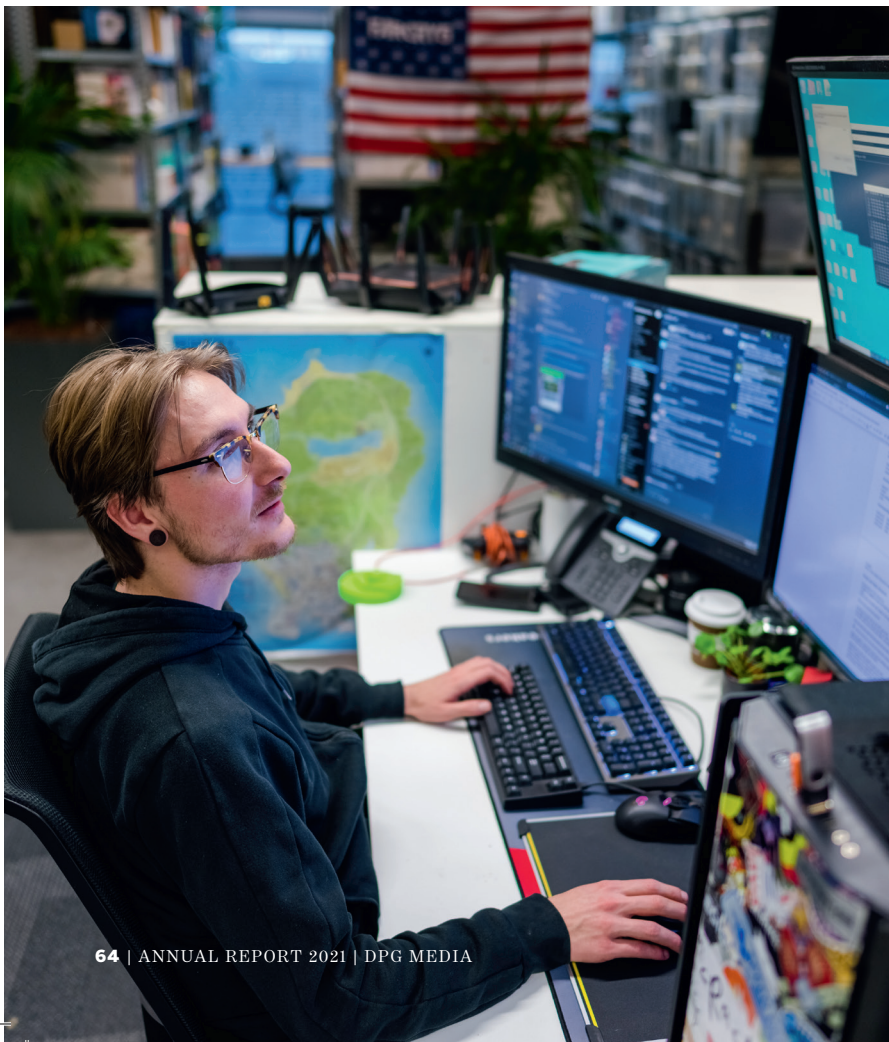
"It results in unique content and that's what makes us different from the rest"





Marc van Lom (29),
TEAM LEAD AT TWEAKERS TEST LAB SINCE 2020. HE HAS BEEN WITH THE TEST LAB SINCE 2013.



Eric van Ballegoie (43),
TWEAKERS REVIEW COORDINATOR SINCE 2020. BEFORE THAT HE WORKED FOR HARDWARE INFO, WHICH HE CO-FOUNDED IN 2001.





is of course subjective. One bone of contention with the manufacturers is never likely to change, says Van Lom. “Manufacturers mainly want to get their expensive high-end models tested, because their top model has more chance of getting a positive review. But a one-sided focus on high-end models is not in our interest. For instance, we might do a test of ‘laptops that cost around 500 euros’. A category like that is far more relevant to most consumers and therefore to the people who visit our websites.”

EDITING

The decision on what products to test and in which price category is down to the 20-strong Tweakers editorial team. Review coordinator Eric van Ballegoie explains that the editorial team acts as ‘principal’ for the test lab. And yes, occasionally tensions do arise between the editorial team and the test lab. With a grin, Van Ballegoie talks about the “full and frank discussions” that take place about how many products should be tested in depth. “It’s always a toss-up between testing more products or taking a more detailed look at fewer products. So we are continually making choices in consultation with the test lab.”

How comprehensive and time-consuming should a test be? Van Lom gives an example: “If you want to test a monitor thoroughly, you need a whole day. So if the editorial team asks us to test 39 monitors, that’s the equivalent of 39 working days.”

That sounds like an intensive and expensive job, and indeed it is. “But it results in unique content and that’s what makes us different from the rest,” says Van Lom. “At the request of the editorial team, we might agree to test 20 monitors or not to test particular aspects of performance. We have a lot of experienced people at Tweakers, so we generally know which products in a category are of interest.”

TOTALLY INTO TECH

To work in the test lab, you have to be totally *into tech*. To date, that has resulted in an all-male workforce. “Most of our staff have studied electrical engineering, IT or another technical discipline,” Van Lom reveals. “But that doesn’t have to be the case. We can teach people how to perform tests. But you definitely have to be totally into tech. Everyone who works here loves getting to grips with the very latest products on a daily basis and assessing how innovative a product is in comparison with what’s already on the market.”

New from Tweakers:

BESTGETEST

On 1 December 2021 Tweakers introduced **BestGetest**. Geared towards the ordinary consumer, **BestGetest** features buyer's guides for numerous tech products. With the introduction of **BestGetest**, **Tweakers.net** plans to focus fully on real tech fans.

"Although BestGetest is a brand-new development and still in its infancy, the interest it's attracting has already exceeded expectations," Eric van Ballegoie observes. "We think there's plenty of potential here because it lets us focus on a very large number of consumers. On BestGetest, we have cut out the technical terms you might come across on Tweakers."

The buyer's guides for laptops, smartphones, TVs, games, monitors and video cards are especially popular. Around 75 people currently work at Tweakers. To ensure ongoing profitability, Tweakers has several sources of income. On Tweakers.net, for example, you can still find Pricewatch, where visitors can search for the lowest product prices found online. Tweakers earns money every time a visitor clicks through to an online shop via Pricewatch. "We also make money from advertisements and our Plus articles," says Van Ballegoie. "These are subscription-based background articles on topics such as the latest advances in TV technology, which are of particular interest to real tech fans."





833

PRODUCTS



tested in 2021 at the test lab

Most

FREQUENTLY READ PRODUCT TESTS IN 2021

- 1 Smartwatch
- 2 Desktop
- 3 Laptop
- 4 Smartphone
- 5 Monitor



91,621

TEST RESULTS IN 2021

The test lab colleagues get to have fun with a whole range of products, from laptops, monitors and TVs to CPU coolers, video cards, processors and smartphones. A separate test area that blocks electromagnetic radiation (a Faraday cage) has even been created to test devices such as routers. There is a soundproofed section and another space contains a photo studio: all tested products are photographed at the test lab itself. Van Ballegoie concedes that testing is an expensive business, but insists that the company is certainly aiming to grow, as long as there is sufficient manpower available to test great tech products. “For instance, we currently test a lot of 55-inch TVs because that’s the most popular size, but you could easily test other sizes as well. And given enough time and space, we can also test a wider range of products, such as robot vacuum cleaners.”

Car websites

STRONGER TOGETHER

Two media companies that are combining forces and doing battle together in the Dutch car market: the success story of Automotive MediaVentions.

Changing from competing publishers to partners in the car sector in 2019 turned out to be a golden opportunity. Since DPG Media's AutoTrack formed a joint venture with Mediahuis's Gaspedaal, they have overtaken the previous market leader and competitor AutoScout24 in terms of reach. The publishers now want the individual websites to become the largest as well.

The result of the joint venture exceeds expectations. "We've even exceeded the figures we put down on paper beforehand. Here one plus one really equals three," says Sander van den Hout, Director of Automotive MediaVentions.

IN THE LEAD

The reach of the websites has nearly doubled since 2019. The websites now attract more than five million users per month. "Now we want to grow each brand and take the lead. These kinds of websites actually need to have at least a top-two reach, otherwise you don't count for much."

The ambition is clear. "Anyone looking for another car has to do it through us," says Van den Hout. "We want to be the place where consumers get the best service. There are several types of users, so you need individual brands. In that way, we can offer everyone the solution that meets their needs."



Sander van den Hout (49),

DIRECTOR AUTOMOTIVE MEDIAVENTIONS SINCE 2019. BEFORE THAT HE WAS MANAGING DIRECTOR ONLINE SERVICES AT DPG MEDIA.

BUYERS

Gaspedaal collects and displays all cars for sale in the Netherlands. This is the place to be for car lovers who know everything about various models, technical data, options and accessories. AutoTrack is aimed at indecisive consumers who can't see the wood for the trees. They want to get some guidance. If that doesn't happen, they quickly abandon the search for a vehicle.

Now there is an additional service for them. When someone finds a car online using AutoTrack, an independent expert ensures that everything – from vehicle check to purchase – is taken care of; the car is delivered to the door with a guarantee. A two-week trial period then starts, during which the buyer can still change their mind. "The important thing is that a buyer has a good feeling about a car."

ONLINE BATTLE

And there's more in the pipeline. "Consumers needs are changing. Technological developments are taking place, such as self-driving cars and cars you can share. We see plenty of room there for further growth."

This wouldn't have been possible without the joint venture, says Van den Hout. "A number of years ago, DPG Media and Mediahuis lost the online car advertising market to international companies. It's unique in the Netherlands for media companies to join forces in this way and do battle together against other competitors."



“We’ve even exceeded the figures we put down on paper beforehand”



MAGAZINES

71x
shopper
Parade
van oude
en nieuwe
parels

FIAT PANDA (1980)

SCIENCE

AD NR. 4 /
JUNI 2021

Met bestelbon
#LIKEME
BOEK 3



AGT
HOIT

ADVOCaat GRIET CAUJDE

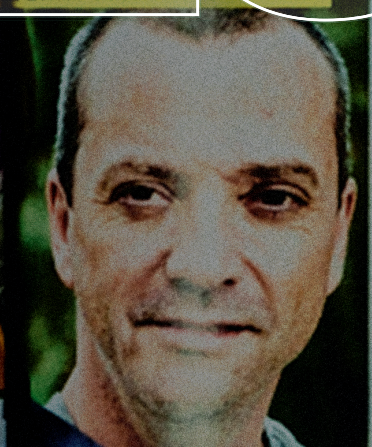
'CHRIS ZIT NU
VILLEDIG
OP 'N TANDVLEES'

RWACHT

R CULTUUR MET GROTE C:
ZORGT VOOR VERDEELDHEID

Sc
Moo

BR



MIGUEL WIELS

'MAAR WIJ
ZIJN ZELF
OOK IN FOUT'



ELPEN
E GRAAG!



S VOOR KANEN
VEL HAAT VOOR

Specia
de auto v

facts
& FIGURES

6% *Increase*
total reach magazines the Netherlands
(print + digital)

550,000

PAID COPIES

women's magazines

LARGEST WEEKLY IN BELGIUM: DAG ALLEMAAL

171,000

COPIES

709,000

PAID COPIES

*entertainment
magazines*

LARGEST WEEKLY IN THE NETHERLANDS: LIBELLE

270,000

COPIES

365,000

PAID COPIES

kids magazines

MAGAZINES

vtwonen **EXPERT** *for the home*

THE NUMBER ONE

Nicolette Fox (56),
EDITOR OF VTWONEN
SINCE 2018. SHE
PREVIOUSLY HELD
VARIOUS POSITIONS AT
LIBELLE.



If there's one thing that has become clear over the past year, it's the importance of our own personal living environment. The multimedia platform of vtwomen helps to inform and inspire people with.

With print, online, television, events, retail, an online community and a shopping portal, vtwomen is the leading multimedia home style platform of the Netherlands and Flanders. A real '360° brand' with a wide variety of activities.

"You have to answer consumers' questions and be present where they expect to find answers," says Nicolette Fox, editor of vtwomen. "We want to attract all people who are interested in home and lifestyle to our platform. It's a *one-stop shop*. There was already a strong focus on digital growth, but during the pandemic, we pulled out all the stops to meet the need for inspiration, information and shopping online."

HUGE FAN BASE

vtwomen reaches interior enthusiasts mainly through social media (Instagram and Facebook). People who are planning to renovate or move house are directed via SEO to the online evergreen content: timeless content that remains relevant even in the long term. And people who wish to buy something for their current home are guided by vtwomen directly to the shopping pages.

"You have to answer consumers' questions and be present where they expect to find answers."



It's no coincidence that the brand has a huge fan base on social media: more than 870,000 followers on Instagram and over 350,000 on Facebook, and vtwomen is number 1 on Pinterest. The technical capability to bring this large community together on vtwomen's own platform will be created this year. With user-generated content, a comment function and question-and-answer sections.

All the channels complement each other, says Nicolette Fox. "Last year, it was again impossible to put on the vtwomen&designbeurs trade show in the usual way. Alongside the physical event, we'll continue to offer digital elements that we've successfully developed as an alternative. And our TV show *Weer verliefd op je huis* (Falling back in love with your home) is a great help in engaging a new target group. This allows us to fulfil our role as experts perfectly."

In addition, vtwomen entered into a very exciting collaborative venture with Bol.com as the largest provider of products for the home. There was already collaboration with Fonq and it turned out that the partnerships coexisted very well. One element of the partnership with Bol.com was a quest for new styling talent. The accompanying TV format did not have the hoped-for result, but the collaboration will certainly be continued.

PLATFORM FOR ONLINE COURSES

The collaboration on content with news brands within DPG Media (with AD and the regional titles in the Netherlands, and with HLN in Belgium) reinforces vtwomen's role as the home decor expert, with the help of the video series *De Stijl van Eva* (Eva's Style) and sections such as *Vraag het vtwomen* (Ask vtwomen). This increases both reach and branding. The platform for online courses, vtwomen college, with paid-for content, also proved to have high potential. "We see many opportunities in this area."

The launch of vttv, the online video channel with short Do It Yourself clips and styling tips, was also in 2021. "Our video services are still at an early stage. We have room to grow, for example with smart makeovers and inspiring home tours."



VTWONEN *facts*

 **24%**

RISE in site use in 2021

46,000

subscribers to the magazine in 2021

PRINT: RISE OF 2%



RISE OF  **DIY**
545%

IN THE NUMBER OF SUBSCRIBERS TO THE SPECIALS GARDEN & DIY



Nina Mezza

“A WEEKEND WITH A SILVER LINING”

The weekend magazines at HLN (Nina) and AD, and the Dutch regional newspapers (Mezza) have become a regular ritual for one and a half million readers. In 2021, the magazines were well read and received high ratings. What's more, Mezza has been completely revamped. Editors-in-chief Isabelle Cheyns (Nina) and Sara van Gorp (Mezza) talk about the power their titles hold.

ISABELLE CHEYNS (48), EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF NINA SINCE 2020. PREVIOUSLY AN EDITORIAL COORDINATOR AT GOED GEVOEL AND NINA.BE.

“Nina’s strength is positivity.” There is plenty of gloom in the world already due to the pandemic and hard-hitting news. Which is why we present our stories in a positive way. On a weekly basis, we attract more than 500,000 readers, who rate our magazine with an average score of 7.2. We see our role as complementary to the main news, sports news and regional news in the regular newspapers. Our aim is to brighten up the weekend with a silver lining, by sharing appealing, fun stories and pages full of fashion and beauty tips.

In doing so, Nina is the ultimate source of relaxation and inspiration for readers. We try to fulfil this role with great awareness. Each week, in a small team



SATISFACTION RATINGS

7.2



from readers
of Nina

of experts, we think about the content of the cover, create mood boards and expand on the theme. In November, for instance, we produced an issue on natural-born optimists. Famous Belgians who, despite the burden of loss and illness, have a very positive attitude to life. This kind of a story was a particularly uplifting read in these gloomy days.

But that doesn't mean that we only provide good news. If there is an elephant in the room, we will not shy away from it. Yet we also handle these issues with utmost respect. And we've noticed that this approach has encouraged many Flemish celebs to appear in Nina. They are familiar with our pleasant collaborative style of working and are eager to share their stories with us.

In addition to the interview, which is something we devote generous amounts of time to, we also arrange a photo shoot and a video, taking care of the make-up and styling ourselves. Our guests appreciate this total experience and it also produces plenty of *eye candy* for the magazine: lovely visuals that lift your spirits. And of course, receiving positive feedback from readers ("Amazing! This issue of Nina was so dreamy!") is wonderful."

WEEKEND
MAGAZINE *facts*

SATISFACTION RATINGS

7.8



from
subscribers
of Mezza

1.5



million

WEEKLY READERS

of Mezza en Nina



Subscribers
spend an
average of

37

MINUTES

READING

MEZZA



SARA VAN GORP (48), EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF MEZZA SINCE 2020. PREVIOUSLY, A CREATIVE DIRECTOR AT SANOMA AND CHIEF EDITOR OF KEK MAMA.

“Mezza is the perfect magazine for a good weekend. There’s a good reason why that’s our slogan! Our aim is to brighten your mood. While a magazine is in tune with current events, it doesn’t need to address the hardcore obsessions of the day. Our goal is for people to pass on three things to someone else after reading Mezza, anything from a witty remark by a Dutch celebrity, to a great book recommendation or a refreshing insight.

That said, we don’t simply look at the world through rose-coloured glasses. Mezza also features controversial stories. Take, for instance, one of our recent productions, ‘Kind uit de Kast’ (My Kid’s Coming Out), showcasing beautiful pictures of an older lady with her tall daughter, a trans woman. We specialise in heartfelt stories too, such as the column by musician Jan Rot, who was told last year that he’s terminally ill. This is undeniably something worth shedding a tear over. We produce this magazine for nearly one million subscribers. That’s a huge number, of course, and a very diverse group. We therefore strive to achieve as much diversity as possible in the 48 pages we have available, always searching for the right balance. If we notice a preponderance of women in a particular issue, we will include more men. Lots of seniors? Let’s add a youngster.

In March 2021, we transitioned from eight different titles to a single name: Mezza, introducing new sections, reformatting design and tweaking our tone of voice. A recent subscriber survey showed that Mezza is a better read and more highly rated. The average rating increased from 7.5 in 2018 to 7.8 and the reading time from 33 to 37 minutes. People email us to say, ‘You guys make my weekend even more enjoyable’, which I consider a great compliment. Of course we also receive angry reactions every now and then but even those are appreciated: a magazine is meant to make an impression. We don’t have to stay on everybody’s good side.”



How LIBELLE and DONALD DUCK



*went
digital*

Libelle acquired a brand-new website and app in 2021, the year in which DPG Media also launched the Donald Duck app. Sanne Linssen supervises the digital transformations of magazine brands. "Giving the reader just that little bit extra."

Sanne Linssen (31),

MANAGER DIGITAL
TRANSFORMATION MAGAZINES
SINCE 2020. PRIOR AT SANOMA
NEDERLAND, INCLUDING VIVA.



Director of Magazines Joyce Nieuwenhuijs set the bar high in the previous annual report when she put the biggest challenge for 2021 into words. “We’re going to do something that no other magazine brand in the world has done before: create digital content in a form that is so unique and relevant that consumers will be happy to pay for it.” Sanne Linssen, Manager of Digital Transformation, Magazines, takes stock of the past year.

How far did you get in 2021? “We have really only just begun but, after a year of development from idea to product, we launched the brand-new Libelle website and app in July, containing the digital magazine. In doing so, we have embarked on a new course: an optimal mix of design, interactivity, content and inspiration. By the end of 2021, the app had already been downloaded more than 52,000 times. Barely two months later we also launched the Donald Duck app. It contains not only the latest edition of the weekly publication but also more than a thousand stories, jokes and extra strips. The app already has more than 80,000 downloads.”

How does Libelle distinguish itself from other digital magazines? “Most digital versions of magazines restrict themselves to a browsable PDF. It was time for a change; the digital version needed to offer the feeling of print plus all the possibilities of online. That makes it a dynamic digital magazine that is easy to navigate and has retained the look and feel of the print version. The digital editions that the editors publish week after week are also being supplemented daily with extra content, from articles to videos, so you genuinely get more for your money. And every day you have a good reason to go back to the app.”



How do you ensure that the content has sufficient urgency? “Primarily through the frequency with which new content appears online and in the app. It’s a mix of easily digestible content and long reads. Some of the popular columns from the magazine are followed up online, for which visitors log in every week. Such recurrent use can be further boosted by publishing a series or a complete book in parts, such as the erotic thriller of which subscribers have been able to read one chapter a week since the end of 2021. And by making smart use of our own channels, such as via our newsletter ‘Beter slapen met Libelle’ [‘Sleeping better with Libelle, eds.]. There were 5,000 registrations for it in no time. A loyal audience with a high click-through rate.”

Is Libelle managing to reach a new generation of women online? “Libelle already appeals to a very wide audience online. While with the print version the focus is on the 45+ age group, nearly half the audience for our online version are 20 to 49-year-olds. Our main aim is to strengthen the bond with the younger audience and get them to return more often to our platforms, thereby securing more loyal readers who will ultimately be prepared to pay for our unique content. That is also the aim for our 50+ target group, which since COVID-19 has become more digital than before.”

What is the strategy behind the Donald Duck app? “The media habits of our audience, including the very youngest, are changing rapidly. We continually have to respond to that. With the new app we offer subscribers added value in comparison with the print subscription, so we hope they will continue to subscribe even longer. In addition, with the *digital only* proposition we are attracting a new target group for whom the full subscription might be too expensive or might not match their needs. So we are making our entire subscriber base more sustainable.”

“We developed the app in close cooperation with a panel of 500 ‘DuckThinkers’, who tested the product enthusiastically and gave us feedback. In conjunction with them, we have developed a comic strip that provides a unique reading experience, so you can now



read Donald Duck online with the same enjoyment and ease as offline. The app enables us to give the reader that little bit extra. For instance, you can find strips of your favourite characters easily and save your favourite strips in your own collection.”

How will the app be developed further? “By maintaining a dialogue with the target group. We already know what features we need to add in order to make users even more fond of the app. The user is at the forefront. If users embrace the product, the results will follow. Features that are still on the agenda are interactive strips, recommended strips based on reading habits and *gamification*. This includes earning points that you can use to unlock strips.”

What is your role in this process? “Together with my team, which comprises the likes of project managers and content analysts, I supervise the digital transformation of our brands.

For that purpose we cooperate with marketing, IT, sales and of course the editorial teams. I’m involved in product development and the transition of the editorial teams to a new way of working. So, my role is, on the one hand, to support, and on the other hand, to motivate. I think it’s important that we challenge one another to maintain an outward focus with respect to digital innovation. Developments are continuing apace. We need to learn from what is already happening in the world and in particular from our users themselves.”

“The media habits of our audience, including the very youngest, are changing rapidly.”





IT & digital acceleration

As a technologically advanced company, DPG Media invests a great deal in IT and digital development. In 2021, we devoted attention both to digital acceleration at the front end – the part the visitor sees – and to cleaning up and structuring the complex IT environment behind the scenes.

IT ACCOMPLISHED THE FOLLOWING IN 2021:

- ✓ Digitisation of iconic magazines such as Libelle, Donald Duck and Margriet
- ✓ The launch of the DPG Network, including a *central DPG Media ID* enabling users to access multiple DPG Media titles and sites without repeated logins. And implementing a *one consent* function confirming permission to process personal data for all DPG Media sites instead of each individual site.
- ✓ A self-service platform for advertisers consisting of DPG Direct and DPG Datalab
- ✓ Expansion of the VTM GO platform including Smart TV

IT WILL CONTINUE TO WORK ON THE FOLLOWING INITIATIVES IN 2022:

- A radical overhaul of the platforms for AD, the regional newspapers and HLN
- Digitisation of Flair and creating a new digital community platform with vtwomen as the first title
- Integration of RTL Belgium
- Replacing the existing subscription systems with a new system for magazines and newspapers

162.5

MILLION

was spent
on IT projects in 2021

800

EMPLOYEES

working on
IT projects at DPG Media



TOP PROJECT

THE BUMPY ROAD TO A UNIFIED EDITORIAL SYSTEM

DPG Media's growth and acquisitions have led to the addition of numerous titles in recent years, all of which were operating with their own editorial systems. To iron out all these differences, IT faced a mammoth task to be completed by the end of 2021: switching all newsrooms to a new, customised editorial system.

Now, all of our journalists, editors-in-chief and designers in the Netherlands and Belgium are working in the same environment. Prior to this transition, there were dozens of different, outdated systems operating in a jumble of configurations, technologies and set-ups. "We needed to simplify," says Leslie Jacobs, IT Director of Business Applications.

The differences between programs made maintenance a complex business. "Despite system errors occurring on a daily basis, the next day's paper had to go to press no matter what. The IT niggles were a source of major frustration among the editors. I remember thinking: we simply can't go on like this," Jacobs recalls.

So, by the end of 2018, we settled on a solution. IT, business and editorial teams joined forces to achieve one goal: a uniform, future-proof and efficient system for a shared workflow. The entire chain from planning to delivery, both digital and print, was incorporated into a new environment for all DPG newspapers.

INTERACTION

It turned out to be a bumpy road that demanded a lot of time and effort. "Constant interaction was essential. This level of collaboration led to a successful end result," says Jacobs. Every day, two hundred colleagues worked on devising, developing and fine-tuning all the functionalities, which required continuous tweaking. Only once the



Leslie Jacobs (41),

IT DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS APPLICATIONS SINCE 2021. PREVIOUSLY EMPLOYED BY EDF LUMINUS.

developers had come up with a system which met the minimum requirements, did the first editorial teams start testing it, albeit with some teething troubles. Their feedback proved indispensable. Jacobs explains, "Without the input from the newspapers, especially the regional ones, we could never have achieved the final result."

Once the system was up to scratch, all computers had to be replaced and everyone had to be trained – in the middle of a global pandemic. Editors who had been working a specific way for years were suddenly required to re-wire their habits. Meanwhile, the deadline of 31 December 2021 was rapidly approaching. "But we made it. It was a huge operation. A marvellous feat, looking back on it now."

Although the system is operational, the environment is far from complete. "We have established a core system. The foundations have been laid and the house has been built. Now we can move on to fittings and furnishings. We still intend to add certain functionalities. So there's plenty of work to be done."

SUBSCRIPTIONS

In the meantime, DPG Media is tackling its outdated subscription systems. Perhaps the most complex chain of all, according to Jacobs. "These are processes that affect many areas of business and IT. In other words, they call for highly intensive cooperation. This includes subscription registration and updating, payment, distribution management, customer service, self-service and the processing of complaints."

Jacobs fills in the details: "This new environment determines which subscriber gets which newspaper or magazine, and when. The invoicing is also linked to the system. Given the volumes we are dealing with at DPG Media, the slightest error can have major consequences."



THE FUTURE

Generation Stronger

For years, DPG Media has been harnessing the power of its own brands to empower children and young people under the banner of **Generation Stronger**. Not only through our own charities, but also by offering financial support to external initiatives. For a strong next generation.



RED NOSE DAY

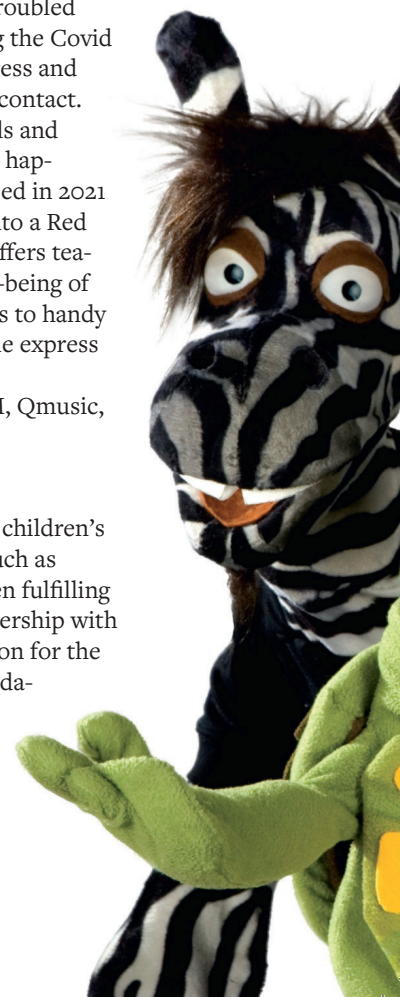
Every year on Red Nose Day, Flanders raises money through all kinds of activities for projects that empower young people physically, socially and mentally. Initiatives that are much needed in these troubled times. Many young people struggled during the Covid pandemic, experiencing higher levels of stress and anxiety, and missing out on a sense of real contact. These activities mainly take place in schools and teachers play a crucial role in making them happen. To offer them support, the money raised in 2021 (over 3 million euros) will be channelled into a Red Nose Academy. This training programme offers teachers all kinds of tools to improve the well-being of their students, from tailor-made workshops to handy teaching packs on how to help young people express their feelings.

Red Nose Day was initiated in 2015 by VTM, Qmusic, HLN and Belfius.

CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK

DPG Media believes it is essential to boost children's enjoyment of reading. Until now, brands such as Donald Duck, Zo Zit Dat and Tina have been fulfilling that role. In 2021, we also launched a partnership with the CPNB Foundation (Collective Promotion for the Dutch Book) in the Netherlands. This foundation has the same goal as we do.

DPG Media and CPNB are joining forces to encourage younger generations to read and to stimulate their enjoyment of



reading. An additional advantage is that children who read well and enjoy reading also develop better coping strategies in an information-rich world. This collaboration also encompasses Children's Book Week and the Children's Jury, in which children choose the best children's book of the year. DPG Media has a host of ideas to make the Children's Book Week even bigger, more fun and more inspiring in the years to come.



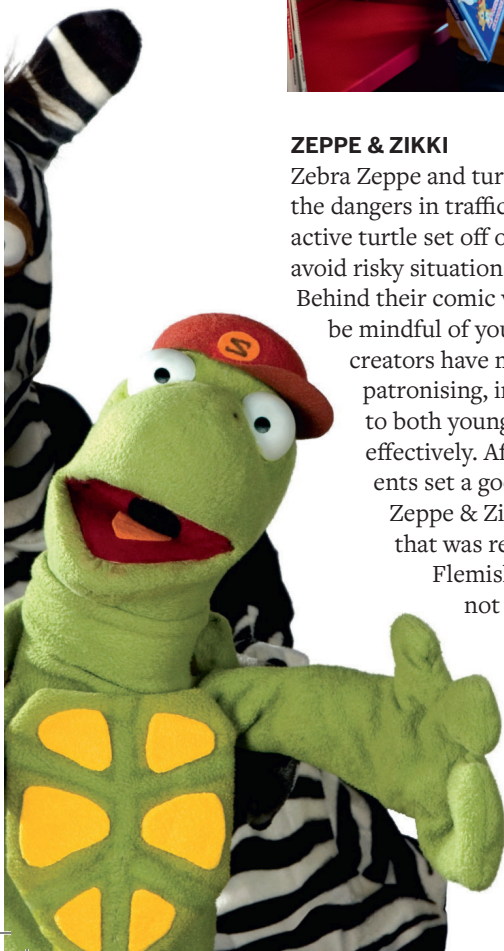
ZEPPE & ZIKKI

Zebra Zeppé and turtle Zikki make children aware of the dangers in traffic. The cautious zebra and hyperactive turtle set off on a journey together and try to avoid risky situations in an inventive way.

Behind their comic videos there is a serious message:

be mindful of yourself and others in traffic. The creators have made a conscious choice not to be patronising, in order to get the message across to both young children and their parents more effectively. After all, it is important that parents set a good example.

Zeppé & Zikki is an initiative by VTM that was realised in cooperation with the Flemish government. The puppets are not only regulars on TV, but also play a leading role in national road safety campaigns and teaching materials on road safety.



KINDERGELUK

Equal opportunities for all children and bringing about happiness: DPG Media lends a helping hand to children and young people from families where money is tight. We achieve this by providing support to the Belgian Royal Association Kindergeluk, a non-profit organisation. The aim is to help these children on the road to a better future, to improve their living conditions and simply give them a chance to enjoy themselves. Kindergeluk focuses on children from socially disadvantaged families, who often face poverty growing up, and children and young people with health issues or learning disabilities. The revenues are used for day centres and family counselling, among other things. DPG Media supports Kindergeluk both financially and structurally.

FINAN- CIAL *report*

“Proud of what our employees achieved in 2021”

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I have the pleasure of presenting the consolidated financial statements of DPG Media for the 2021 financial year. A year we can look back on with pride.

It was also a year in which we were not yet able to put the coronavirus pandemic behind us. A year in which our employees and all freelancers mostly had to work from home again. A year in which we nevertheless achieved strong revenue growth.

The journalistic pillar of our business is stronger than ever and helps to maintain dependable, independent journalism. Flemish and Dutch audiences have embraced our TV and radio channels, making us a convincing market leader. Our media titles are digitising at a rapid pace, with tremendous growth in the digital media reach and numbers of new digital subscribers. Our growth in the digital and TV advertising market has been remarkably successful. The business is on track, our investments are paying off and that is also reflected in the financial performance, with revenue growing by 7.5 percent to almost €1.9 billion in 2021.

The Board of Directors cannot emphasise enough our appreciation and admiration for the work of all our employees in Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark. We have every reason to be proud of what they achieved in 2021. It is especially in difficult circumstances that our characteristic optimism and entrepreneurship come to the fore. The Board has every confidence that 2022 will also be embraced with the same passion.

Ludwig Criel
Chairman of the Board of Directors





2021:

AN EXCEPTIONAL

year

**DPG Media posts impressive numbers
for 2021, writes CFO Piet Vroman (54).**

DPG Media generated revenue growth of 7.5 percent to just under €1.9 billion in 2021. In 2020 the activities of Sanoma Nederland were only included in the consolidation from 1 April. The first full-year consolidation caused consolidated revenue to grow by a further €70 million in 2021, largely due to reader revenue, which rose to €874 million in 2021. On an organic basis, this revenue grew by 2 percent, again due to growth in digital volumes combined with price increases.

Advertising revenue fell by 13 percent in 2020, mainly due to a sharp decline in the second quarter at the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis and the associated lockdowns. Almost all types of media recovered to pre-coronavirus levels in 2021.

After substantial growth in digital advertising revenue, the growth in the TV advertising market was remarkable. The group's total advertising revenue grew to €589 million, representing organic growth of 19 percent. Online services also showed excellent growth again in the past year. Mobile Vikings was deconsolidated from June following the sale to Proximus, causing a €30 million decrease in consolidated revenue.

Costs remained lower in 2021, mainly due to exceptionally low raw material prices, as well as the consequences of the coronavirus crisis. Personnel expenses nevertheless rose by 6 percent to half a billion euros.

EBITDA grew by 22 percent to €414 million, with 21.8 percent revenue growth and EBITA of €330 million. The Dutch activities – which grew by 28 percent – contributed two-thirds of this group operating profit. Belgian EBITA grew by 36 percent and made up 31 percent of the group figure, while the Danish operating profit remained constant.

The tax charge amounted to almost €90 million, representing an increase of 41 percent, after which the

net profit before goodwill amortisation and capital gains rose by 28 percent to €228 million. In addition to this recurring profit, capital gains of €117 million were also recorded, mainly due to the sale of Mobile Vikings. (*)

The operating free cash flow was also high this year at €268 million. This enabled the pace of debt reduction to be accelerated. Barely 20 months after the acquisition of Sanoma Nederland, the group's debt level was reduced by more than half a billion euros. At the end of 2021 the group's net financial debt amounted to €243 million, or 0.6 times the 2021 EBITDA.

OUTLOOK

For 2022 the group expects fairly stable revenue, whereas costs are set to rise substantially across the group as a whole. In just one year, paper prices have risen from the lowest to the highest level in many decades. Other costs, particularly wages, will also show the effect of accelerating inflation. After an absolute record year in 2021, this will almost inevitably lead to a decrease in profit and cash flow in 2022.

The group is nevertheless planning major investments again in 2022, so that we can continue working energetically on our digital transformation, across all platforms. More than €240 million has been earmarked for these projects over a three-year period. This is being partly financed by a long-term loan from the

European Investment Bank.

In the spring of 2022 the group also hopes to complete the acquisition of RTL Belgium that was announced in June 2021. This acquisition is being conducted on a 50-50 basis with Groupe Rossel and will require expenditure of more than €100 million by the group. Work began in 2021 on the construction of a new office building in Amsterdam which will house the bulk of our Dutch activities from mid-2024. These two investments will absorb a substantial part of the operating free cash flow in 2022.

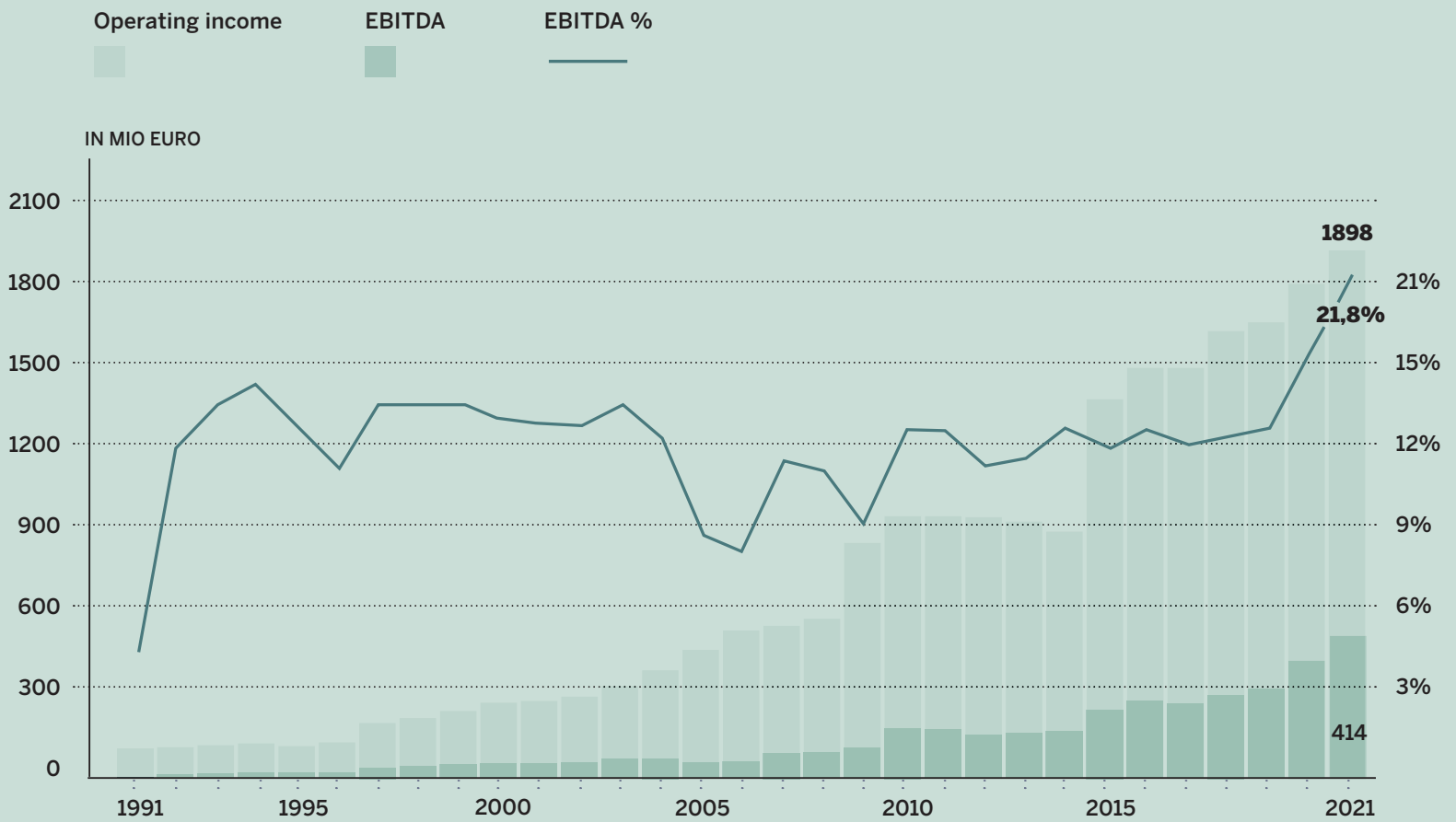
“In just one year, paper prices have risen from the lowest to the highest level in many decades”

(*) The group consolidates its accounts under Belgian GAAP, which means among other things that goodwill is amortised. The amortisation charge in 2021 was €124 million. Net group profit after amortisation of goodwill amounts to €221 million. Equity has risen to €447 million.

2021

OVERVIEW *figures*

DPG Media: 30 years of growth in revenue and returns



Income statement

DPG Media

IN EUR MILLIONS	2020	2021	21/20 %
OPERATING INCOME	1,766	1,898	7%
Revenue	1,736	1,864	
Other operating income	30	34	
Commodities, raw & auxiliary materials	-257	-246	
Services and miscellaneous goods	-690	-732	
Personnel expenses	-475	-502	
Other operating expenses	-5	-5	
EBITDA	339	414	22%
EBITDA/operating income	19.2%	21.8%	
Depreciation of fixed assets	-55	-52	
Impairment of current assets	0	-3	
Provisions for risks and charges	-30	-29	
OPERATING PROFIT (EBITA)	254	330	30%
Financial result	-12	-12	
Exceptional result	1	117	
PROFIT BEFORE TAX	242	435	79%
Tax	-61	-87	
PROFIT AFTER TAX	181	348	93%
Result from equity method	-1	1	
Minority interests	-2	-4	
NET GROUP PROFIT	178	345	93%
Amortisation of goodwill	-109	-124	
NET RESULT (Belgian GAAP)	69	221	

Income statement

subconsolidation per country

IN EUR MILLIONS	Belgium			Netherlands		
	2020	2021	21/20 %	2020	2021	21/20 %
OPERATING INCOME	673	764	14%	1,053	1,141	8%
Revenue	599	709		1,043	1,131	
Other operating income	74	56		10	11	
Commodities, raw & auxiliary materials	-180	-185		-76	-66	
Services and miscellaneous goods	-236	-294		-469	-498	
Personnel expenses	-130	-140		-303	-315	
Other operating expenses	-2	-3		-3	-2	
EBITDA	126	142	13%	202	261	29%
EBITDA/operating income	18.7%	18.5%		19.2%	22.9%	
Depreciation of fixed assets	-34	-32		-19	-18	
Impairment of current assets	0	-3		0	0	
Provisions for risks and charges	-16	-5		-12	-22	
OPERATING PROFIT (EBITA)	75	102	36%	172	221	28%
Financial result	-4	-3		-8	-8	
Exceptional result	1	113		0	3	
PROFIT BEFORE TAX	72	212	196%	164	216	32%
Tax	-22	-23		-39	-63	
PROFIT AFTER TAX	50	190	279%	125	153	23%
Result from equity method	0	0		0	0	
Minority interests	0	0		-2	-4	
NET GROUP PROFIT	50	190	280%	123	149	21%
Amortisation of goodwill	-18	-30		-87	-92	
NET RESULT (Belgian GAAP)	32	160		36	57	

Denmark

Eliminations

DPG Media Group

2020	2021	21/20 %	2020	2021	2020	2021	21/20 %
107	110	3%	-67	-118	1,766	1,898	7%
100	102		-6	-77	1,736	1,864	
7	8		-61	-41	30	34	
-7	-3		6	8	-257	-246	
-46	-50		61	110	-690	-732	
-43	-47		0	0	-475	-502	
0	0		0	0	-5	-5	
10	10	1%			339	414	22%
9.8%	9.5%				19.2%	21.8%	
-2	-2				-55	-52	
0	0				0	-3	
-2	-2				-30	-29	
7	7	4%			254	330	30%
0	0				-12	-12	
0	0				1	117	
7	7	1%			242	435	79%
-1	-1				-61	-87	
6	6	-6%			181	348	93%
-1	1				-1	1	
0	0				-2	-4	
5	6	18%			178	345	93%
-4	-2				-109	-124	
2	4				69	221	

Balance sheet

	IN EUR MILLIONS	31 Dec 20	31 Dec 21
Intangible fixed assets		40	34
Acquisition goodwill		969	826
Tangible fixed assets		176	167
Financial fixed assets		5	6
Accounts receivable due in more than one year		28	18
Inventories and orders in progress		115	101
Accounts receivable due in one year or less		332	293
Available		29	38
Accrued assets		38	32
TOTAL ASSETS		1,733	1,516
EQUITY		307	447
Minority interests		55	22
Provisions and deferred taxes		66	77
Long-term debt		547	203
Credit institutions		357	16
Leasing and similar obligations		39	37
Other liabilities		1	0
Non-subordinated debentures		150	150
Short-term debt		548	568
Leasing		3	3
Credit institutions		65	76
Other loans		1	0
Financial debts		7	0
Accounts payable		301	243
Tax and social security premiums payable		127	162
Debt resulting from the appropriation of profit		40	80
Other liabilities		5	5
Accrued liabilities		209	199
TOTAL LIABILITIES		1,733	1,516
KEY FIGURES			
Equity		307	447
Equity + minority interests		362	469
Solvency ratio		18%	29%
Solvency ratio (including minority interests)		21%	31%
Net financial debt		592	243
Net financial debt/EBITDA (covenant definition)		1.66	0.60

Cash flow statement

IN EUR MILLIONS	2020	2021
Operating profit	253.7	330.2
Depreciation and amortisation	54.6	51.9
Impairment	0.1	2.8
Provisions for risks and charges	30.1	28.7
EBITDA	338.5	413.6
Variation in working capital requirement	51.7	31.4
Financial results	-12.6	-12.4
Extraordinary charges	-28.4	-18.7
Cash taxes	-49.1	-86.2
Capex investments	-39.9	-59.5
Operating free cash flow	261.0	268.0
as % of EBITDA	77%	65%
Acquisitions/divestments	-468.3	153.4
New loans	356.7	1.0
Repayment of loans	-154.7	-339.4
Repurchases/dividends in respect of preference shares	-1.1	-34.2
Dividends paid	0.0	-40.0
Net cash flow	-7.2	8.9
Cash investments	0.0	3.2
Cash and cash equivalents	29.5	35.1
Cash position at end of period	29.5	38.3

CORPORATE
Governance
BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

Group



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Chair of the Remuneration
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*Managing
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Denmark



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Christian Van Thillo
Director



Piet Vroman
Director



Christophe Convent
Director



Ivar Carstensen
Director and Employee representative



Katrine Gundel Harmens
Director and Employee representative



Sanne Fahnøe
Director and Employee representative

Executive Committee

Executive Committee constitutes the operational management



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Executive Chairman



Erik Roddenhof
CEO
(& CEO The Netherlands)



Piet Vroman
CFO



Kris Vervaeet
CDO
(& CEO Belgium)



Bert Willemsen
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