

BERT HABETS

The go-getter

The first thing to know about Bert Habets is that he fully embraces the spirit of RTL Group's new mission statement. It says: "We are innovators who shape the media world across broadcast, content and digital. We build inspiring environments where creative and pioneering spirits can thrive."

"It's ambitious, yes, but, given our rich and highly successful history, we think it's right. Actually, we constantly have to reinvent ourselves as a company that invests, takes risks and shakes things up," he explains his plans for the company – that don't involve standing still.

"You know the expression, 'Let's cross that bridge when we come to it.' But to apply this attitude to the way we react to the changes in our industry would be a fatal error. In order to remain a global leader we have to build a new bridge. Viewers don't make the distinction between linear and non-linear – they just want to watch the latest episode of their favourite TV show. Thus, we have stopped seeing non-linear as an add-on to our established channels."

Where does Habets get his can-do attitude? Born in 1971 in Hoensbroek in the Dutch province of Limburg, he inherited his father's entrepreneurial spirit and competitive drive at an early age. A keen swimmer, 18-year-old Habets competed at both regional and national level.

"My family owned an international fruit and vegetable export company in the south of Holland. As a boy I measured the success of the day by the number of trucks coming in and out. Of course, entrepreneurship is more than numbers. It's about exploring new horizons, taking risks, inspiring and empowering others, learning from mistakes and focusing on the future."

Habets joined RTL Group in 1999 from NIB Capital. As a young banker, the fast-paced media world – with its balance of creativity and business rationale – had always sparked his interest. He began his RTL career at CLT-UFA, returning to his native Netherlands in 2001 to take up a position as CFO of the Holland Media Group, which rebranded as RTL Nederland in 2004.

Habets' leadership skills were quickly recognised. In February 2008, aged just 37, he became CEO of RTL Nederland, where his pioneering, innovative attitude enabled him to transform the company from a traditional broadcaster into one that entertains its audience across all digital platforms.

Habets established a clear strategy for RTL Nederland, which involved strengthening the core business, while diversifying and innovating. The company's digital businesses grew significantly under his leadership, with the acquisition and expansion of the on-demand service Videoland, the launch of RTL MCN and the joint venture with SpotX for the Benelux and Nordic regions.

In April 2017 Bert Habets was appointed Co-CEO of RTL Group to lead the Group alongside Guillaume de Posch, who had been RTL Group Co-CEO since 2012. Announcing his appointment as Co-CEO, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of RTL Group, Thomas Rabe, called Bert Habets a "strong leader and digitally savvy media entrepreneur who embodies RTL Group's Total Video strategy."

Habets' goals for the future of RTL Group focus on two Cs and two Ts: Creativity, Consumer, Technology and Talent. As the man who, at the RTL Group Management Congress 2014, famously said: "Let's once again be the company that shakes things up," how does he summarise these?

"Creativity is the starting point of everything we do. More than ever before, creating the best content is the power engine for everything we do. It is our USP – and this why we will further increase our investments in local, exclusive content, across all major genres: scripted, entertainment, factual and news/information.

"Consumers no longer care where they watch our content – linear, non-linear, online or offline. We have to stop making the distinction, and focus instead on maximising the consumers' attention to our broad variety of video offers, across all devices – this is what we mean by Total Video. As a consequence, we will expand our on-demand services in the countries where we have strong families of linear TV channels. In these markets, we will adopt, step by step, the so-called Hybrid model – combining a free, advertising financed service with a premium pay product.

"Technology is a must-have in our industry. Growing and diversifying as a business is only possible with state-of-the-art technology in targeted advertising, data collection, content aggregation and recommendation. For example, we are working on an ambitious growth plan for our ad-tech businesses. This plan includes the combination of SpotX and Smartclip into one integrated company, rolling out their solutions across our operations and scaling up the businesses with further acquisitions and partnerships.

"Talent is vital to our success, and competition for the best is tougher than ever. To inspire and retain the best people, we need to empower them with the freedom to experiment. Not being afraid of failures, but learning from them and getting back on the horse for the next hurdle. We are as good as our next success. To this day, I aim to inspire this mindset in others."

Habets admits he likes nothing more than developing a company, seeing results and exploring new possibilities: "Working in media, an industry in a constant state of flux, has taught me that vision and being agile is more important than extensive and detailed business plans. Strategy is great; getting things done is even better." His keen curiosity and enthusiasm for new things is even reflected in his motto: "For every great idea, we will find the budget."

In December 2017, Guillaume de Posch decided to step down as Co-CEO of RTL Group. As of 1 January 2018, Bert Habets leads the Group as sole CEO, with overall responsibility for the strategy and day-to-day management of the Group.

At the announcement Bert Habets says: "I would like to express a personal thank you to Guillaume for our excellent collaboration in co-leading RTL Group over the past few months – this made my transition from RTL Nederland to RTL Group so much easier and is hugely appreciated! I am glad Guillaume will remain 'on Board' so we will continue to benefit from his expertise, experience... and humour. I wish him all the best in his new and, I'm sure, knowing Guillaume, very exciting projects ahead. A special thank you also to Elmar. I am very confident that together we will achieve the ambition expressed at our recent OMC off site – which is to take the Group to the next level by accelerating our Total Video strategy."

People who have worked with Bert Habets over several years describe him as a great listener and acknowledge that he is an entrepreneur at heart who welcomes new, innovative ideas and respects people's expertise. They say this makes him both a pleasant and inspiring boss.

So well-known is Habets' entrepreneurial spirit, it's not just acknowledged by his colleagues and peers – it's also been recognised by distinguished awards. In early 2014, he was voted 'Most influential broadcast personality of the year 2013' in the Netherlands, while he secured the Bertelsmann Award for Outstanding Entrepreneurial Achievements in 2010, 2011 and 2013.

Habets' role as CEO doesn't leave him much free time, but he enjoys spending the spare time he has with his family, or engaging in his favourite pastimes – running, mountaineering, sailing and surfing. Seems the risk-taking spirit extends beyond the boardroom.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Born 9 January 1971 in the Netherlands
Degree Master's in Economics and (Fiscal) Law
University of Maastricht

Career stations:

Since January 2018	CEO of RTL Group
From April to December 2017	Co-Chief Executive Officer, RTL Group
February 2008 to June 2017	CEO of RTL Nederland
March 2001 to February 2008	CFO of RTL Nederland
March 2000 to February 2001	VP Controlling, RTL Group
December 1999 to March 2000	Project Manager Business Development TV, RTL Group
December 1995 to November 1999	VP Media and Entertainment Finance, NIB Capital

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