HOPE OF DELIVERANCE

Sahel 84: the solidarity caravan launched by RTL Radio (France) 30 years ago

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Remembering Count Jean-Pierre de Launoit

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QUICK VIEW

Looking back over an aid mission without precedent
RTL Group
p.4–8

Remembering Count Jean-Pierre de Launoit
RTL Group
p.9–10

Ben Stiller and ‘RTL – Wir helfen Kindern’ support children in Haiti
RTL Television
p.11–12

Changing the perception of disability
Groupe M6, Pôle Radio RTL
p.13–14

The ‘RTL Check’: When Ruquier meets Calvi in a new advertising spot
RTL Radio (France)
p.15

Big Picture
p.16

SHORT NEWS
p.17
30 years ago, the Trucks of Hope were achieving their goal after almost 5,000 km through the drought-stricken Sahel region in Africa. *Backstage* looks back over an aid mission without precedent.

**“WE UNDERSTOOD THAT WE HAD TO ACT”**

Luxembourg – 20 November 2014
RTL Group

On 31 October 1984, trucks on the road to Chinguetti
In the beginning was the word

On 20 January 1984, in the face of the human tragedy being played out as a result of the drought that had been plaguing the Sahel for several years, Cardinal Lustiger (Archbishop of Paris) made the initially absurd sounding suggestion, on TF1’s programme 7/7, to change the rules of the Paris-Dakar race for the following year and create a competition between all-terrain trucks loaded with food, medicines, tools and even seeds, that would come to the aid of the local population. The day after, the management of RTL Radio in France took this idea and ran with it. They decided to take on the challenge, reasoning that this wish for a solidarity caravan could become a reality if the public, RTL Radio listeners, were made aware and called upon to act. At the time, RTL Radio was the preferred station of lorry drivers, thanks to its presenter Max Meynier and his programme Les Routiers sont sympa. Furthermore, the radio was in charge of organising the ‘24 Heures du Mans Camions’ (Le Mans 24 Hours Truck Race) and was in almost permanent contact with the manufacturers, drivers and professionals of the Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) world. Michel Leblanc, RTL’s Editor-in-Chief at the time, was immediately given the task of getting this ambitious project up and running, with the aim of helping the African populations most affected and preserving the spirit of human adventure, whilst at the same time trying to motivate both the public and lorry manufacturers.

In response to the question of why take on such a crazy gamble, Michel Leblanc said: “It’s enough just to move, stir up the dust and peoples’ habits, shake up the critics, ignore the pessimists. One effort is enough to provide for one child, one single person. It is enough just to act. That’s why we went.”

...and then the preparation

Before they could go, they had to get organised, find partners and prepare, in spite of the urgency. Several reconnaissance trips to Africa, namely to Mauritania, Mali, the Republic of Niger and Senegal, in addition to numerous reports, were carried out before the convoy’s departure, making it possible to work out priorities and organise logistics. The RTL Radio team received support from UNICEF, the French Red-Cross, SOS Sahel and other NGOs. Very quickly, it was decided that this emergency mission should not be limited to an isolated event, but be supplemented on the ground by action for development. They also wanted to take full advantage of radio, television and the written press to make all of Europe aware of this tragedy. It was for this reason that right from the start, RTL Radio encouraged its colleagues to join forces with Operation Sahel 84 as a whole: This included TV stations RTL Télévision and FR3 (currently France 3), radio station RFI and a dozen regional daily newspapers. The major European HGV manufacturers were also insisting that this operation be carried out without brand rivalry, technical competition or escalation of resources. The French Army also rushed to the operation’s assistance, in addition to several regional and departmental councils as well as the mayors of France’s major cities who agreed to sponsor the lorries’ haulage.

Operation launch and big departure

Funding for the operation still had to be guaranteed. To do this, a vast fundraising operation was rolled out across France; an operation which began with the marathon of solidarity, launched on
21 September 1984, on RTL Radio and FR3 by way of a special live programme hosted by Max Meynier and TV presenter Guy Lux. Various celebrities came to pledge their support over the course of the evening, including: Yves Montand, Johnny Hallyday, Georges Moustaki, Michel Sardou and Sylvie Vartan. An appeal was launched, aimed at persuading lorry drivers to volunteer and collect donations over the weekend. They hoped to recruit 1,000, but received over 1,800 volunteers! Together with another 50,000 Red-Cross volunteers, they collected almost 55 million Francs (around 8 million Euros), more than five times the amount of 10 million Francs they had hoped to gather. From rue Bayard in Paris, RTL Radio announced the amounts raised every hour over the airwaves, relaying this huge wave of generosity, while RTL Télévision and FR3 broadcast images of the fund raising.

After a preliminary leg intended to get the less experienced drivers used to the sand, the lorries departed on Monday 29 October. Upon completion of this first stage, Max Meynier delivered his first impressions live on air. This was the first radio broadcast by satellite from the bivouac in the middle of the desert. The second leg took the convoy 254 km to Choum, while the following day several lorries delivered supplies to Chinguetti, the seventh holy city of Islam, submerged in the sand. On 1 November, the Trucks of Hope made a stop in the Mauritanian capital where the volunteers were afforded a reception in the presence of the French Ambassador. By the end of the day, after a drop-off at Boghé, these exhausted men and women had travelled 634 km. Despite the fact that each leg had been meticulously studied and prepared for, with distribution points established, the convoy was blocked at Aioun el Atrouss by villagers demanding medicines and protein tablets. The solidarity caravan continued on towards Mali, crossing the desert on a challenging path. After travelling 279 km over soft sand tracks, they reached Timbuktu on 4 November for a 24 hour “rest-stop” during which the focus was mostly on the equipment and the vehicles which had visibly suffered. On 7 November they crossed the border between Mali and the Republic of Niger. Following delivery of two trunks of medicine in Menaka, the leg continued, but was marred by an accident involving a lorry. Several people with minor injuries were taken to Niamey hospital by a Cessna plane which managed to land on an improvised air strip. By the next day, 8 November, everyone was once again back on their feet for the final leg which...
would take the convoy to Agadez. This town in the
Republic of Niger marked the end of what was a
5,000 km journey for 160 volunteers.

Wager won! Enduring mission

It had been decided to deliver all of the supplies,
to where they were needed, over ten legs with 18
unloading points, in 11 days. Wager won! It had also
been decided that the operation would be covered
in the media to make as many people aware of it.
Every evening, live on RTL Radio from the centre
of the bivouac, Max Meynier broadcasted his show
Fréquence Max by satellite. And every day, two
RTL Télévision crews offered reports which were
broadcast by satellite from the major African capitals.
This was in addition to reporting carried out by the
FR3 teams and articles by journalists in the written
press. In this way also, the wager was won.

In his richly illustrated book on this epic, published
the following year, Michel Leblanc wrote: “We never
said that we were capable of solving all of the Sahel’s
problems. We never thought we were specialists in
humanitarian work. (...) We did what we could by
respecting the commitment we made to thousands
of donors. Some bystanders didn’t understand that.
As for us, we understood that we had to act. Is that
not more effective? The tears of children will never
be able to irrigate the desert. Is that a reason to
leave them crying alone?”

Max Meynier added: “On our return, fault finders
criticised us for having delivered several boxes that
were battered, or, worse, that were ripped open, for
having aimed too small – or too large – for having
gone too fast. (...) In general, for having often acted
without thinking (it is so easy to think without acting!).

All in all, to not have managed in one evening and
fifteen days to solve the problem of the Sahel...In
face of all these sensitive issues, on behalf of all
the participants from our slightly mad but incredibly
exhilarating enterprise, I apologise. We could have
done better. But what we did, had to be done. It
wasn’t nothing.”

For Jacques Rigaud, President of RTL Radio at the
time: “It’s not about taking the place of governments
and organisations, but it is entirely possible to raise
public awareness, to encourage acts of solidarity, to
make even a modest contribution to the efforts made
by these African countries for their survival. (...) We
were well aware that this effort alone would not be
enough to solve this issue of survival – but would at
least contribute to doing so and awaken public and
private consciences a little more”.

After this unprecedented operation, almost 15 million
Francs (2 million Euros) that were still available from
the fundraising were invested in development in
those regions of the Sahel affected by the drought.
In 1985, some of those who had been involved
from the very beginning decided to continue what
had been started by setting up “Les Camions de
l’Espoir” (“The Hope Trucks”), a charity which has
just returned from its 39th Sahelian humanitarian
convoy. Thirty years later, the mad gamble still
continues to bear fruit.
It is with deep sadness that RTL Group learned of the death of Count Jean-Pierre de Launoit, who participated in the development of our company for 27 years, notably in the role of Vice Chairman of the Board of Management and Chairman of the Board of Directors.

Luxembourg – 14 November 2014

Born on 5 January 1935, Jean-Pierre de Launoit, son of Paul de Launoit, owner of the Banque de Bruxelles, was one of the shareholders of the Compagnie Luxembourgeoise de Télédiffusion (CLT). Jean-Pierre de Launoit joined the CLT in 1970 in the role of Vice Chairman of the Management Board, a position he would hold until 1997. In 1971 he also took on the post of Vice President of the Board of Directors of CLT before being appointed President a few years later. He would retain the presidency there until January 1997.

1972 sees the creation of the Compagnie Bruxelles-Lambert which, after the consolidation of the CLT shares, held 34.73 per cent of the latter. These shares then formed the basis of a holding company, established in April 1973: Audiofina. Count de Launoit, President of Audiofina, increased that share to 38.3 per cent, holding a blocking minority within the Board of Management of CLT. The following year the Belgian group
joined with the French Havas, a historic CLT shareholder. Following this transaction, Audiofina held 54.63 per cent of CLT’s capital and became its driving force. For de Launoit, what mattered most during the consolidation was the convergence of concerns for prosperity.

His contributions to the strengthening and growth of the Group were unparalleled. The creation of a German-language channel in 1984 was then followed in 1987 by the launch of M6 in France and of RTL-TVI in his native Belgium, a European expansion of televisional activities that continued in the Netherlands in 1989. Jean-Pierre de Launoit therefore actively accompanied the Group on its path to consolidation and diversification and continued to do this until his final years, the year that the entity CLT-UFA was created.

As the historic Chairman of the Board of Management of RTL Belgium, Jean-Pierre de Launoit remained President of Télévie until his final years. As one of its founding fathers, the Télévie was very dear to his heart.

During an interview held in 2013, as part of the Group’s documentary about the history of RTL Group, Count de Launoit, valued for his elegance and kindness, shared his view on the Group’s organisation: “It is a peaceful view, a happy one because of the sympathy, the admiration I have for all the team that works there and I think that its success is absolutely justified and legitimate, and I also believe that it will continue and grow in the years to come.”

RTL Group would like to pay tribute to Count de Launoit and to thank him for his 27 years of tireless work for the benefit of the company.
Hollywood star Ben Stiller was a live guest at the RTL-Spendenmarathon telethon on 20 November 2014. The actor plans to use the donations raised to build a primary school for children with disabilities in Dalmas, one of the poorest neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince in Haiti.

Germany – 18 November 2014

In early November, Stiller travelled to Haiti with RTL Charity Director Wolfram Kons and an RTL camera crew to draw German viewers’ attention to the dismal living conditions in the island state. On 12 January 2010, one of the worst earthquakes in the history of the...
American continent exacerbated the already difficult situation of Haiti’s children. The natural disaster destroyed more than half of all primary and secondary schools, as well as three universities. Only half of all children in Haiti have the opportunity to attend primary school, and only one in three youngsters aged 15 to 24 can read or write.

Ben Stiller on his project: “I want to ensure that no child in Haiti has to grow up like this any more. For the children here, education is the key to getting out of poverty. That is their only chance at building their own future. I would already like to say a big thank-you to all the people in Germany who help us with this project. Apart from drinking beer from insanely huge mugs and playing great football, helping children in need is an integral part of German culture.”*

After his first visit to Haiti in 2009, Stiller got involved in building schools in the Caribbean country through his ‘The Stiller Foundation’ and ‘Artists for Haiti’ organisations. This effort resulted in the construction of twelve schools in Haiti so far, in addition to several hospitals. The donations collected in the RTL-Spendenmarathon telethon 2014 will go to building another elementary school, where 450 socially disadvantaged children with disabilities are to be taught and nurtured as soon as possible. In addition, the training of 120 teachers will be financed.

Ben Stiller was at the RTL studio with Wolfram Kons to present his project when the RTL-Spendenmarathon kicked off on Thursday 20 November 2014 at 18:00.

* Inhouse translation from the German press release of RTL Television.
From 17 to 23 November 2014, Groupe M6 and Pôle Radio RTL (France) have been reaffirming their support towards disability by participating in the 18th Disabled Persons Employment Week. In addition to special programming, the two affiliates are taking action to sweep aside common misconceptions and promote difference on air and behind the scenes among employees.

France – 17 November 2014

Groupe M6 and Pôle Radio RTL – as part of their diversity policy – are aware of their responsibility as educators on this subject and are running a new campaign to improve on the integration of people with disabilities and help them develop their careers.

Improving public awareness of disability

All week (from Monday 17 November to Friday 21 November at 13:40 on M6 and at 20:40 on W9), TV channels M6 and W9 have been broadcasting ‘pastilles’ (short programmes) called Différents comme tout le monde (Different as any one of us).

In addition, W9 has been broadcasting recorded messages from the channels’ presenters in sign language. Sidonie Bonne, Karima Charni, Jérôme Anthony, Marie-Ange Casalta and Jérôme Fouqueray, the channel’s Managing Director, are notable contributors to this message.
RTL Radio dedicated its 62nd Employment Day, Monday 17 November, to the employment of disabled persons:

- Starting at 4:30, morning programmes RTL Petit-matin and RTL Matin broadcast reports about disabled workers who are experimenting with original employment solutions

- At 12:30, solutions promoting the employment of disabled persons where discussed on RTL Midi with special guest Ryadh Saïlem, entrepreneur, consultant, community activist and high performance athlete (swimming, French national wheelchair basketball team) who answered listeners’ questions

- On Thursday 20 November at 15:00, Grégory Cuilleron, who has no left arm and who won the first series of Top Chef, as well as Tanguy de la Forêt, sport shooting world champion and disabled worker, were special guests on On est fait pour s’entendre

Promoting access to employment for disabled persons and raising awareness among employees

Thanks to the ‘Un jour, un métier en action’ operation, Groupe M6 – alongside Deloitte and Prisma Media – has teamed up with the temporary employment agency Adecco to allow disabled job seekers, recruited and assisted by Adecco, to spend a day with partner companies. Each participant has been offered a role that fits with their professional aspirations and has been accompanied throughout the day by an employee who has showed them the ropes.

Additionally, a poster campaign and an awareness film have been released internally.

ABOUT DISABLED PERSONS EMPLOYMENT WEEK

The Week is made up of different national and regional events organised by Agefiph, Fiphfp and Adapt to address a social challenge which, in France, affects over 2.5 million people: access to and maintenance of employment of disabled persons in both the public and private sectors.

It is an opportunity to forge links between companies, recruitment agencies and disabled persons.
RTL Radio, in France, has unveiled a new advertising spot aiming to represent the notable overhaul of its programmes and promote the dynamism of its brand: 30 seconds with Laurent Ruquier and Yves Calvi, two of rue Bayard’s new emblematic voices.

France – 19 November 2014

Last September, in the spirit of the slogan “RTL Bouge” (RTL on the move), and with several subsequent adjustments to programming, the leading generalist radio station in France aimed to begin a new chapter in its history: the arrival of Yves Calvi as maestro in the mornings and the transfer of Laurent Ruquier from Europe 1 to RTL to take over from Philippe Bouvard at the helm of the cult radio programme Les Grosses Têtes.

In five years, RTL Radio has renewed close to 90 per cent of its broadcasting schedule with the arrival of presenters such as Stéphane Bern, Marie Drucker, Marc-Olivier Fogiel, Flavie Flament and Jacques Pradel – a daring gamble for a media that traditionally plays it safe.

To translate this dynamism and will to change, advertising agency BETC conceived this spot, drawing inspiration from the studio corridors at rue Bayard “because when Laurent Ruquier meets Yves Calvi between two programmes, anything could happen!” The result is a quirky film full of humour, produced with the assistance of both presenters.

The short film is shown in cinemas and online from 19 November 2014.
According to the latest audience figures published by Médiamétrie on 19 November for September-October 2014, RTL Radio remains France’s number one radio station across all audience criteria. With an audience share of 11.6 per cent, 2.4 points ahead of the number two (France Inter), the general-interest radio station is once again the only one to exceed the 10 per cent mark on this criterion. In addition, since the return from the summer break RTL Radio has attracted more than six million listeners (cumulative audience).
A frightening question, but one that concerns us all

M6

In keeping with its concept, in the episode on 16 November 2014, Zone Interdite reported about the right to die. The programme contained exclusive, poignant and at times disturbing testimonies.

France – 14 November 2014

Orange and Scènes de Ménages team up

M6 Publicité

On the occasion of the launch of its Christmas campaign, Orange is partnering up with cult M6 series, Scènes de Ménages. From 16 November 2014, viewers of the channel can discover the two emblematic characters from the series in an exclusive advertising campaign.

France – 18 November 2014

Suspects returns

FremantleMedia UK

Fremantle Media’s critically acclaimed original crime drama Suspects has been recommissioned by Channel 5 for a third season, starting January 2015.

United Kingdom – 18 November 2014

New round of matchmaking

FremantleMedia UK

In early 2015, FremantleMedia UK’s dating show Take me out and its hit spin-off show Take me Out: The Gossip will return on ITV and ITV2 respectively.

United Kingdom – 20 November 2014

BroadbandTV takes a bite out of the Big Apple

BroadbandTV

BroadbandTV (BBTV) is expanding its operations into the US with the opening of a New York City office. Located in Manhattan’s Midtown, the new office is BBTV’s first in the United States and will initially support the company’s US Ad Sales team.

Canada – 20 November 2014
**BACKSTAGE IS AVAILABLE IN THREE LANGUAGES**

You can read *Backstage* in your preferred language – in English, German or French.

**DAILY NEWS FROM ACROSS THE GROUP – DIRECTLY IN YOUR INBOX**

In addition to the weekly newsletter we offer to registered users a daily newsletter available in three languages.

**‘AT RTL GROUP, WE CARE’**

RTL Group is committed to effectively combine business success with socially responsible actions towards local communities and to protect the environment. Visit the Corporate Responsibility news section on *Backstage* (CR news) and find out how RTL Group aims to improve the societies in which we operate.

backstage.rtlgroup.com   backstage.rtlgroup.fr   backstage.rtlgroup.de

For more information, don’t hesitate to contact the editorial team: Backstage@rtlgroup.com