NEWS – THE BELGIAN WAY

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Anke Schäferkordt

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Screenshot with Hakima Dahrmouch presenting the news in the new TV studio of RTL Info

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RTL Belgium has revamped its news programme offering. *Backstage* travelled to Brussels to interview RTL Belgium Head of News and Sport Laurent Haulotte and find out what had prompted these carefully crafted changes.

“WE BROADCAST A VIEW OF THE WORLD AS BELGIANS SEE IT.”

Belgium – 5 February 2015
RTL Belgium
8 December 2014. Brussels – At 18:59 in RTL House the RTL-TVI news room is primed to air its main TV news broadcast. The executive producer gives the signal and the most watched bulletin in the French-speaking Belgium begins. However, this is not just an evening routine like any other day: it is the first evening of a new-look RTL Info, revamped to match the new viewing habits of its Belgian audience. The RTL Info relaunch attracted 49.9 per cent of viewers in its target group, shoppers aged 18 to 54.

“How people choose to keep abreast of current affairs has substantially changed over the last few years,” explains Laurent Haulotte. “Nowadays news is consumed virtually in real time, using a wide range of different appliances: radios, smartphones, computers, TV sets and so on, and this has impacted the extent of what people already know and what they expect to learn from watching television. We have found that TV remains people’s standard news source, but we also know that we face fierce competition from rival information providers,” he says.

Information is one of RTL Belgium’s main strategic pillars. As Stéphane Rosenblatt, General Manager of Television at RTL Belgium, says in a recent interview published in Le Soir: “RTL Belgium was built on its presence in the Belgian news sector.” The changes were made with a view to modernising the presentation of information and also consolidating the TV channel’s lead in the ratings. Haulotte goes on: “We have to keep changing how we package our information to retain people’s interest and facilitate their interpretation of the news we broadcast. So we have to think about our positioning as well as considering visual and technical aspects, whereby our main aims are to remain the public’s default choice, to keep pace with the times and perpetuate our close relations with viewers. These are our prime objectives.”

The most visible changes concern the decor, computer graphics, broadcast design and the capacity to host more studio guests and debates. In the new studio, graphics can be used to accommodate more elements, juxtaposing them more fluently and dynamically than before. This is very important, as Haulotte is keen to point out: “We bear in mind that there are four main French-speaking political parties in Belgium. So the new studio has six seats, enabling us to stage debates.”
“On the artistic side, we teamed up with a creative French agency which came up with a pleasing concept based on the idea of a wave: a wave of information being propagated, and this is apparent in our graphics, where you can watch this wave very subtly forming and spreading out to reach different audiences,” Haulotte tells us.

The studio itself is equipped with a 14-metre-wide, 2-metre-high screen, which offers plenty of possibilities. Haulotte explains: “We can use all or just part of the screen to display an image or photo, or the screen can be used to present information. So a journalist in the studio might say that the price of oil looks like going up and tell the audience, turning to the screen, that this is why. This is a new narrative element we have introduced. We call it an ‘expert corner’. One important decision we made here was that everything that had an aesthetic impact should also serve a purpose, not just look pretty. In this respect, we drew some inspiration from another of the Group’s channels, Antena 3.”

In addition to its aesthetic innovations, the channel has invested in technological solutions that allow it to bring greater fluidity to on-air broadcasts and enable improvements to its production procedures and editorial process. These changes mean that the channel can marshal all its resources and full know-how to combine proximity to its viewers with clarity of presentation to create a newscast that is accessible and of top quality. As Haulotte puts it: “One change that is far less obvious to viewers, but undoubtedly posed our biggest challenge, was the need to alter our workflow management. As soon as we had understood this and drawn up our concept, we set down our technical specifications and submitted them to our technical department. We invested in Mosart, an automated broadcasting tool that enabled us not only to meet the technical specifications, but also to move some former production management staff into the editorial team to get them thinking about the content of our broadcasts. After all, our ultimate aim has always been to optimise our viewers’ understanding of what we inform them about.”

On the subject of the French-speaking Belgian media landscape, Haulotte has this to say: “Belgium has no continuous 24-hour news channel, but as we saw with the recent spate of terrorist acts, whenever a major event takes place the public expects us to become a continuous news channel. For instance on Thursday 15 January 2015 we were on air for two hours in the evening, and the following day we broadcast virtually non-stop news for 12 hours, from 08:00 until 20:00. So normally we produce two broadcasts a day, but in exceptional circumstances we have to transform ourselves into a full-blown news channel. Mosart enables us to piece together different news programmes, broadcasts that can range from being highly complex to very straightforward. So we can go on air very, very swiftly, all thanks to this automated broadcasting system.”
Regarding the topics covered by the news, Haulotte stresses that: “RTL Belgium owes its success in the news domain to the fact that it covers absolutely everything. The way we see it, there is no real distinction between major and minor news, and if we believe that something is in the interests of the majority of people, then we feel obliged to cover it. Admittedly, the lion’s share of what we do necessarily concerns Belgium or Belgium’s world view. We are a small country, but we offer a take on what is going on around the world. This is extremely important to us. We have connected with our public in Belgium. As TV broadcasters we must, at all costs, connect with people in a way that reinforces our credibility, relevance and proximity. I believe that news totally meets that brief because viewers will not find out what is going on here in Belgium by watching French, Dutch or German television. We broadcast a view of the world as Belgians see it. Every news bulletin we air must depict the world as seen through Belgian eyes. News undoubtedly constitutes a kind of backbone for us, bringing people closer together. And that is one reason why RTL Belgium is the leading channel serving francophone Belgium.”

Commenting on the decision to stick with the current ‘dream team’ of presenters and general treatment of news topics, Haulotte continues: “When we presented our plan I repeatedly said that we were striving for evolution, not revolution. It was vital not to unsettle or destabilise the public, for in my opinion making a clean break is something that only a challenger, not a leader, can permit itself to do. That said, we certainly have an obligation to keep pace with modern developments. So we were relatively bold in some respects, but at the same time cautious in others.”

“So we are always endeavouring to improve, constantly questioning what we do and how we do it. Our target was never to achieve a 60 per cent market share. Our aim is to be viewers’ default choice. That is extremely important. Over the years we have instilled a reflex in viewers, who know that if something happens, they should turn to RTL Belgium to find out what is going on. Earning this trust is a daily challenge,” Haulotte concludes.

Ms Popularity

A survey carried out by Le Soir, Sudpresse and Ipsos led to RTL Info 19 Heures anchor Hakima Darhmouch being crowned TV Personality of the Year 2014 in francophone Belgium.

Did you know?

In 2013, RTL-TVI’s evening news bulletin attracted an average of

637,200 viewers equivalent of 43.5 per cent total audience share
The expansion of the *RTL Info* brand created two new posts

The first post for the new, enlarged RTL Info brand is that of News Community Manager. This job entails two missions: firstly, to monitor social networks, and secondly to propagate the content of *RTL Info* news broadcasts at times other than when it is being aired. Haulotte elucidates this by saying: “It is the News Community Manager’s job to get our *RTL Info* content out to the public and into social networks. This is a vital role because the News Community Manager very much personifies our two-way interaction with the public, managing news input stemming from outside the company, as well as the propagation of our own news output.”

The second new post is that of Artistic Producer. This person oversees artistic and aesthetic development, with a view to making content more readily understandable to viewers. Laurent Haulotte explains: “It was really important to create such a role, to bring together internal staff with a range of different career profiles. These people know the editorial team well, are familiar with the news and have a good feel for what the public wants. So far this approach has been pretty successful. It has added ‘a certain something’. Anyway, someone has to dream up and deal with all the different layers of narrative we add.”

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**CURIOUS ABOUT THE NEW LOOK AND FEEL OF RTL INFO?**

Scan the QR code or click to watch the *RTL Info* spot.
In an interview with Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), Mediengruppe RTL Deutschland CEO and Co-CEO of RTL Group Anke Schäferkordt talks about her enjoyment of the jungle show, the challenges of digitisation, and the need to develop proprietary, exclusive formats.

In the FAZ interview, Anke Schäferkordt reveals that she is a passionate fan of RTL’s jungle show, and finds “the group dynamic between the contestants” especially fascinating. Dynamic collaboration within the Group is to become even more of a priority at Mediengruppe RTL Deutschland, too. Many employees already work together on new formats for the group of channels. Now the idea is to strengthen this collaborative approach. Schäferkordt says: “The idea is to boost cooperation within Mediengruppe RTL and to create the right conditions for more creativity. We want to try out more things – even at the risk of the occasional failure of a new format.”
Schäferkordt explains the need to accelerate the development of new, exclusive formats as follows: “We have to ask ourselves what content will help us score with viewers in future. Hollywood blockbusters and American series will become less important for our major broadcasters in the long run if they are offered online by a growing number of providers. What we need therefore are our own, exclusive formats, ones that are shown only on Mediengruppe RTL channels.” All new impetus for the family of channels aside, the Mediengruppe RTL Deutschland boss feels that the established formats are important as well: “As in other industries, we are well advised to continue developing the things that are successful.”

Asked about the decline in audience share, she points out that in addition to challenges in the programme of the individual channels, the fragmentation of the television market also needs to be considered. The market continues to evolve and “the important thing is that we are actively involved in shaping the market.” She adds that Mediengruppe RTL Deutschland did an excellent job of this with the launch of RTL Nitro, and its latest special-interest channel Geo Television consolidates the picture.

Schäferkordt expressed her optimism with regard to competition with the new video-on-demand services. As she sees it, the different funding models of Netflix & Co. as paid services and free-to-air TV channels with their advertising revenues are not mutually exclusive: “The impact of these new competitors on our core business is likely to be limited.” Her confidence is further bolstered by the overall positive developments in the TV ad sales markets – especially in Germany. In addition, Mediengruppe RTL Deutschland is counting on the success of the Now portals and Clipfish.de. “We went online with these early on and changed our identity: from a traditional TV group to a provider of content across all platforms.”

The rapid growth of the Youtube video portal is an opportunity in Schäferkordt’s view. “Short-form video is becoming more important online, and its content increasingly professional […] RTL Group is on the forefront of this development,” she explains. Majority shareholdings in StyleHaul and BroadbandTV made possible the leap to North America, and in Europe Divimove is a player. “These networks supply and aggregate high-quality short-form videos for Youtube and other platforms.” And the acquisition of SpotXchange gives RTL Group a presence in the online video advertising market as well.

At the same time, Schäferkordt points out that in FremantleMedia, RTL Group has a production arm that has been very successful in America for years. The RTL boss is confident that RTL Group can grow long-term with FremantleMedia. Finally, the acquisition of the American production company 495 Productions expands the portfolio.
On 31 January 2015, RTL Television’s jungle show *Ich bin ein Star – Holt mich hier raus!* (I’m A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here!) ended. This time bush-camp contestants were rather ‘well behaved’, however the ratings and online views were once again stellar.

Germany – 3 February 2015

With 56.18 per cent of the audience votes, actress Maren Gilzer was crowned Jungle Queen 2015 in the grand finale, succeeding Melanie Müller. On total audience average, 6.79 million viewers watched this year’s series (28.2 per cent market share). Among the 14 to 59 target group, an average 5,120,000 viewers tuned in scoring 35.9 per cent market share. On Saturday 31 January 2015, the show attracted 32.8 per cent of the total audience market – the best ratings of the ninth season. Among the 14 to 59 target group, the audience share came to 40.7 per cent (5.47 million).
This year’s series also achieved good online and mobile ratings. With 21.1 million video views on Mediengruppe RTL Deutschland platforms, Ich bin ein Star – Holt mich hier raus! achieved the third-highest online ratings of all the seasons in 2015. Only the previous year’s episodes were more widely watched with 27.4 million video views, followed by 21.9 million in 2013.

In addition to lots of video views, the RTL jungle show’s content was also a major topic of discussion on social networks: more than two million interactions in the form of comments, likes, shares and tweets meant the second-best ever values after a record 2.6 million in the 2014 season. The “Walter is out” post on 28 January 2015 triggered the most interactions – even more than the “Maren is Queen of the Jungle” post.

This year’s advertisers are also likely to be happy with the good ratings and high level of activity. In addition to Bahlsen and McDonald’s, Müller, Advocard, 1&1, RaboDirekt and Check24 were on board as advertising partners with various special ads and sponsorship elements.
José Manuel Lara Bosch, Chairman of Grupo Planeta and Grupo Atresmedia, passed away on Saturday 31 January 2015 at the age of 68.

Spain – 3 February 2015

The Mohn family and Bertelsmann’s executives and employees around the world, including RTL Group, express their deepest condolences and support to the Lara family, as well as to Grupo Planeta’s employees. RTL Group owns a 19.2 per cent stake in Atresmedia.

Born in Barcelona in 1946, José Manuel Lara Bosch succeeded his father, José Manuel Lara Hernández, who founded Grupo Planeta in 1949, inheriting the closely held publisher in 2003 with his two siblings. Under his leadership, the company expanded beyond book publishing into other media with the acquisition of a stake in Atresmedia Corp de Medios de Comunicación SA, of which José Manuel Lara served as Chairman.

Lara was also a Member of the Board of the foundation Fundación José Manuel Lara and the Board of Banco Sabadell Atlántico. Moreover, he was patron of the Fundación Carolina, Fundación Príncipe de Girona and Patronato de la Fundació Aula. He also served as president of Uteca, the association of Spanish commercial broadcasters. In 2007, he was a recipient of the Government of Catalonia’s Creu de Sant Jordi.

Lara studied economics at the University of Barcelona and obtained his Masters in business from ESADE. He began his career in 1963 in Paris at Librairie Larousse, going on to hold various responsible positions within the organisation and at Grupo Planeta companies, both in Spain and Latin America. He is survived by his wife Consuelo García-Piriz and his four children.
Deloitte published the 2015 edition of its predictions for the technology, media and telecommunications (TMT) sectors. Its conclusion: while short-form video has a future, it isn’t the future of television.

Luxembourg – 30 January 2015

Though short-form videos are writing a great success story, with the top 100 Youtube channels generating over ten billion views per month around the world, Deloitte predicts that in 2015 the total time spent watching short-form (under 20 minutes’ duration) video online will account for less than three percent of all video watched on all screens. Its revenue based on this will be about $5 billion: by comparison, long-form TV content will generate over $400 billion in advertising and subscription revenues alone.

TV remains number one
Metrics are the reason why short-form’s numbers are so big and small at the same time: short-form is measured in views and clicks, long-form in viewers and commitments of at least a month, and sometimes several years. Deloitte explains that it estimates ten billion hours of aggregate online short-form video will be shown on screens each month in 2015, which is equivalent to 20 hours of long-form video. This compares to a monthly average of over 360 billion hours of long-form video to be watched on TV sets in 2015.

Budgets determine the content
Since in 2015 long-form TV shows are likely to have a budget of up to several to tens of millions dollars per hour and series, Deloitte believes that short-form production budgets will typically be in the thousands to tens of thousands of dollars per clip. This has a great impact on the genres. Whereas short-form is known for music, tutorials, video game play, clips from traditional TV programming, unboxing, movie trailers and entertainment news, traditional TV continues to be the leader in drama, soap operas, family entertainment, sport and reality.

In addition, the content is watched by different target groups and at different times. Short-form video, which is mostly watched by under-30s and usually optimised for smaller screens such as laptops, smartphones and tablets, is often watched in short bursts, to fill gaps during the day, when waiting for a friend, or to ‘graze’ or when distracted. By contrast, traditional TV is primarily watched for several hours per session and predominantly while relaxing in the evening.

Click here to read the full report.
FremantleMedia India has announced that it has partnered with the country’s largest mobile video streaming service, ZengaTV, and largest multi-channel network (MCN), One Digital Entertainment, to launch the world’s first digital talent show: India’s Digital Superstar.

India – 30 January 2015

The show is presented by Amazon.in, powered by Gionee in association with Red FM as the radio partner. As the first show of its kind, India’s Digital Superstar auditions will span across 13 weeks, from 19 January 2015 till May 2015, with the grand finale taking place in the 14th week, in Mumbai. The particularity is that competition never stops as the Indiasdigitalsuperstar.com platform allows potential candidates to upload their videos at any time. The audience is the grand jury, and the winner will be crowned according to the number of views and likes across Youtube, ZengaTV and Facebook platforms. The auditions are open to all Indians around the world, and audition videos can be uploaded until a week before the night of the finale.

Anupama Mandloi, Managing Director FremantleMedia India, says: “After the super success of Indian Idol, India’s got Talent, we at FremantleMedia are delighted to launch a platform that will be accessible to everyone with internet access. Given that India is a priority market for FremantleMedia and a popular destination for many of our hit international brands, we want to continue driving our strategy of aggregating talent across media with India’s Digital Superstar. We have been instrumental in sourcing, discovering and unleashing talent across television and this is the obvious next step for us to take the talent hunt to the internet, which is a world unto itself.”

The website of India’s Digital Superstar

Scan the QR code or click to watch one of the most viewed videos
Jetstar is the official airline partner of *Asia’s Got Talent* (AGT). To celebrate the partnership an Airbus A320 has been beautifully wrapped in AGT artwork designed by FremantleMedia Australia’s Graphic Designer Reagan Mackrill.

**Creativity on the air**

Jetstar is the official airline partner of *Asia’s Got Talent* (AGT). To celebrate the partnership an Airbus A320 has been beautifully wrapped in AGT artwork designed by FremantleMedia Australia’s Graphic Designer Reagan Mackrill.
In front of the judge and the cameras
RTL-TVI

On 25 January 2015, RTL-TVI launched the six-episode reporting series *Face au Juge*, which puts the public to the heart of the courts and aims to show the social side of the Belgium justice system. The public was in any case present for the first ‘hearing’ as it recorded 38.9 per cent of viewers in the target group of shoppers aged 18 to 54 (2014 average: 25.5 per cent) proofing that local productions are a real hit for RTL-TVI.

Belgium – 2 February 2015

One big family
UFA Show & Factual GmbH

To strengthen their brand and simplify processes, the production firms UFA Show and UFA Factual will do business as UFA Show & Factual GmbH from now on. As a result, Uwe Schlindwein becomes the new Programme Director, reporting to Managing Director Ute Biernat.

Germany – 3 February 2015

RTL.fr is the most-visited radio site in France
RTL Radio

According to Médiamétrie’s audience ratings in December 2014, RTL Radio confirmed its two-year leadership of the market with 3.1 million unique visitors a month in 2014 and a 19 per cent increase compared to 2013.

France – 3 February 2015

Hip-hop with style
StyleHaul

Samuel Goldwyn Films and StyleHaul have acquired Northern American rights to CNN films’ documentary *Fresh Dressed*. Premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, it shows the importance of fashion in NYC hip-hop. It is a Mass Appeal production in partnership with CNN Films, and the cable news network already plans to air it later this year after a theatrical release. The companies also announced that there will be an exclusive transactional window on Vimeo On Demand.

North America – 4 February 2015
**Suspects fly to Australia**

FremantleMedia International

FremantleMedia’s global distribution arm, FremantleMedia International, has signed a multi-series deal with Australia’s free-to-air network Channel Seven for the first four series of procedural detective drama *Suspects*.

United Kingdom – 4 February 2015

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**Télégie: Art to benefit research**

RTL Belgium

‘*Le Rideau Rouge,*’ a painting by Paul Delvaux, was sold for the sum of €300,000 at a charity auction. The money will go to Télégie and the Amis de l’Institut Bordet, to benefit cancer research.

Belgium – 4 February 2015

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**A new design for RTL Lounge**

RTL Lounge

The Dutch digital channel RTL Lounge has had a new look extending across all platforms since early February. Its new appearance is fresh, cheerful and properly targeted at female viewers. In addition, the channel has been given the claim ‘Dit is’, which is included in trailers and commercial separators.

The Netherlands – 4 February 2015
Two of FremantleMedia UK’s (FMUK) labels Retort and Boundless have recently bolstered their teams with new appointments.

Scripted comedy label Retort has announced the appointment of Nana Hughes to the role of Head of Development. Nana joins the company from Big Talk Productions, and began her comedy entertainment career working on V Graham Norton, moving onto various comedy entertainment shows including 8 out of 10 Cats and Friday Night Project, before becoming Deputy Commissioning Editor at Channel 4 in Comedy and Entertainment.

Nana then went to BBC in-house, developing new comedy before joining ITV Studios comedy department, where she developed and produced Miss Wright by Isy Suttie for Sky Living and executive produced Rides (pilot) by Dawson Bros for ITV2.

FMUK’s factual entertainment label Boundless has appointed Bafta nominated Executive Producer Cal Turner as Executive Producer, primarily overseeing the new series of The Apprentice. Cal’s previous work includes Undercover Boss for Studio Lambert; Maestro At The Opera for BBC; Jamie’s Dream School for Fresh One; and Find Me A Family and Freaky Eaters for Betty.

Boundless has also appointed Sarah Spencer to its expanding team as Executive Producer. Sarah joins from Betty, where she was Executive Producer on third and fourth season of The Undateables, second and third season of Obsessive Compulsive Cleaners for Channel 4 and Who Needs Ibiza? The Great British Holiday for BBC Three. She also worked in BBC Documentaries Commissioning, running the new director scheme ‘Fresh’ for BBC Three. Sarah will be tasked with developing the factual entertainment and documentaries slate at Boundless.
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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.

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