



The future is hybrid

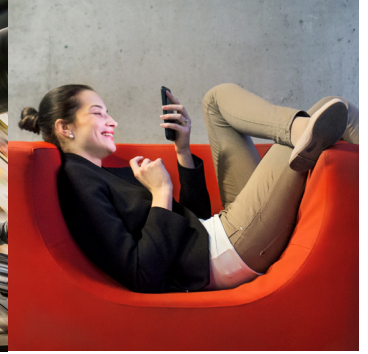
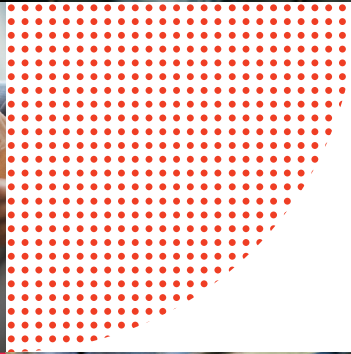
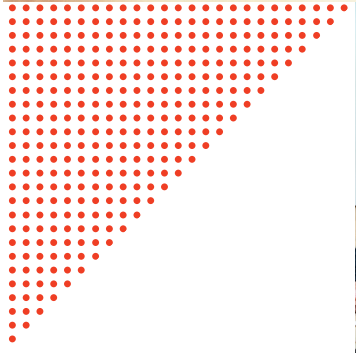
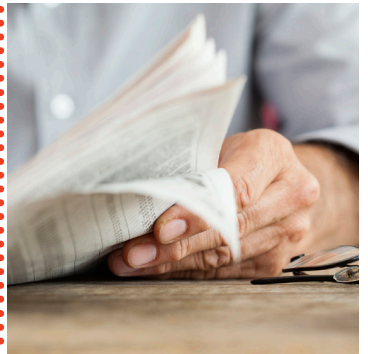


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The vision of Rik De Nolf

The future is hybrid

23 March 2020. The coronavirus crisis has not yet reached its peak. People are in quarantine, schools and shops are closed and the economic damage is immense. We are looking back on a successful 2019 and a good start to 2020. We are ready to continue building on this momentum as soon as the virus has been beaten.

Roularta has taken all the safety measures to ensure the safety of its staff, and the group has assumed its responsibility to society. We are ensuring continuity, and our newspapers and magazines are still being published. The readers' market is evolving favourably in this period in which reliable sources of information are being consulted more than ever.

Predicting the future is particularly difficult at this point. When will the advertising market revive, and will advertisers opt for campaigns in a reliable editorial setting? How will people consume information, and how will news brands respond?

The readers of *KW De Krant van West-Vlaanderen* are also opting en masse (95%) for a hybrid formula. Subscribers follow the daily news on kw.be and have exclusive access to all the + articles. On Fridays they receive an extra pack of reading material consisting of a newspaper, the lifestyle and entertainment magazine *KW Weekend* and a traditional local title for each region.

Last but not least, there is the 'New Deal' that Roularta launched in 2019. Roularta has six news magazines, *Knack/Le Vif*, *Trends/Trends-Tendances* and *Sport Voetbalmagazine/Sport Foot Magazine*, which explore and analyse every facet of modern life. Subscribers prefer hybrid subscriptions (95%), a combination of 'digital news and commentary every day' and a pack of reading material midweek. Every subscriber (to Knack or Trends) receives digital access to all six news magazines: they have online access to all the content, including the + articles, on the websites and they can read the six magazines on their PC, tablet and mobile. The subscriber only pays the retail price of one magazine, and all this is possible thanks to digitalisation.

Communities

With print and online versions, Roularta's lifestyle brands provide expertise and service on the one hand and community building on the other. Each brand has its own area of expertise: cooking, home and garden, motherhood, health and wellbeing for *Libelle/Femmes d'Aujourd'hui*; fashion & beauty, relationships and special times in life for *Flair* and fashion and tourism for *Feeling/Gaël*. *Plus Magazine* also tackles money and legal issues.

Our lifestyle brands have a strong emotional connection to their readers. Online platforms have been set up to meet the readers' needs. For example, the 'Libelle Vriendinnen' community has brought together like-minded women who have become friends. And

Plus Magazine is developing its e-commerce channels at shop.plusmagazine.be and boutique.plusmagazine.be. A self-publishing platform is being developed for *Flair*.

First-party data

Roularta's magazines have been applying a consistent subscriber strategy for 50 years. 90 per cent of our readers are subscribers. They read on paper and online, giving Roularta access to first-party data, i.e. data that come directly from the company's own database. This is of crucial importance given the stricter privacy rules such as the GDPR and anti-tracking measures in browsers.

Roularta is 100% proactively committed to its top-notch position with the public: the content that is digitally accessible mainly consists of + articles reserved for subscribers. Interested readers are invited to register, sign up for a trial subscription and to subscribe. Attractive consumers value the relevant content and intelligent advertisers find the right target groups.

Roularta Local Media (*De Streekkrant*, *De Zondag*, *Steps*) is also innovating with geo-localisation, which means that local advertisers run online campaigns in well-defined locations of their choice on the group's news, women's, classifieds and business information sites.

Roularta's strength is in multimedia: we can launch campaigns in a combination of print, digital and television, sometimes based on a survey, and we can extend the campaign to include an event or book etc. Moreover, *Kanaal Z/Canal Z* produces peripheral programmes for television and videos that can lead a long life online. One thing is clear. As you will discover in the following pages, Roularta has been working successfully this year to create the future. We're ready.

Rik De Nolf,
Chairman of the Board of Directors

Roularta believes in the hybrid formula: a subscription that combines print and digital. Take the average readers of *De Tijd* and *L'Echo*, the Mediafin broadsheets (50% Roularta). During the week, they are satisfied with brief financial and economic reports online, and at the weekend they enjoy a fat newspaper with background information and analyses, plus the lifestyle magazine *Sabato*. The 'digital first' approach works: the number of *De Tijd/L'Echo* subscribers rose by more than 10 per cent in 2019. Gradually the majority are opting for hybrid subscriptions, reading the newspaper digitally in the week and on paper at the weekend.

*In 2018, Roularta created a new division in the form of **the Digital Hub**. The division's digital experts support the business units with their **digital transformation**. The Digital Hub has developed a vision for digital and data. The focus was on transformation within the wider organisation, the search for **new income models** and additional expertise on SEO, SEA, UX and e-commerce.*



© Marco Mertens

2020 is the year when we deliver

Roularta launched the Digital Hub eighteen months ago. That marked the beginning of an accelerated transformation. A lot has changed since then and the first results can already be seen.

How great is the impact of digitalisation?

Xavier Bouckaert, CEO: 'Digitalisation has been going on for a good ten years and it is not going to stop. It is forcing us to transform in the broadest sense of the term. Because digitalisation is not just about software and the digital platforms behind it: it also has an immense impact on the entire organisation. For a good digital strategy, we need to attract people with the right skills, stimulate

collaboration between teams and bring work flows together.'

Stefan Seghers, CDO: 'That is precisely why the transverse nature of the Digital Hub is so important. We know there is a need for innovation and transformation throughout the company. Publishing, IT, the editorial teams and marketing: every single department is affected. That is why there was no point creating a new digital island operating independently of the other departments.

The Digital Hub works transversally and its primary aim is to digitise the entire organisation.'

What results have you obtained up to now?

Stefan Seghers: 'The Digital Hub has existed for eighteen months. During that time, we have developed an overarching strategy that sets guidelines for the years to come. The next step was to look at how we can implement those guidelines in each department and what was needed to do so. In organisational terms we have finished setting up new teams – including a data team – and recruiting people with totally new skills, in SEO for example. A year and a half ago, we immediately made substantial investments in a new data infrastructure with a new customer data platform, which is something we need to personalise all our contacts with our readers, especially the new ones. We have also set up a new marketing organisation. That means we are now ready in terms of both organisation and content to reap the rewards of our new digital and data strategy.'

Xavier Bouckaert: 'Data is a strategic cornerstone in 2020. As a media company, we have always captured a lot of data from our subscribers, but the areas of application tended to be quite limited. In the last ten years, businesses have constantly been made aware of the importance of data, without it being clear what we could do with it and how to go about it. That has changed now. We have our own data specialists in the Digital Hub who have also defined seven areas of application for our data. Based on that, we invested in a customer data platform that is unique in Belgium. It provides important insights to the editorial teams about their readers. We can also set up extremely personalised campaigns for our

readers, for very specific target groups, and expand segments for our advertisers.'

What are the cornerstones of the digital strategy?

Stefan Seghers: 'Our brands form the first cornerstone. Roularta has a unique portfolio of more than 40 brands, which means we have content for almost every target group. That is our strength. For that reason, we need to keep our brands strong and nothing must undermine their credibility. The second cornerstone is data-driven customer relations. We want to capture data and create value for the reader in doing so. The third cornerstone is a profound relationship with the reader: we want to get engaged and then marry the reader. We don't just want to know which articles they read and how long they spend on them, but above all we want to know about the emotional relationship a reader has with a brand.

'The final cornerstone is personalisation. If we can capture valuable data based on our strong brands for 40 target groups, and moreover create an emotional bond, we can also continue to personalise and deepen the reader experience. If we succeed in that, the flywheel will start spinning by itself.'

How do you see that personalised reader experience?

Xavier Bouckaert: 'Clearly the intention is to offer readers added value, not to violate their privacy. But if readers are open to it, we really can make very highly personalised suggestions and offers using complex algorithms. However, the reader is always in control.

'The same applies to our editorial teams. Obviously we can provide insights to the differ-

ent brands into the readers and their reading and browsing behaviour. But the editorial teams decide for themselves what to do with that information. It would also be a mistake to base the editorial work entirely on data analysis. The mission of our media brands is to guide readers through a highly complex society. So you cannot limit yourself to topics that simply generate a lot of clicks. We must not fall into that trap, because that will spell the end of our profession.'

What about e-commerce ambitions, now that Storesquare has been shelved?

Xavier Bouckaert: 'Storesquare gave us a lot of knowledge and insight. In that sense, it was definitely worthwhile. And Storesquare



is not our only e-commerce activity either. For example, we also inherited Shedeals from Sanoma, a platform that we can do a lot more with. And we are also committing to *La Maison Victor*, a magazine for the growing group of sewing enthusiasts and crafters: it has its own online store as well. The magazine and online store are very popular, with a community that is growing by thousands of people every week. We have years of experience with line extensions - books, music, films, wine, travel, design, cookery etc. - and that is a great example of e-commerce as well.'

Stefan Seghers: 'We have learned not to spread our nets too widely. The trick is to offer products in line with our brands. In that way, we inspire people with our content and that makes the online store an extension of the brand.'

The Digital Hub was also supposed to reveal new business opportunities. How is that going?

Xavier Bouckaert: 'There is certainly no lack of opportunities. Our unique position also allows us to help companies with their digital development. Because that requires both content and data - precisely the two crucial things we have at our disposal. There is also much to be said for new forms of publicity, such as screen advertising in queues in shops. We could also give local traders - who traditionally advertise in *De Zondag*, *De Streekkrant* or *Steps* - the opportunity for targeted local advertising on our national news and women's platforms, such as *Knack* and *Trends*, *Libelle* and *Flair*. We also want to really commercialise the neighbourhood

platform *Postbuzz* over the coming months. That is a platform that gives you news from your immediate surroundings, ranging from news, job ads and barbecue parties to local promotions at the corner shop.'

Stefan Seghers: 'The new business department in the Digital Hub puts at least three quarters of its energy into extracting new yields from existing assets. There is still so much we can do with our core activities. Often you also need to do smarter things with what you already have. Breaking down certain silos often helps you make great leaps forward.'

'The Digital Hub's role is to accelerate the company's transformation. We realised that many departments had ideas, but they didn't know how to put them into practice. Not all the teams had people with the right skills. Despite this, there is no time to lose. The coming of the Digital Hub marked the start of a widespread transformation of the company.'

CEO Xavier Bouckaert and
CDO Stefan Seghers



Cross-media content and co-creation inspire advertising



The advertising market is notably fond of jargon. Philippe Belpaire, the director of the national advertising agency, is our silver-tongued guide to this 'data-driven ecosystem', where 'branded content' has earned itself a permanent place in the 'umfeld'. What is more, 'co-creation' is going through the roof.

Whether you call it content marketing, native or branded content, its importance is increasing,' Philippe Belpaire tells us. 'We are getting more and more of it pitched at us since the Roularta Brand Studio opened in 2018. And we approach customers proactively with unique concepts. Our content strategists analyse that customer's owned media, a project manager monitors the project from A to Z and the graphics team give us great visuals, whether in print or online. Most project go cross-media or pure digital. What we like best is to sit down with the customer and their media bureau and create a solution together that fits the customer's DNA and our media. Co-creation is standard practice today.'

A HIGH-QUALITY UMFELD

'If you only consider volume, we can never compare to the big giants like Google and Facebook,' Philippe Belpaire admits. 'What sets Roularta apart is its three core target groups in which we are the market leader across the country. Women, wealthy Belgians and decision-makers. On the advertising market, we do not target the masses, but we do have the right Umfeld. We can offer advertisers the reach they require.'

'What is more, magazines are community builders. We take our

'On the advertising market, we do not target the masses, but we do have the right Umfeld.'

Philippe Belpaire, director of the national advertising agency

communities to the advertisers. They can get their message across in quality print and online channels and at events. In other words: face to face. Roularta has played a pioneering role in this. In the business segment alone, we organise 60 events a year, attended by 30,000 visitors. That's quite something. And they are touch points. Places where we capture data that is fed into our CDP; data we process and enrich.'



'Likewise, in 2020, our strong brands constitute the core strategy around which we build communities,' Philippe Belpaire continues. 'And that's how you generate data. We are in the middle of rolling out a customer data platform (CDP). That's something new. Most people in the sector use a data management platform (DMP). That kind of platform only creates anonymous profiles based on the behaviour of visitors to a website. We are taking things a step further and combining all the data, such as behaviour on the websites, visits to our events and purchases of subscriptions or products from the entire group to create one unique profile. With respect for people's privacy.'

Geomarketing and content sharing

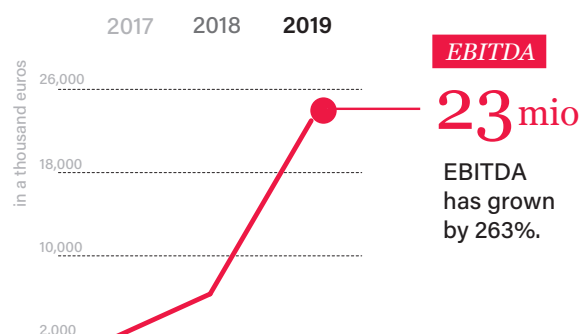
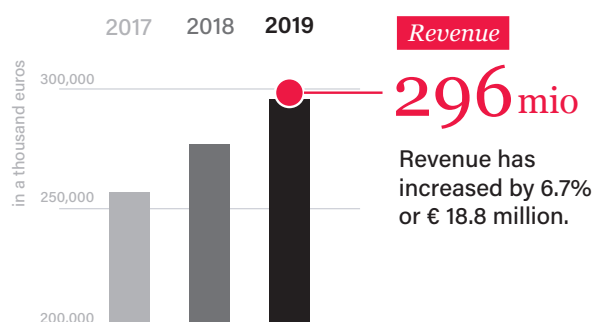
Roularta has a solid tradition of local advertising, and that is another area in which the shift to digitalisation has begun. 'Last year we started using extremely precise tools for geomarketing that we can offer across our entire network. That means that all our advertisers have access – geolocalised access, that is – to about 3.5 million visitors per month. This is separate from the resale of certain advertisements on Google and Facebook, for example. Now we can give a local stakeholder access to the Umfeld of the news and women's magazines as well as the traditional advertisements in *De Streekkrant*, *De Zondag* or *Steps*.'

Last but not least, Belpaire mentions the promising possibilities of accessible content. 'Normally we develop editorial content that you can only view on our websites. We are increasingly sharing that content with third parties. For example, a bank might include an article or selection of articles or channels from *Moneytalk* in its platforms such as the website or application. This high-quality content – which clearly mentions the source – enables it to increase its customer engagement. At the same time, we gain extra reach for our content and we can trace information about the reader. Maybe that reader would be interested in a sub-

scription. What is more, as an advertising agency we can also take on the commercialisation of this extra inventory. It would be a question of revenue sharing: delivering high-quality advertising to accompany the articles. This means that this content also generates income for the partner, who would be able to recoup some of the costs of integrating our content. To make this happen, we have been hard at work on our APIs, the definitions that enable software programs to communicate with each other. The result is better communication with other platforms including those of advertisers.'

The results in 2019

Roularta in figures



Profit and loss account (in millions of euros)

| | |
|------------|-------|
| Revenue | 295.8 |
| EBITDA | 23.0 |
| EBIT | 10.0 |
| Net result | 10.3 |

Balance sheet (in millions of euros) 31/12/19

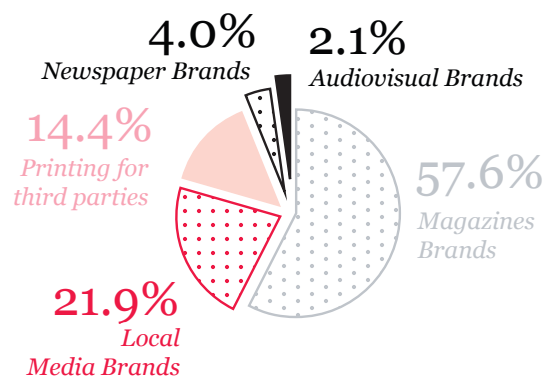
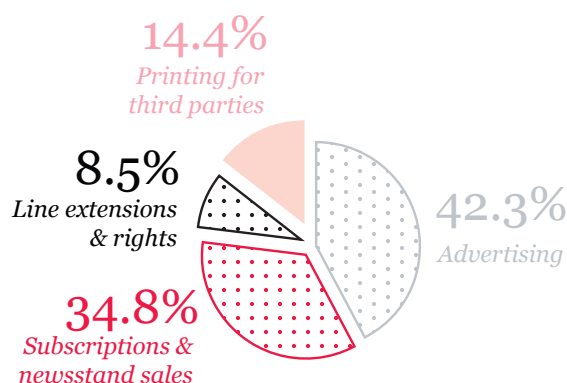
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| Currents assets | 182.7 |
| Non-current assets | 170.7 |
| Balance sheet total | 353.4 |

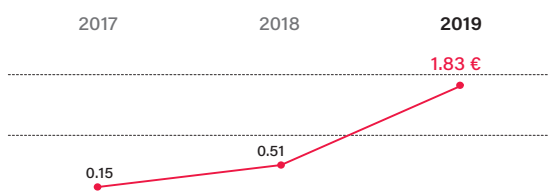
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| Equity - Group's share | 227.8 |
| Liabilities | 125.0 |

| | |
|--------------------|--------|
| Liquidity (1) | 1.6 |
| Solvency (2) | 64.6% |
| Net Financial debt | 95.9 |
| Gearing (3) | -42.0% |

- (1) Liquidity = current assets / current liabilities.
 (2) Solvency = equity (Group's share + minority interests) / balance sheet total.
 (3) Gearing = net financial debt / equity (Group's share + minority interests).

Turnover distribution



*Key figures per share**EBITDA**Rate / profit**Rate at the end of December*

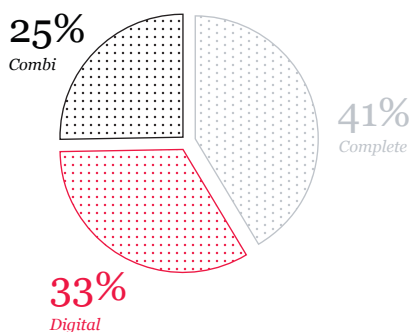
Mediafin in figures

*Revenue***66.1** mio*EBITDA***11.5** mio

The contribution of Mediafin in the EBITDA of Roularta Media Group amounts to 1.8 million euros for 2019. Compliant with the IFRS regulations, this contains 50% of Mediafin's net result minus the annual depreciation of brands, inter alia, De Tijd and L'Echo.

*Investments***1.6** mio*Evolution in subscriptions***+12 %****+2.3** mio*Existing subscribers*

December 2019



How Roularta Media Group creates value

input



Financial capital

80 million EUR
registered capital

13,141,123 shares
listed on Euronext Brussels

228 million EUR
equity

96 million EUR
net cash position

Manufactured capital

Offices in Belgium:

Brussels, Zellik, Roeselare (head office), Antwerp, Ghent, Hasselt

Office in The Netherlands

Baarn

6
advanced full-colour offset printing presses

650 data servers

1 petabyte storage capacity

2,000 computers



Natural capital



An average of
70,000 tonnes
of 100% TCF paper

1,383 tonnes
of ink

19,746 m³
water

159,000 m²
aluminium plates

36,416 litres
of cleaning agents

164,919 litres
of dampening additives

35,720 MWh
energy

142.000 m²
Total surface area Roeselare

66,000 m²
area of greenery beside the
company plant

Human capital



1,265 staff*

712 men,
553 women

186 accredited
professional journalists

Network of more than
1,300 freelancers

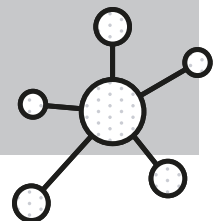
Social capital

Different memberships e.g.
Council for Journalism,
Febelgra

Chairmanship of WE MEDIA
(Belgian magazine
association) and EMMA
(European magazine
association)

23,597
advertisers

792.247
subscribers



Intellectual capital

- Innovation Lab and Roularta Digital Hub
- Strong media brands

output



Financial capital

296 million EUR
turnover

95 million EUR
personnel

6.8%
growth in turnover

Natural capital



3.57%
energy saving** on the site of
Roeselare

=390 tonnes less
CO₂ emission

or an average yearly consumption of
89 families

Manufactured capital

557,322,827
rotations rotary presses

More than 100 events

(Trends Manager of the Year, Trends Summer University,
She goes ICT,...)

Printed copies: **299,314,608**
magazines and 184,772,778 newspapers



Human capital



14,500 hours of
training for personnel

63 new recruitments

Social capital

Websites: more than
9 million
unique visitors per month
and more than 30 million page
views per month

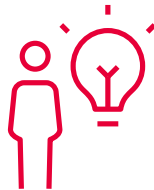
3,031,631
readers of local media

9,504,529
magazine readers (CIM) in
Belgium, the Netherlands and
Germany

98%
reader client satisfaction rate

weekly **1,100,000**
viewers for Kanaal Z/Canal Z

Co-creator 'Een Hart voor
West-Vlaanderen'

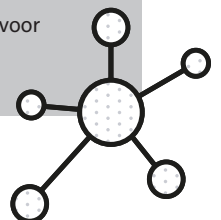


Intellectual capital

48 innovative projects tested by the
Innovation Lab

70 magazine titles

5 newspaper titles



(*) number of heads

(**) compared to reference year 2016

Panel interview

Reliability and credibility are our strengths

although the media sector is described with monotonous regularity as a sector in crisis, that is not how the editors-in-chief of the news magazines see things. Above all, they are aware of challenges and opportunities. 'Declining revenue from advertising is increasing the commercial pressure. But journalism itself is not in crisis. Roularta's news magazines are all quality publications that can draw on a long tradition of clarity and depth. This is our most important guarantee of success, certainly if we add a digital strategy as well.' That is the unanimous opinion of Anne-Sophie Bailly (*Le Vif/L'Express*), Bert Bultinck (*Knack*), Ruth Goossens (*Knack Weekend*), Daan Killemaes (*Trends*) and Jacques Sys (*Sport/Voetbalmagazine*).

In a world where the flow of information never stops, there is a more important role than ever for weekly magazines to play.

'We can position ourselves on the market as a beacon in the midst of all this chaotic information.

That is where our future lies.' A conversation with the editors-in-chief of the Roularta news magazines.

How important are the new digital channels for Roularta's news magazines?

BULTINCK: 'The magazines only appear once a week, but the digital channels enable us to be compelling and relevant every day. Readers find their way daily to our high-quality articles on the website and Facebook. The newsletter is another important channel. We use it to gather articles each day that no Flemish person who wants to be well-informed can afford to miss. The great advan-



tage is that people who receive the newsletter are already in the *Knack* headspace. Those readers experience a significant association with the brand, which usually doesn't happen if they click through from other websites or social media.'

SYS: 'You do need to find a good balance between quality and speed. In sports journalism it is very easy to put a news item on the website within quarter of an hour. But you also have to dare to take the time simply to write a good piece.'

GOOSSENS: 'Our strength is that we don't always get caught up in the madness of the day. People already have enough of the maddening flow of news from the radio and television. You can also make a difference by swimming against that tide and thinking about how you can present stories in a different way. That doesn't mean you need to cut loose from current affairs entirely. But the example of the Panama Papers does show how a news magazine can create news itself by taking the time to delve all the way down into something.'

'The declining advertising revenue is increasing that pressure.'

Anne-Sophie Bailly,
Le Vif/Express



'The magazines only appear once a week, but the digital channels enable us to be compelling and relevant every day.'

Bert Bultinck, Knack



'Our strength is that we don't always get caught up in the madness of the day.'

Ruth Goossens, Knack Weekend



'We can position ourselves on the market as a beacon in the midst of all this chaotic information. That is where the future lies for a magazine like *Trends*.'

Daan Killemaes, Trends

Our journalists

also realise now that their articles reach a wider audience on the website.

What is the digital strategy for the different news magazines?

BULTINCK: 'We have already been working for some time on bringing the print and web editorial teams closer together. We didn't start that until quite late, but we are catching up now. It is a necessary step to reinforce the Knack headspace, though. Readers need to have the feeling that the digital newsletter and the magazine are related. That reader experience is important.'

BAILLY: Our journalists also realise now that their articles reach a wider audience on the website. Of course we publish the news online, but ultimately the website is a gateway to relevant articles from the magazine. That change of mentality is gradually bearing fruit. People are having their say about the magazine and traffic to the website is increasing as well.'

'At the same time, the quality of the digital articles is also getting closer and closer to the quality of the articles in the magazine. After all, it's true that readers should not experience any difference in quality between the articles they read online and the ones in

*'Roularta's news magazines
are all quality publications
that can draw on a
long tradition of clarity
and depth.'*

the magazine. The two channels together constitute a single news brand.'

GOOSSENS: 'As far as *Weekend Knack* is concerned, the digital transition is welcome to speed up. The priority is to create an attractive website and a digital version of the magazine. That transition is bound to happen one day. For example, a digital magazine means you can use more videos and gifs, and it also offers more freedom of form. There is still great potential in that area. There is a much greater risk of cherry picking online. That is why you need to create a strong online environment that also radiates the typical atmosphere of the magazine: to make an audience loyal to your brand.'

SYS: 'As a sports magazine, we are still just beginning our digital transformation. We react more quickly to current events on the website, and the bigger articles are featured in the magazine. That means we can report the news quickly, with the magazine there to provide clarification and greater depth. We are hard at work considering how we can do that even better, enriching the website based on our journalistic philosophy. Add the fact that we face stiff competition from the newspapers and Sporza, which offers everything for free. It



‘One of our greatest challenges is not to get trampled in the stampede of information.’

is a matter of not getting trampled underfoot and continuing to surpass ourselves at the same time.’

What is the added value of a printed magazine, if the difference with the digital variant is getting smaller and smaller anyway?

BULTINCK: ‘It is the digital aspect of our magazines that is growing most. We still have really big steps to take there, in terms of both content and experience. At the same time, we have to make sure we don’t devalue the paper magazine. The reader’s experience of the magazine is crucial to that. The fact that *Knack* is beautifully printed on good

paper with attractive colours is part of the reader’s experience.’

BAILLY: ‘A website is infinite and constantly changing. So visitors to the site do not always know whether they have read all the relevant information. A magazine, however, is a finished product week after week. That offers a certain security, which many readers also appreciate.’

KILLEMAES: ‘One of our greatest challenges is not to get trampled in the stampede of information. Readers are bombarded daily with news flashes, tweets, Facebook posts, blog posts and other alerts. The daily stream of information is endless. A weekly magazine doesn’t have the rhythm of a newspaper to help it stake its claim every day. That



From left to right: Daan Killemaes, Bert Bultinck, Ruth Goossens, Jacques Sys and Anne-Sophie Bailly.

a paywall, and we have to convince people that it is worth paying for in-depth journalism. That is the big digital challenge.'

BULTINCK: 'I don't believe in a Spotify model; we can't survive like that. Now, of course, we are experiencing extra pressure due to the declining revenue from the advertising market. The public broadcasting services are not making it easy for us either. I am convinced of the importance of good public broadcasting, but I do wonder whether they should be publishing opinion pieces and long background stories. I believe that citizens are already very well served with the VRT's audiovisual offerings: that should be enough.'

Marketeers, advertising people and strategists have found their way into all the media companies. What does that mean for journalists' independence? How much has that changed in recent years?

GOOSSENS: 'The declining advertising revenue is increasing that pressure. Particularly in lifestyle journalism, advertisers are increasingly often using creative formulas that do not always allow readers to distinguish between editorial articles and sponsored content. We cannot allow that to happen to *Knack Weekend*. Reliability and credibility are our most important assets and we must not jeopardise them.'


is also why a daily digital presence on the market is so important. As a weekly magazine, we have the advantage that we can excel with our background information and explanations. We can position ourselves on the market as a beacon in the midst of all this chaotic information. That is where the future lies for a magazine like *Trends*.'

Nowadays there is plenty of news to be found online for free. Isn't that a problem for news magazines?

BAILLY: 'The big challenge online is to get readers to pay for content. That is not always easy, because young people are used to finding free information everywhere. We use

Subscribers to Knack, Trends, Le Vif or Trends-Tendances

have digital access to all the content of all six of the Belgian news magazines (including *Sportmagazine*). The editorial teams of these titles work together in one editorial company and publish relevant reports on the internet 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on the internet, in the form of + articles reserved for subscribers, as well as an interesting pack of reading material every week, containing top magazines that can also be read on a mobile, PC or tablet. They provide analysis and exclusive background information, and have specialists in every area: politics and society, culture and science, sport and entertainment, economy and finance, lifestyle etc.



The price of high-quality information

Last year, subscriber recruitment for Roularta's newspapers revolved around the New Deal. You sign up for one brand and get another five as well. 'We completed that process successfully, and it has opened up perspectives', says Frank Minne, the circulation director.

'2020 is all about data and e-marketing.'

Frank Minne, circulation director

Frank Minne's team of fifty provides a set of commercial, logistical and administrative processes linked to the reader market, including both subscribers and newsstand sales. 'For the historic Roularta newspapers, the subscriber journey is much more significant than newsstand sales. If we sell a hundred copies, ninety of those are to subscribers. That ratio is becoming more and more pronounced as the years go by. You also find that the reader market is occupying an increasingly important place in the exploitation of the titles. That tendency can be found everywhere.'

A world without digitalisation has also become unthinkable. 'We always make a digital reflection of our main titles that you can view on various platforms. It is our responsi-

bility to market that product as well. That happens almost entirely in a subscriber context.

'Furthermore, we are increasingly using digital channels to attract subscribers.'

Digital subscriber recruitment

Roularta has to deal with a natural drop-off in its subscriber base every year. 'So we set targets for attracting subscribers. How many new subscribers do we want to bring in per title every month and how are we going to do it for an acceptable cost price? We still commit to traditional channels such as tele-marketing and direct mail, but we also use digital channels: e-mail campaigns, social media campaigns and promotions on our own websites.'

'Our Blueconic data platform is an essential element in digital subscriber recruitment. We can gather everything we know about

subscribers and prospects there, define segments and so on. We supplement all the data we have been able to gather in the physical world with information from touchpoints in a digital context. On the basis of the collated information, we aim to give the customer as pertinent a subscription offer as possible.'

'What we offer someone who frequently visits our websites for a quick glance is different to what we offer someone who visits less frequently but reads long reads all the way through. Sometimes we suggest a trial subscription, but for other people we take the plunge of immediately suggesting a greater commitment. And we try to weigh up these offers against each other. That is the core of our digital marketing.'

'It is too early to share all the results of Blueconic, but we think we have a solid basis and expectations are high. Once the sys-

'We supplement all the data we have been able to gather in the physical world with information from touchpoints in a digital context.'

'If we sell a hundred copies, ninety of those are to subscribers.'

'We always make a digital reflection of our main titles that you can view on various platforms.'



*'There is still an audience
in Belgium that knows and
understands that high-quality
information comes at a price,
and they are prepared
to pay it.'*

tem is in a mature stage, we need to be able to formulate a set of propositions in which we find the right tone every time to make a financial proposition from the right angle in terms of content and the best trigger. We are going to experiment with this over the coming months.'

A full subscription

One of Roularta's showpieces in 2019 was the New Deal (see *box text*). Subscribers to one of the news brands received digital access to all six news brands: *Knack*, *Trends* and *Sport/Voetbalmagazine* as well as the French-language publications *Le Vif*, *Trends-Tendances* and *Sport/Footmagazine*. Didn't that lead to cannibalisation? *Knack* readers who are interested in sport no longer need to subscribe to *Sport/Voetbalmagazine*.

'Anyone who wants the comfort of a print magazine can always buy an individual copy of *Knack* and/or *Trends* and/or *Sport/Voetbalmagazine*. But there is no need to beat about the bush: we want to offer our subscribers a complete service when it comes to relevant reporting and commentary. That means quality in all areas: politics, social issues, economics and also sport and entertainment, culture and lifestyle.'

'Digitalisation enables us to make an offer that is far wider than the basic product. It's true that this cuts down on our opportunities for cross-selling. But for the population who are not yet subscribers, our product proposition is more extensive. That is a competitive advantage when it comes to recruiting subscribers.'

'The New Deal was popular: that is reflected in our repeat subscriptions. We didn't take that as read. The reorganisation of the product formulas was linked to appropriate price adjustments. We hardly experienced any negative effects from that, which gives us confidence. There is a wide audience in Belgium that knows and understands that high-quality information comes at a price, and they are prepared to pay it.'

A hybrid formula with internet and print

'The future of print and digital is the subject of permanent debate everywhere. Daily newspapers are experiencing a particularly strong shift from print to digital. But the hybrid formulas – where print is still important, especially at the weekend – are successful.'

'The transition is happening a little differently for magazines. You interact differently with the product; you consume it in a different way. With the exception of *The Economist*, whose global audience of businesspeople makes it atypical, I do not know of any example of magazine publishers who have succeeded in spectacularly increasing their purely digital subscriptions. Readers who only read magazines online are people who spend a lot of time abroad or simply because they are digital diehards. This is a smaller group, although it is growing and we certainly must not neglect it. In the meantime, though, we now have our own hybrid formu-

la with online reporting and commentary on a daily basis and an extra pack of reading material in mid-week.'

Booming women's magazines

The best results that the Circulation team can present in 2019 came from the women's magazines that Roularta took over in 2018. 'These magazines have a different history. Putting their content behind a subscription wall or paywall has not yet been developed. Over time, we will probably evolve towards a constellation similar to the one we have for our news magazines. And maybe we can develop a New Deal proposition here as well.'

'The previous publisher, Sanoma, had a strong focus on newsstand sales, and this means that there is still enormous subscription potential for titles like *Libelle/Femmes d'Aujourd'hui*, *Flair N/F* and *Feeling/Gaël* and we can continue to expand the print versions. We have had a fantastic year with *Libelle*. Newsstand sales held strong in a market that is decreasing by 10 to 12 per cent per year. And that was paired with spectacular growth in subscriptions: we added another 10,000 last year. But digitalisation is on the table here as well, certainly for titles like *Flair* that are aimed at younger age groups.'

The reader community service also helps us get subscriptions. 'With magazines like *Libelle*, that means creating relationships between readers. When it comes to magazines like *Knack*, the right approach lies in special offers with extra advantages relating to cultural events, books and music, travel, wine etc. The *Knack Club* is still a central feature of our subscriber offers. And the readers still really value that. Our president likes to say that intense consumers of culture can quickly earn back their subscription fees with their membership card.'

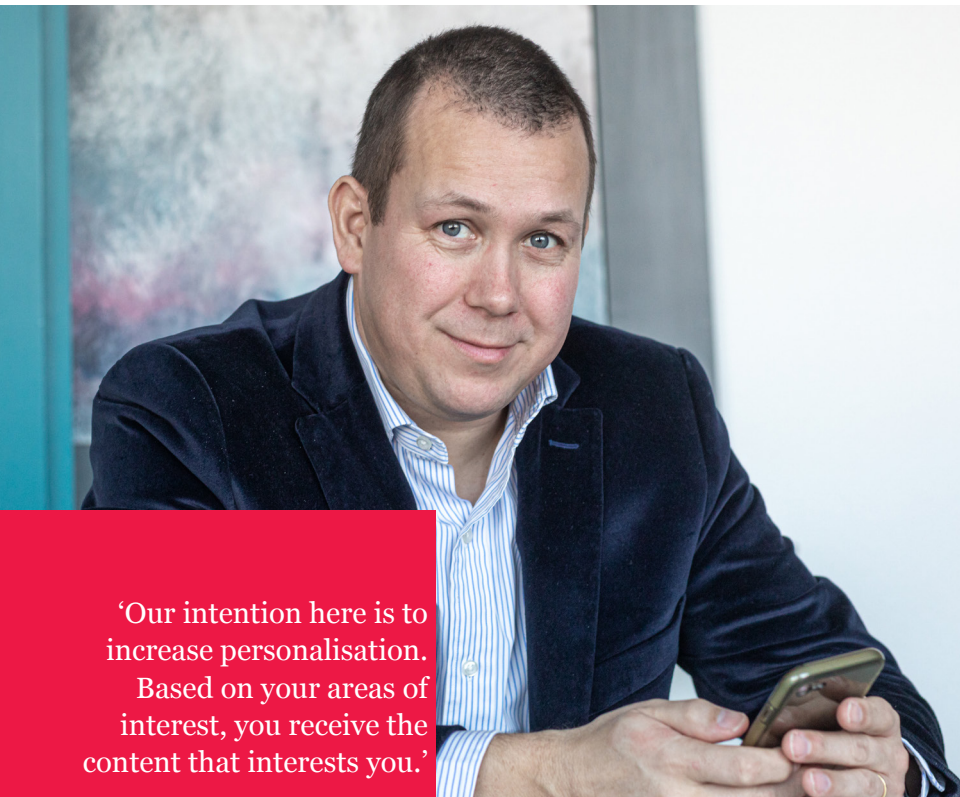
A portrait of William De Nolf, a man with short dark hair and blue eyes, wearing a dark blue jacket over a light blue and white striped shirt. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with greenery and a body of water.

Digital reading for the whole family

Interview

The readers of a Roularta news magazine get automatic digital access to the other five news magazines. Eventually they should be able to receive personalised custom news all day, throughout the week. 'We are also working on a family formula so that Dad doesn't get suggestions for articles in Flair and his teenage daughter doesn't get stock market news', William De Nolf explains.





‘Our intention here is to increase personalisation. Based on your areas of interest, you receive the content that interests you.’

Roularta set up a digital hub in September last year. ‘We have brought together everything to do with web and app development in a single team, except for digital marketing. This reorganisation has enabled us to introduce digital knowledge in all our business units and speed up digital innovation in the company,’ explains William De Nolf, who is responsible within the team for developing websites and applications.

A milestone in this digital acceleration was the New Deal. ‘The best way to explain that deal is with an example. Knack subscribers are sent their packs on a Wednesday. Thanks to the New Deal, they now also have digital access to *Trends*, *Sport/Voetbalmagazine* and their French-language counterparts *LeVif/L’Express*, *Trends/Tendances* and *Sport/Foot Magazine*. We are also hard at work on our news sites, so that *Trends* subscribers can also see the other websites more clearly, for example. We want to encourage them to read the other content as well.’

‘Our idea for the site is to introduce a single skin, keeping the titles, but making it easy for you to find what interests you, regardless of the titles.’

Family subscription

‘Our intention here is to increase personalisation. Based on your areas of interest, you receive the content that interests you. You can also indicate the topics you want to follow. If you don’t like sports, you can turn that news source off. You can also decide when you want to get your news: immediately, in packages etc. We are in the middle of developing all this.’

Does that mean the titles will disappear in the long run, replaced by a single Roularta news site? ‘We are still committing completely to our brands, but we are testing whether we need to link them. That would mean you wouldn’t need to install ten apps, and instead you could consume the content at a central point. Our idea for the site is to introduce a single skin, keeping the titles, but making it easy for you to find what interests you, regardless of the titles.’

‘Personalisation will go further than in the New Deal. Ultimately, we want to evolve towards the concept of a family. Dad, Mum and the kids get a personal profile within the shared family subscription, the same way they do on Spotify or Netflix. For example, Dad gets to read the contents of *Knack*, Mum gets *Libelle* and their children get *Focus* or *Flair*. All of them have their own profile within a shared family subscription. We don’t want to end up like Spotify, though, where your children listen to all kinds of songs and then when you get in the car the only music you hear is theirs.’ (He laughs.)

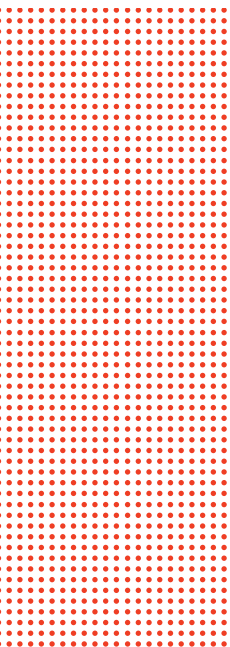
'The Innovation Lab

improves both the customer

journey and operational efficiency.'

Erwin Danis, Directeur of the Innovation Lab

A factory for innovative ideas



Roularta's Innovation Lab screens the outside world for trends and new technology. All the business units can come to it with questions and ideas as well.

the digital transformation is happening fast, new technology is breaking through, disruption is happening all around us. After a brainstorm in 2018, our management decided to set up an Innovation Lab. A specific team is working on innovation on a daily basis. 'Our activity is overarching, for the whole company,' says Erwin Danis, who runs the Innovation Lab.

'To begin with, we look beyond the horizon. What should we be expecting? And what do we need to implement to keep ahead of the future? The staff of the Innovation Lab attend conferences, visit exhibitions and make contact with start-ups and technology providers.'

'Once you are in that circuit, you will often be approached yourself. We organised a Roularta Media Tech Accelerator on one occasion. Along with Duval Union Consulting, we coached start-ups in the media and elsewhere. One of our success stories was the collaboration with Look Live Media, a start-up that provides user-generated video solutions. We used that technology for the KW-Cup, so that football clubs could post videos on our platform.'

'If we detect interesting opportunities, we go back to the business units. They decide whether they see possibilities in our proposals. Conversely, we also get requests from the business units to solve problems or inte-

grate improvements. Then we get in touch with our contacts to bring suitable parties together and select the right technology.'

NewsButler and NewsTapas

The Innovation Lab also does research and development, for example with Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (VLAIO) or the Google Digital News Initiative Fund. 'It is usually a matter of collaboration between the government, a technology provider, an academic research group and ourselves. A triple helix. The research institution provides the knowhow, the technological partner develops it and ultimately we can offer the product.'

NewsButler is one example. 'It fits into our story of personalising news. NewsButler is a recommendation engine based on artificial intelligence (AI). We are working on this with partners including ITEC at the Kulak (Kortrijk campus of KULeuven) and the Ghent-based AI firm ML6. An algorithm provides reading recommendations for topics and articles. We collect data, with an editorial rather than commercial aim in mind. Besides offering recommendations, this technology can determine what you see at the top of your personal news feed. If you are a Club Brugge supporter, you will see those articles first. Thanks to the New Deal (read more on p. 22), we can also work across different brands and bring everything together.'

'NewsTapas emerged from our collaboration with partners including the IDLab at Ghent University and ML2Grow, a strong player in AI and adaptation. Now the same Club Brugge supporter can indicate that he has 10 minutes in the morning to consume news on his smartphone and an hour in the evening, on his laptop. So he gets five bullet points and short articles in the morning and a



The Innovation Lab also does research and development, for example with Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (VLAIO) or the Google Digital News Initiative Fund.



“The digital transformation is happening fast, new technology is breaking through, disruption is happening all around us.”

longer version in the evening. Furthermore, the technology can refine what you want to read.

‘Blueconic, the customer data platform we are rolling out, captures, manages and segments data and orchestrates the output to various channels. Take personalised newsletters, for example. Those newsletters will also include videos. It’s easy to enrich a website, but a lot more difficult to do so with a newsletter. We are working on being able to provide video messages as well. That is not a static thing: a GIF immediately starts playing when you open the e-mail.’

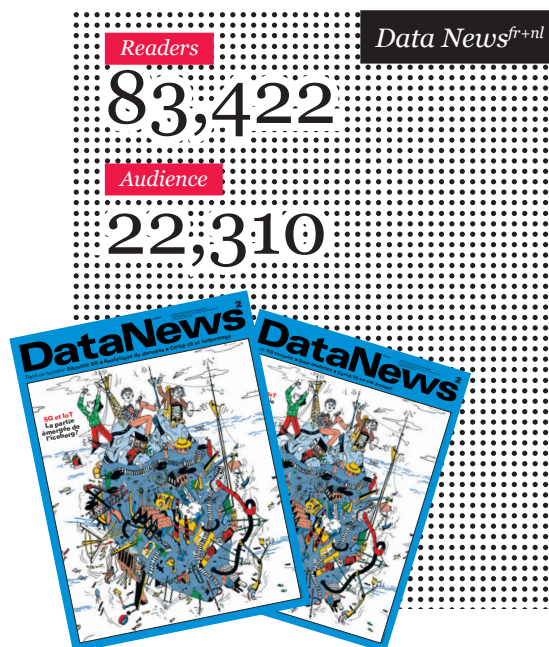
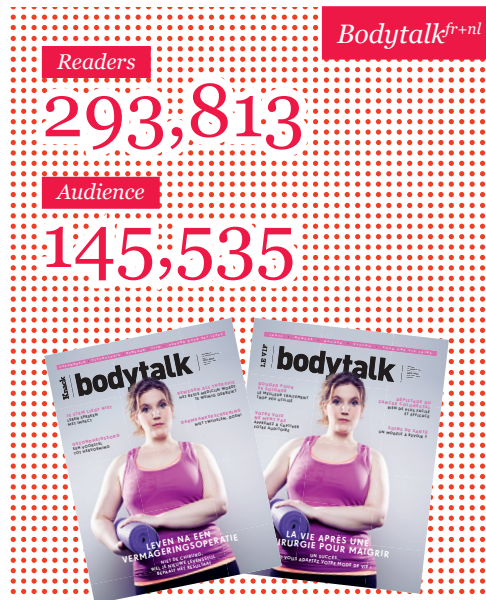
Better customer experience

‘The Innovation Lab improves both the customer journey and operational efficiency. A combination of the two includes almost

everything. A nice example of this kind of technology is used to support customer service. We are hard at work on automatic responses to incoming e-mails. The intention is to be able to answer 15 per cent of the e-mails automatically, as quickly as possible. The messages are often the same, and answering mails tends to be repetitive work. The time we save will allow our staff to create more value, which will ultimately result in more satisfied customers.’

Erwin Danis concludes with a good example for commercial staff. ‘They are often on the road, visiting customers. Afterwards they have to write a report. Now they get in their car and a bot asks them who they have seen, what they said etc. The bot captures and records it all. Later they get an e-mail that they just need to validate and send to CRM.’

Print



News & Business

Readers and Audience (print + digital)



Readers

438,515

Audience

31,111

Sport/Foot Magazine + Sport/Voetbal Magazine



Readers

290,211

Audience

51,365

Trends + Trends/Tendances

Readers

150,034

Audience

44,767



Trends Style fr+nl

Readers

377,018

Audience

54,303

Krant van West-Vlaanderen



Readers

456,200 (incl. website)

Audience

62,536

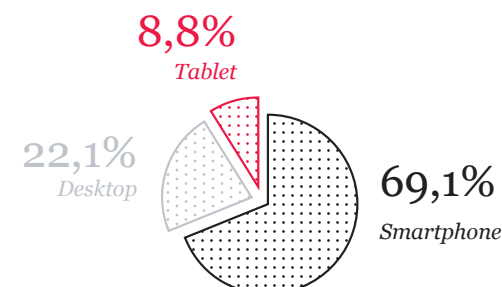


De Tijd / L'Echo

Online

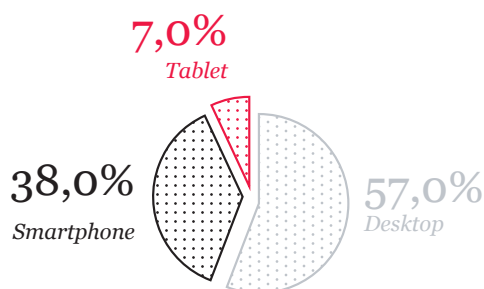


knack.be
levif.be **2.440.025**
real users



8.983.997 Visits
13.237.648 Views

trendstop.be **377.605**
real users



595.415 Visits
2.309.124 Views

News & Business

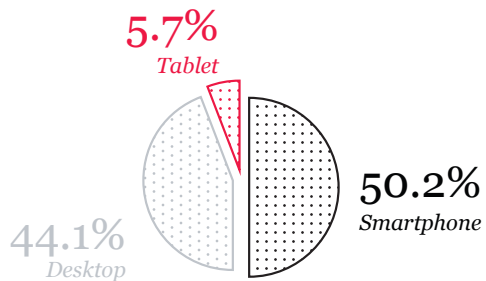
Real users, visits, views per month

trends.be

tendances.be

830,332

real users



1,754,146

Visits

4,164,229

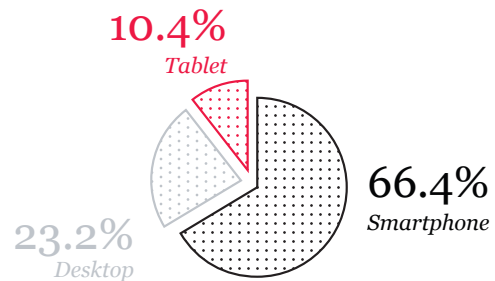
Views

Krant van

West-Vlaanderen

688,007

real users



2,497,126

Visits

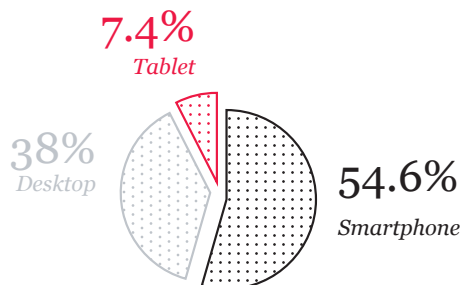
3,498,729

Views

Data News

180,711

real users



308,249

Visits

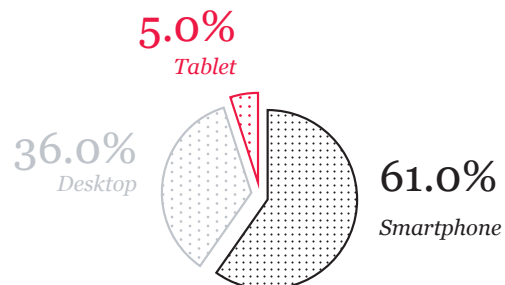
445,584

Views

Alle Roularta Brands

4,321,852

real users



28,859,887

Visits

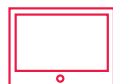
47,148,033

Views

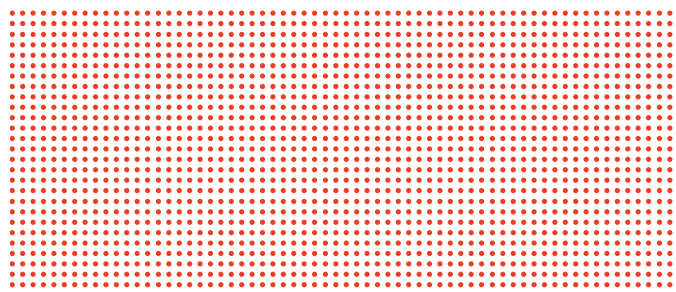
pc or laptop



tablet



smartphone



Magazines are the perfect digital detox

Panel interview

Print is alive and kicking. Quality and craftsmanship are fully appreciated again. 'Making women's magazines is one of the nicest crafts in existence. Especially with a view to the future. It is a craft in which print and digital go hand in hand.'

'The 'women's brands' had already built up a good reach.'

'The emotional bond between a women's brand and its readers is huge. You really do have a social role to play that must not be underestimated.'

'We are surfing the wave of digital acceleration that the publisher is experiencing'

© Studio Dann

'And we react to current events with larger topic files online, for example if there is a storm coming. You can't always pick up on that in the magazine.'

'Roularta is a family company where you reach decisions fast'.



the women's magazines *Libelle/Femmes d'Aujourd'hui*, *Flair* and *Feeling/Gael* have completed their first full year under Roularta's wings. The editors-in-chief are looking back on that year with a sense of positivity. 'You can feel that Roularta is a real publisher. Sales of subscriptions have gone up, the print quality is better.... Together we are committing to quality and content, and we are doing so with much success. It's good to feel supported,' says Anne Daix, the editor-in-chief of *Femmes d'Aujourd'hui*, the French-language counterpart of *Libelle*.

'Roularta is a family company where you reach decisions fast,' adds general editor-in-chief Karen Hellemans. 'Moreover, we can build a long-term vision and plan without the exclusive focus on the next quarter's figures and the pressure that brings. That's a breath of fresh air.'

In the long term, digitalisation is firmly on the cards. 'We are surfing the wave of digital acceleration that the publisher is experiencing,' Eva Van Driessche, the editor-in-chief of *Flair*, concurs.

How are your women's magazines contributing to that digital transformation?

Karen Hellemans. 'The 'women's brands' had already built up a good reach. We want to further strengthen that by increasing engagement among visitors to our online magazine. Last year we worked on the quality of our digital content on the one hand, and strategic and technical aspects on the other, with data as a key focal point. We should be able to reap the rewards of that in the coming year.'

Eva Van Driessche. 'The Flemish and French-language *Flair* collectively reach about 3 million readers per month, if you include both the print and online versions. Since the summer of 2018, we have invested

heavily in quality. It was worth cricking that up a bit, certainly on the digital channels. Our reach was high, but the match between the two channels wasn't quite what it should be. We have been able to streamline that again. Most of our readers are young women, who are a very digital audience.'

'The online and print editorial teams work together much more. I am not going to claim that they have now merged into a single group, but we have started exchanging a lot more information, we have meetings together, the journalists write for both channels and themes run parallel. The biggest difference is in the rhythm. A web journalist writes five or six articles a day.'

'A lot of paper articles are published on the website. That is a conscious choice, because the readers are not 100 per cent the same. As to whether it will stay free forever... probably not. But you need to show what you have to offer before you can introduce a paying or data model.'

The readers of *Libelle/Femmes d'Aujourd'hui* are older. How do you reach them?

Hellemans. 'Print is still very important for us. We produce a weekly magazine, but there is also a monthly culinary magazine, *Libelle Lekker*, the two-monthly *Libelle Nest* focusing on country life, and *Libelle Mama* once a year. We have sister publications with similar timing, on the same themes, for *Femmes*. Online, we are also committing to a broad, 'horizontal' website with familiar human interest pieces, practical articles and relevant current affairs for our readers. Alongside that, we are expanding our areas of expertise 'vertically', on the themes of cooking, living and nature, and motherhood. We are really proud of *Libelle Lekker*, as the biggest and best quality recipe website in Flanders.'





'You can feel that Roularta

is a real publisher.

Sales of subscriptions

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quality is better....

Together we are committing

to quality and content,

and we are doing so with

much success.'

© Studio Dann

*From left to right: Karen
Hellemans, Anne Daix
and Eva Van Driessche*

Do Flemish and French-speaking readers get the same things to read?

Anne Daix. 'Obviously we try to synergise costs as far as possible. That is easiest with culinary themes, but it's also successful for topics such as interior design, beauty, gardening etc. If we notice that a given angle isn't working, we tweak the text or images. Sometimes we go for radically different subjects, but we do use the same images. *Femmes* is not a carbon copy of *Libelle*, but if you look carefully you will notice their common basis.'

Hellemans. 'The Dutch and French-language sites have a parallel structure. The recipe database is full of translations, but current affairs pieces are written by a French-speaking journalist.'

'Images are the most expensive element of lifestyle journalism: production costs a lot of money, but you take far more pictures than you can publish. *Femmes* can choose the most culturally suitable photographs from a series that *Libelle* commissions. The same is true online. I would say that above all, it is an intelligent reuse of material.'

Daix. 'In the beginning we thought we could simply copy and paste. That's not the case.'

Despite the many similarities, differences do exist. We can cope with them by means of planning, by producing strong texts of our own and thanks to the wider choice we have from the images produced. So for me *Libelle* is the most important source I can draw on. The flexibility in implementing the merger has worked well and enabled us to create an excellent magazine for our target group.'

Van Driessche. 'Our teams are smaller, which means that we work together even more intensively, certainly in print. We believe that the similarities for young women are greater than the differences. *Flair* focuses on first times, lifequakes and so on: graduation, job interviews, finding love or not finding love, deciding whether to have children etc. These themes are no different on the other side of the language divide, although we are also working on differences in style. It's two-way traffic, by the way, although the Flemish team is larger because of its reach.'

Are the differences between print and online readers small as well?

Hellemans. 'People read print at different times to online material. A magazine gives you a real moment of me-time: you can immerse yourself in lifestyle inspiration and familiar stories for a while. Online you tend to

be looking for something more specific, whether it's a recipe, news or social contacts. That is why we still have a digital team of on-line journalists for *Libelle* and *Femmes*. They have their expertise in SEO, social media and video, and can cope with a high publication speed. Strategic management is in one person's hands, however, to ensure that the teams cooperate, know each other's planning and can take over anything relevant. We go even further in our specialist areas. Everyone uses multimedia for *Libelle Lekker*.'

Daix. 'And we react to current events with larger topic files online, for example if there is a storm coming. You can't always pick up on that in the magazine.'

Hellemans. 'That's right, and I think that storm is a good example. You see, we've run a lot of stories in the past about cleaning, tidying up your garden, what to do with the children when the weather is bad etc. If there's a storm on the way, we can compile an online topic file and repost our expertise. We make a lot of these reusable stories, and that's when content becomes a service.'

How important are communities?

Hellemans. 'The emotional bond between a women's brand and its readers is huge. You



Karen Hellemans,
general editor-in-chief of women's magazines

'Mobile readers are often in search of something specific 'right now'. The paper magazine is a weekly or monthly moment of me-time when readers can immerse themselves in inspiration and familiar stories.'



Eva Van Driessche,
editor-in-chief of Flair

really do have a social role to play that must not be underestimated. They identify and empathise with other readers' stories about things that happen in life. Our *Libelle* and *Femmes* readers really do look for that connection with us and each other. That's why we started a friends' club last year. So that they could meet other women in a safe environment set up as a plus zone.'

Daix. 'The women have already held gatherings in Brussels, Liège and Namur without the editorial team being involved. They keep in contact on our platform and arrange to meet up. It's growing organically. We will probably do something with that in editorial terms as well.'

Van Driessche. 'With Flair we have groups like that for sexuality, for example, but they are curated by a journalist with expertise in that area. That group came up with the request for an event. So we went looking for event partners. The ladies treated our journalist like a real star. It was pretty impressive.'

Are events like these the work of editors or marketers?

Hellemans. 'We have always thought very much in terms of a brand, a 360 degree approach, whether that means events, the

magazine, online or designing a fashion collection. The editor-in-chief and the marketer work in tandem. They need to be thinking along the same lines. If you have all that creativity at hand and all this passion for the target group, why would you only use it to make the magazines and the website? We don't keep our creativity confined by those barriers.'

Van Driessche. 'Marketing organises things, makes the event big, but we provide the content. There is no wall between us. My brand manager and I communicate so much that we recently came up with the same proposal at a meeting. Although hers was in a beautiful presentation and mine was in a scrappy one.' (*She laughs.*)

Hellemans. 'We provide strong, high-quality, creative content and they make our brands even bigger. That requires close collaboration. Of course we still have basic rules about what we can and can't do. We still have final responsibility for what appears. Luckily they often reject things in advance when they don't fit our editorial values, precisely because we know each other so well.'

'I do still see opportunities for progress, certainly with the new digital possibilities. More data will enable us to improve our quality.

Ultimately it is a matter of creating value for readers, and marketing is helping us to do that.'

Is the paper edition slowly dying out?

Van Driessche. 'Flair is more and more digitally based. We print the topics that do well on the online platforms in our paper edition. Young girls are always on their smartphones, which is why we have improved the quality of our videos, for example. That works. But I still don't think print will disappear. We have brought out a '*Flair Summer Book*' and a special about getting married, for example. Occasions like that require an edition you can keep. Paper still has much greater credibility than online content. And influencers confirm that. They get a kick out of being in the print edition.'

Daix. 'Our strength is in our content. If it's in *Femmes* it must be right. Print is the quality stamp that enables you to build a strong digital brand as well.'

Hellemans. 'I don't think print will disappear. Even if the world is more digital than ever, that only increases the need for quality, selection and expertise. Creative craftsmanship is on the up again. And that goes hand in hand with the digital developments.'

'First you need to show what you have to offer before you can introduce a paying or data model.'

'Our strength is in our content. If it's in *Femmes* it must be right. Print is the quality stamp that enables you to build a strong digital brand as well.'

Anne Daix,
editor-in-chief of *Femmes d'Aujourd'hui*



Shopping in your favourite brand

Nele Baeyens,
Director of Marketing and digital strategy



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As the biggest brand for women in Flanders, Libelle aims to inform, inspire and connect with its readers to the maximum. The e-commerce platforms Libelle Lekker Shop and Shedeals offer extra consolidation and reinforcement for the brand.



'Our e-commerce channels bring Libelle into its readers' lives.'

2020 will be an important year for Libelle's e-commerce channels. New business models are being combined and tested. On the one hand, the focus is on the Libelle Lekker Shop: the online store that sells kitchen items and tableware such as oven dishes, grill pans, tablecloths and serviettes. On the other, new strategies are being tested this year for the Shedeals platform. Readers find attractive offers there for pampering weekends, dining out, exhibitions, concerts, musicals and city trips.

'In the Libelle Lekker Shop, our editorial team recommends products – under the motto "tried and tested for you" – because they believe in the quality and value they offer', says Nele Baeyens, Director of Marketing and digital strategy. 'Our readers attach great importance to a selection of this kind. They trust our choice, because it helps them find their way through the gigantic range of items available online. Besides providing ex-

tra consolidation and reinforcement for the Libelle brand, it also creates additional business opportunities.'

Support and interaction from other channels is self-evident. 'Libelle selects several products from the online store each time, based on its editorial agenda', Nele Baeyens explains. 'These products are then placed in a prominent position in the magazine and on the Libelle Lekker website. This selection is the main push towards our online store. It receives extra support from a comprehensive cross-brand media plan. That consists of an extensive mixture of offer pages, online articles, newsletter bannerings, social media posts etc.'

Discounts through partnerships

Apart from the Libelle Lekker Shop, the Shedeals platform is the most important e-commerce product for Libelle. Readers find discounts of up to 70 per cent on the

'Shedeals and the Libelle

Lekker Shop need to grow into

one of the target audience's preferred

purchasing channels.'

Shedeals:

556,800
unique visitors to the
platform

5%
conversion rate

Libelle Lekker

127,670
unique visitors

80%
faithful public
visitors who keep
coming back after
their first visit

20%
influx of
new buyers

platform, thanks to partnerships with popular brands and specialised distributors. As Nele Baeyens tells us, 'The Shedeals team works with the editorial teams of Libelle, Flair and Feeling. They know what is popular with their target audience. We choose the special offers on that basis. The range is extremely varied. We mainly focus on ticket deals and not so much on product deals, although the latter are still important at certain times of year, such as Christmas.

'Thanks to Shedeals and the Libelle Lekker Shop, the Libelle brand permeates the lives of our readers in the form of specific services and products. We also put maximum efforts into making the right choices and compiling a good range tailored to our target group. The right quality at the right price: that is our

goal at all times. By gaining our readers' trust, we intend to expand our e-commerce platform over time into one of their preferred purchasing channels.'

Roularta plans to expand these channels even further in 2020. The Libelle Lekker Shop will become the fixed distribution partner of a select number of brands, as well as becoming an online platform for new product launches and a collection of Libelle Lekker's own. Shedeals will get a new website this year. It will remain the most important platform for special offers, but from now on it will also be possible to find the deals on other channels – depending on their nature and the target group – such as the brand new Libelle Vriendinnen platform.

Far-reaching integration in 2020

Roularta has succeeded in fully attuning its internal systems to the supporting e-commerce platform for the online store of its creative community *La Maison Victor*. That has led to automatic invoicing and automated contact with customer service and the logistics partners. 'Now we want to extend that operational efficiency to all the e-commerce platforms,' says Nele Baeyens. 'It's Shedeals' turn in 2020. The ultimate aim is to get the underlying data platforms to communicate optimally with each other.'

A portrait of Maxine Konings, a woman with blonde hair, smiling. She is wearing a dark blue top and a necklace. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with greenery and warm lighting.

Maxine Konings

*'We want to enter into
dialogue with our readers,
really get to know them and respond
to their needs.'*

Communities strengthen bond of trust



In 2020, Roularta is committing strongly to the 'sense of belonging' within online communities. Its goal is to build a meaningful, long-term relationship with its readers.

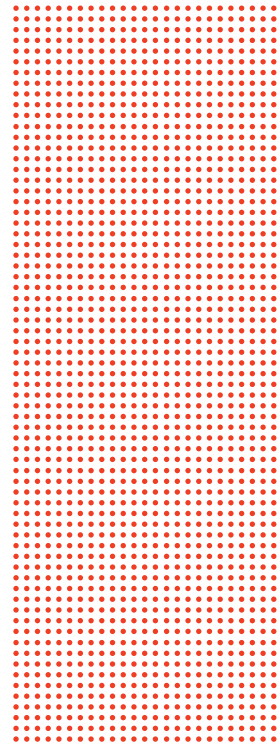
Roularta does more than just offer strong, high-quality content. The publisher aims to connect as much as possible with its readers through its brands. It has already committed strongly to this through social media channels, but in 2020 it stepped its efforts up a gear.

Roularta recently launched La Maison Victor, an online community for creative people. In just three months, it attracted 25,000 registered members. The *Libelle Vriendinnen* community has also been set up, which is all about interaction and experience in a familiar setting. The same project is being started up for Femmes d'Aujourd'hui in the spring, entitled 'Les Amies de Femmes d'Aujourd'hui'.

'We want to really connect with our readers through our brands, and above all to embark

on meaningful, long-term relationships with them,' says Maxine Konings, the digital product developer for Roularta's women's magazines. 'Our goal is to have even more dialogue with them, really get to know them and respond to their needs. To commit to engagement, move towards frequent, registered visitors and offer them a personalised experience. Online communities are the ideal platforms for this, and they are what we are focusing on this year. But the brand, the experience and the reader promise are key. However the focus is different for each brand, in line with what the magazine stands for, its goals and what is popular with the target group.'

Obviously the communities are intended to bring the readers into contact with each other as well. 'Chatting about the latest Libelle podcast, discussing a book in the book club,



‘By building communities, Roularta is creating familiar settings where people feel at home with the associated brands.’



Libelle Friends: a resounding success

- The number of members of the new Libelle Vriendinnen community is growing steadily every day.
- An average visit lasts more than 6 minutes.
- Registered users view at least 8 pages per session.

sharing photos of your homemade dessert, looking for new friends to meet up with. If you enter your interests and location, you will receive suggestions for groups, events and friends,' Maxine tells us about *Libelle Vriendinnen*. 'But it goes beyond that. You can take part in savings campaigns, get discounts on days out or participate in the weekly puzzle. So *Libelle Vriendinnen* is a loyalty platform as well as a community.'

Familiar settings

By building communities, Roularta is creating familiar settings where people feel at home with the associated brands. 'We want to become an established value that they return to regularly,' is the message. 'For *Libelle*, we started out from a Facebook group that was created several years ago by the *Libelle* editorial team. We wanted to go a step further, with a separate platform where our readers could also find groups or start one up themselves, filter content based on their interests, create activities and so on.'

'Furthermore, if you use your own platform you don't have the 'background noise' you experience on Facebook; you don't have to scroll endlessly to find what you are looking for. And what is more, our communities give you personalised suggestions thanks to our advanced customer data platform. We use this to get to know our people better: we know what they like, what content they like to read and what their interests are. That enables us to customise our offering for everyone, with personalised content and relevant offers. The consumer really is the focal point.'

Prior research

Building up a community takes time and perseverance. A whole lot of prior research is needed. Roularta always starts with the brand's strategy and brand statement. 'We study the target group and focus on the topics for which the brand has already built up a large, engaged community online,' explains Maxine Konings. 'So it is not enough to make a nice website with cool features and then draw attention to it with a gigantic launch campaign. The real work only starts afterwards.'

'For example, we develop customer journeys: they are intended to make it as easy as possible for our visitors by showing them the right messages at the right time. But to be honest, the most important thing is to keep the communities active. As a publisher, you must not underestimate the effort that requires. That is why we have appointed dedicated community managers. They are crucial to the platform because they know what is going on and constantly put in the work. They closely follow everything that happens and react immediately.'

Interaction with the brands is important. For example, Roularta itself has set up groups and events in the *Libelle Vriendinnen* community based on Libelle magazine. A couple of times a year, the online editors of the magazine also launch plans, such as the 'tidy-up plan' and the 'less sugar plan'. Interesting interactions with the community are possible in this area as well. 'Our readers get support from each other when they are trying to

achieve a goal. They share tips on the platform and talk to other people about their experiences and achievements.'

Community rules

Because communities are public places, Roularta has also established a few community rules. 'But they are very reasonable,' says Maxine Konings, putting them into perspective. 'Users need to respect each other and may not merely use our platforms for commercial purposes. We moderate the content ourselves, but also rely on members to report things they are unhappy about. We check every report. But it is clear that people do abide by our community rules: so far we have not had to remove a single post.'

'Our communities are also free from negative comments. The atmosphere is great. We notice that the users support and motivate each other. *Libelle's* slogan is 'Caring for you and your loved ones' – and you clearly feel that here. We will always thoroughly evaluate any negative comments on the platform itself. We try to find out the cause of the frustration, and mainly try to learn from it. We give people a say and then use what they give us. Hopefully that will enable us to transform a negative feeling into something positive.'

'We want to really connect with our readers through our brands, and above all to embark on meaningful, long-term relationships with them.'

PART OF THE 360° APPROACH

The communities Roularta wants to build in 2020 are part of a holistic overall plan in which online and offline channels are attuned to each other. 'We believe in a 360° marketing approach', Maxine Konings tells us. 'All our brands are interwoven with our editorial content. They are clearly prominent in our paper magazines, on our websites, on social media and at events. Each community needs to become part of the brand as well: that is the only way for us to come full circle.'

'The focus is different for each brand, in line with what the magazine stands for, its goals and what is popular with the target group.'

Maxine Konings



Magazine brands are the original influencers

Social media enable magazine brands to connect with their target groups. They have a huge role to play, especially for women's magazines. 'We have long since used social media as more than merely a way to direct traffic to our websites.'

'The various social media channels are an essential component of Roularta's marketing mix.'

Jeroen Van Raemdonck



the Roularta magazine brands saw the potential of channels like Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube years ago. They have great coverage and a more engaged audience than ever who feel a positive connection to the brand. The magazine brands are the original influencers, as it were.'

'Each of the magazines is strongly represented on social media such as Facebook today, although the approach differs depending on the brand and associated target group. For example, Instagram Stories – the vertical videos that only stay online for 24 hours – were a very rapid hit with the young readers of *Flair*. So *Flair* reacted to that immediately, with fun stories about new articles, glimpses behind the scenes and calls to action.'

'The content on our social media is adapted to the audience we have in mind', says the digital marketing manager, Jeroen Van Raemdonck. 'It always corresponds to the magazine brand in terms of content and tone of voice. Take *Libelle*, centred on 'Caring for you and your loved ones': the emphasis on all *Libelle*'s channels is on current,

socially relevant stories with high emotional content and feel-good messages that connect with the readers.'

Social media are an essential component of Roularta's marketing mix. 'Besides connecting with our readers, we also use social media to publicise campaigns and events. For example, when we launch a television campaign for our annual *Libelle* calendar, we also develop a sophisticated social media campaign to create extra visibility for that issue.'

Building the brand

Roularta has long since used social media as more than merely a way to direct traffic to the magazine sites. As Jeroen Van Raemdonck explains, 'Every message that is published has the goal of building our brands, with surprising formats, fun insights, posts that touch people and make them feel connected to the brand and to each other. For example, this interaction between the brand and the readers became very tangible, both offline and online, during the original meetings between members of 'Libelle Vriendinnen' organised by the online editors and captured in lovely videos. They had a lot of views from visitors to the event and also from our Facebook followers.'

'There is nowhere where we feel as strongly connected to our readers on our social media channels as in our closed communities. The Facebook group *Libelle Vriendinnen* had 400 new posts from its members in the past month alone. Because groups like these are so popular, we have opted resolutely for community building on our own platforms in 2020, with more focus on connecting offline as well. That does not only apply to *Libelle Vriendinnen*. The French-speaking, live *Flair* event 'Les Boudoirs', with workshops and debates on sexuality, is a great example of a well-known online concept that now has a successful offline counterpart.'

93%

of Facebook fans are female and two thirds are between 18 and 34 years old.

FIGURES

Roularta's magazine brands have enormous reach on social media. 'With one Facebook post, we easily reach 90 to 95 per cent of our fan base, without spending a single cent', Jeroen Van Raemdonck tells us. 'Flair currently has about 200,000 Facebook fans who fit perfectly into our target group: 93 per cent are female and two thirds

are between 18 and 34 years old. A post to that group sometimes reaches more than a million unique individuals. But channels like Pinterest are not outdone. Especially with Libelle Lekker, which attracts about one and a half million unique viewers on that visual channel every month.'

Plus Magazine: the authoritative magazine for over-50s

Plus Magazine has an extremely broad-based multimedia strategy, covering all kinds of channels on and offline. The focus is always on innovation, 'because we want to have a contemporary image.'

SUBSCRIBER BASE IS ON THE UP

The number of subscribers to Plus Magazine has grown over the last five years from 82,000 to 100,000. 'We want to keep those 100,000 subscribers, although the GDPR laws are making it more difficult', says the marketing director, Joost Martens. 'At any rate, this good subscriber base creates a stable cash flow and it is important for the advertising market. Newsstand sales of our magazines are also steady, and reader offers through our partners are doing very well.'

the over-50s have specific interests. Topics such as health, money and law are important to them, as are tourism and culture. This is why *Plus Magazine* profiles itself as an authority, creating a surrounding community. 'The magazine is the focal point', says Joost Martens, the marketing director. 'And we use other channels around that flagship. People often think a multimedia strategy only means online, but that is not the case. We do have a website and several newsletters, but we also organise events, competitions and reader offers that bring money into our coffers as well. Furthermore, we support newsstand sales of our magazine with radio campaigns, and editorial director Anne Vanderdonck is a regular guest on the RTBF.'

'Clearly we can reap the benefits of speed on our online channels. *Plus Magazine* is a monthly magazine that offers opportunities for extensive articles on relevant topics, but for daily updates on pensions or inheritance laws, for example, you can go directly to our website or find information in our newsletters. For this, we also work with the editorial teams of other Roularta magazines such as *Knack* and *Trends*. We continually exchange information in both directions. That allows us to react quickly. The opening rate for our newsletters is almost 50 per cent, demonstrating that we are valuable to our readers.'

Incidentally, you would be wrong to think the *Plus Magazine* target group cannot cope with digital channels. 'Over-50s grew up with computers', Anne Vanderdonck explains. 'And

70%

of the articles are translated and adapted to the target language group if necessary.



people who are already a little further on in life often learned to use them at work. In fact, over-50s buy more online than millennials. What is more, they protect themselves better against cybercrime than young people, and they are less naive about social media. In short: our subscribers are far from digital illiterates. We rarely receive traditional letters.'

Modern look

Innovation is a central feature in *Plus Magazine's* multimedia strategy. 'We recently gave our magazine a brand-new layout,' says Anne Vanderdonckt with pride. 'We want to have a contemporary image. That makes it even more important for us to look modern than for other magazines. This is expressed in a

youthful design and contemporary font. We also innovate in terms of content. Over-50s have particular issues to deal with: we constantly offer them new insights and ideas.'

'Last year we also organised our first financial event,' Joost Martens adds. 'Experts talked about relevant subjects for a whole day: pensions, inheritances and wills, donations to good causes, sustainable investments etc. The participants paid 20 euros and received a goodie bag to take home. It was a success: the event received an average score of 8.4 out of 10, and thanks to the advertising efforts it was particularly profitable as well. Now we are going to expand this initiative to national level, probably with a health and beauty event to follow.'

The Plus Magazine editorial team

- is bilingual: around 70 percent of the articles are translated and adapted to the target language group if necessary.
- has one editor-in-chief and two editors (one for Dutch and one for French).
- has 14 full-time employees and about 30 freelancers.
- is a single team for both print and online.
- also provides the special editions on a variety of topics.

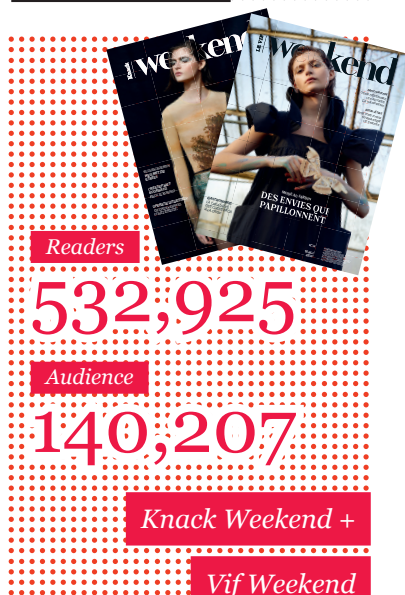
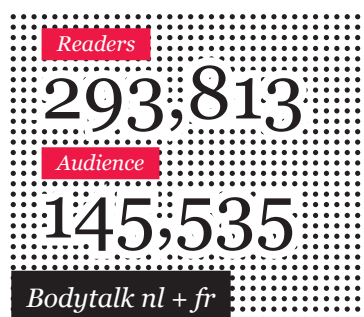
'Our subscribers are far from digital illiterates. We rarely receive traditional letters.'

Anne Vanderdonckt

Joost Martens

Plus magazine

Print



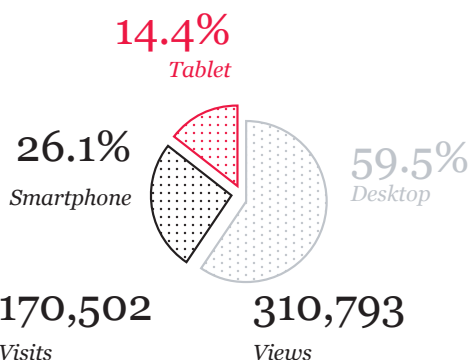
Lifestyle & Women

Readers and Audience (print + digital)

Online *Reals users, visits, views per month*

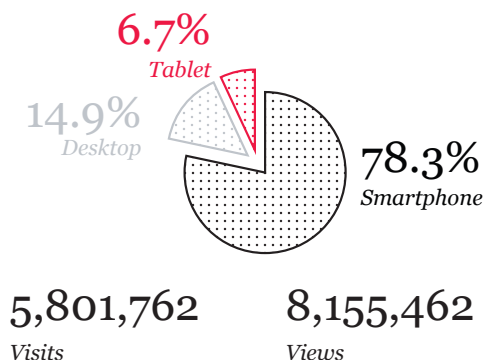
Plus nl + fr **99,661**

real users



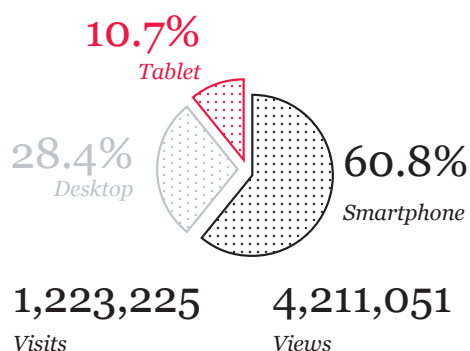
Flair nl + fr **1,560,911**

real users



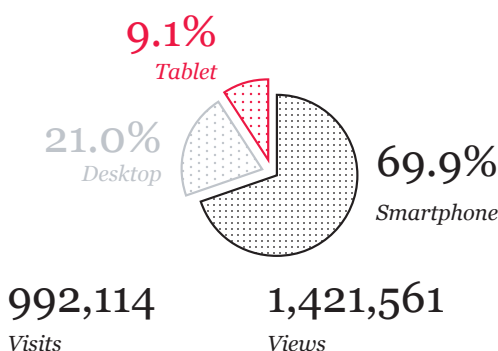
Libelle Lekker **843,674**

real users



Feeling **390,739**

real users



pc or laptop



tablet

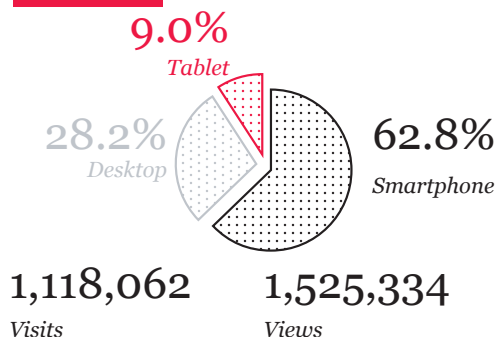


smartphone



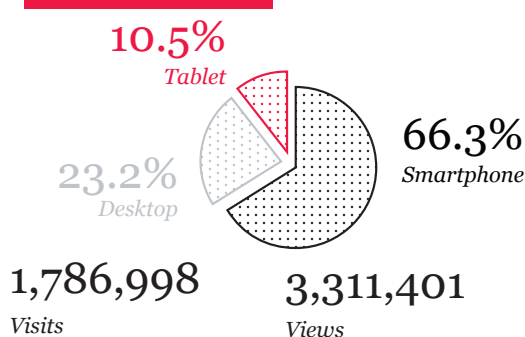
Weekend Knack **578,468**

real users



Libelle **652,067**

real users



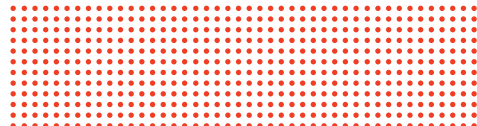


Every business realises now that an internet presence is crucial

Double interview

Innovative technology linked to the power of its own close-knit network: with this approach, Roularta is even succeeding in transforming the local advertising market.

Luk Wynants (Director Local Media) and Barbara Spyckerelle (Director Recruitment Solutions) firmly believe in the smart combination of print and online.





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MijnStad currently
reaches a total of
170,000
followers on social media.

Roularta has had a strong reputation as a print company for decades: how and when did you gradually come to shift the focus to online media as well in what you offer at local level?

Luk Wynants: In fact we took the initiative nine years ago, for example as a Google reseller and with the sale of Google display campaigns. Other channels such as Facebook soon made us realise that this was not enough, and that we would also have to offer our customers innovative online products of our own. The wanted ads – ranging from property to jobs to cars – were the first to generate added value very quickly in a combination of print and digital. The specific platforms that emerged for those ads boosted advertisers' and customers' belief in these digital solutions.

Were the customers eager for your own solutions right from the start?

Barbara Spyckerelle: At first the problem was simply that no one had enough expertise. We gradually convinced our customers of the value of our own digital products. 'Local digital display advertising' is a nice example of that. Our customers believe in the added value of Roularta's extensive digital

network and the power of strong national titles such as Knack, Trends and Sportmagazine, Libelle, Flair and Feeling. And thanks to the technology, we can now enable customers to benefit from that network in their own region as well.

Luk Wynants: It's true that it took a while for smaller retailers in a typical SME environment like Flanders to jump on the digital bandwagon. The trend caught on much more quickly in the Netherlands, but Flanders has completely caught up now. Local businesses understand very well now that they can have an online presence. They can reach tens of thousands of potential customers with an advertisement in De Streekkrant, De Zondag or Steps, but now it is also possible to reach even more consumers through the online channels. Now we are responding to that with our own solutions.

How exactly does 'local digital display advertising' work?

Luk Wynants: We package the message in smaller portions. Imagine a customer who wants to put his brand new clothing store in the spotlight. We offer him a traditional print advertisement, but we also make Roularta's big, digital, online network available. That gives the shop sufficient visibility online. And we make sure the online ads are only visible in the region that is relevant to that business, with a geolocalised campaign.

Specifically, that might mean a print advertisement in Steps linked to an online ad in several standard display formats. They run on the websites of Libelle, Weekend Knack, Feeling, Flair, Plus Magazine, Knack, Trends, etc., during the same publication period as the print ad. Only readers who live in the desired region will see these regional online ads. That is possible today using geolocation software, because we know more or less where every website visitor lives and what they read. So we can guarantee our advertiser around 15,000 online views with this package, on top of the 70,000 to 80,000 readers we can offer through our print medium.

So the key to this approach is advanced geotargeting?

Barbara Spyckerelle: Absolutely. Geotargeting will enable us to work hyper-locally from now on. Our added value is in the combination with our strong, very close-knit network that covers the whole of Flanders. When local businesses work with us, they know exactly where their online advertisement will appear, on which of all our different websites and in which newsletters.

As a customer, why would I still opt for online and print in today's world?

Barbara Spyckerelle: Print and online media represent very different experiences: people often read more superficially online, whereas they tend to take their time over print. So I certainly do think there is still a great future for print advertisements, as long as we ensure that our titles stay very strong and meet the needs of our readers. The two advertising channels are complementary; it's as simple as that. And we will continue to provide our specialised service in terms of Local Digital Search with Google Search. It's the perfect way to attract masses of online visitors to the advertiser's own website.

Is local digital display advertising more expensive than a traditional print advertisement?

Luk Wynants: No, you pay about the same price you would pay for the same number of views in print.

Now you are also working on the development of a few totally new local advertising channels, aren't you?

Luk Wynants: That's right, we've got two in the pipeline at the moment. There is MijnStad, formerly known as Postbuzz, a regional app we took over last year from a small start-up. Since then we have considerably extended, improved and tested it. MijnStad aims to be a neighbourhood platform where you can find up-to-date, hyper-local information within your municipality and close to your home address. In time that will evolve

'We make sure the online ads are only visible in the region that is relevant to that business, with a geolocalised campaign.'

Luk Wynants



into a digital neighbourhood information network that we want to link to advertisements. To begin with, businesses can make a page for themselves and post messages for free. We can boost those posts in return for payment. The pricing is based on the proximity that the business selects: nearby is free, but there is a fee to advertise further afield. MijnStad currently reaches a total of 170,000 followers on social media. And it does so in a controlled, secure environment where it is not possible for people to post absolutely anything. The launch of MijnStad is planned for sometime in the next few months. We are also experimenting with Optilocal, a kind of big information screen system 2.0. If you're waiting in line at a sandwich bar or in the supermarket, you see an information screen with all kinds of messages on it.

That's already fairly widespread today, though, isn't it?

Of course, but those advertising messages usually only capture your attention for a few seconds at best, because they alternate in a

kind of fixed cycle. The big challenge for digital signage of this kind is to keep hold of the public's attention for longer. And we want to do that in future by showing funny films on the screens as well. It's hardly revolutionary, but success on social media has proved that it works really well. We can alternate those films with advertising messages. That means advertising for the business where the screen is located, but perhaps also as part of a broader regional campaign in print and online. Technologically speaking, it is possible at the moment to display somewhat different messages on each individual screen, i.e. customised for the business where the screen is installed. Our specialists will advise businesses on that.

Barbara Spyckerelle: For our online activities, we want to be really unique by going hyper-local as well. It should be perfectly possible for businesses that only have customers in Tiel, for example, to restrict their advertisements on Optilocal to the local area and attract customers in Tiel. Over time, this opens up all kinds of new possibilities for job advertisements, let's say, where the regional factor is more important. Or for the real estate market as well.

*'For our online activities,
we want to be really unique
by going hyper-local as well.'*

Barbara Spyckerelle



Gocar.be mainly aims to attract more individuals

'Nowadays people are prepared to travel about 100 km to buy a car if they find an interesting offer. If necessary they cross the linguistic divide as well.'

Wim Moyson



With around 60,000 advertisements, Gocar.be is one of the bigger players on the online car market in Belgium. There are a number of technological innovations planned for the coming months, mainly intended to send the number of private customers skyrocketing.



© Frank Toussaint

Until the end of 2019, Gocar.be only offered new cars and cars from stock. The site had four other brands, including autovlan.be and autoclassic.be. 'After integration, we remained the market leader in new cars online with the new Gocar.be,' sales manager Wim Moyson tells us.

'There were many arguments in favour of bringing all those sites together on one new portal site. For example, it was not always clear to our customers where exactly they could find their cars. From a marketing perspective as well, it is considerably easier to put one big portal site on the market where you find both new and second-hand cars as well as vintage cars and vans. Incidentally, customers will soon be able to find motorbikes on the site again as well. So Gocar.be is becoming a real one-stop shop.'

In the long term, Gocar.be has far more extensive ambitions. Mobility has long since been about more than just cars. So the new portal site will gradually need to be transformed into a mobility site, where you can find electric bicycles or motorbikes, shared cars and scooters, Wim Moyson believes. 'Individuals in search of a mobility solution in any sense of the term should be able to find it with us.'

This ambition ties in perfectly with one of the main short-term goals: to attract even more private individuals to the site. Currently more than nine out of ten advertisements on Gocar.be come from professional customers. That also makes the portal site the market leader in that segment. 'There are two reasons to commit more strongly to private customers,' Moyson says. 'Firstly, they are clearly also potential customers for the professional advertisers. So more private individuals immediately make our site considerably more attractive to that target group. Secondly, private customers can advertise with us for free at present, but they can also pay to attract even more attention to their ads. From that perspective, the pri-

ivate customers are also an attractive growth market.'

Scale

The online car market has not really grown in bare figures in recent years. Nonetheless, it is becoming more and more important to most car buyers. They use it to gain information in advance or get an idea of what they want. What is more, completely new cars will also be bought entirely online increasingly often. The fact that Gocar.be is owned by both Roularta and Rossel offers quite a lot of benefits in that respect. 'Support from two big media groups is an attractive argument to use with professional customers,' Moyson says. 'And then there is the importance of scale. Nowadays people are prepared to travel about 100 km to buy a car if they find an interesting offer. If necessary they cross the linguistic divide as well.'

To make the site more attractive to private buyers and sellers, Gocar.be intends to focus mainly on technological innovations in the coming months and years. With that in mind, a user experience consultant has been taken on. 'Specifically, we want to give customers the opportunity to save their favourites in their own customer profile, for example. In addition, it will soon be possible to compare models on the basis of criteria they determine themselves. If we succeed in making the site even more accessible and attractive with innovations like these, more private customers will automatically find their way to Gocar.be.'

'We have since created a separate database for vintage cars as well, thanks to which we now have the biggest range in that market. Soon we will be launching a new B2C newsletter for vintage car lovers, to expand in that sector into the market leader. The only thing is that the Belgian market is a bit too small to achieve that. So last year we bought the autoclassic.nl URL. In other words, we do still see opportunities for growth at international level.'





Print

De Zondag

Readers

1,510,136

Audience

494,347



Steps

Readers

342,808

Audience

249,654



Readers

1,118,577

Audience

1,100,000

De Streekkrant

Local media

Readers and Audience (print + digital)

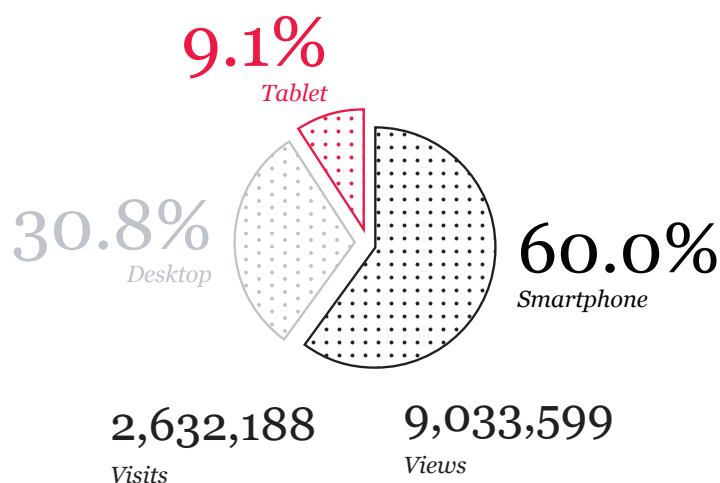
Online

Reals users, visits, views per month

immovlan.be

721,176

real users



pc or laptop



tablet



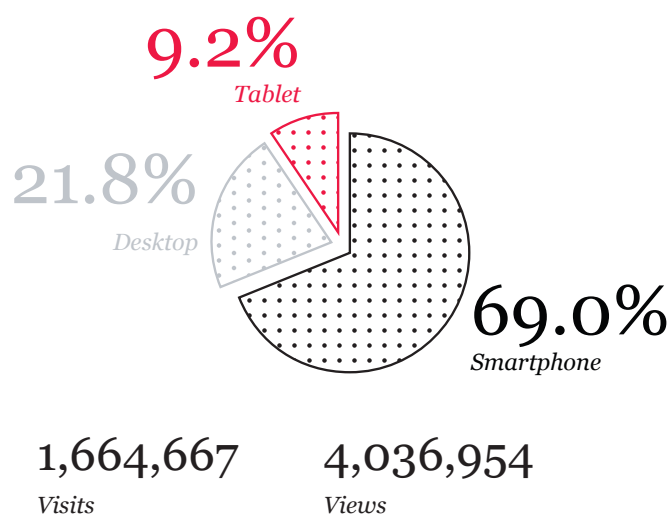
smartphone



gocar.be

624,030

real users



Regional news in a hybrid packaging

Krant van West-Vlaanderen

Covers all

64 communities

in West Flanders, plus three 'border communities': Zulte, Comines and Maldegem.

377,000*

people read the paper editions every week: this represents an annual increase of 13.2 per cent.

The average age of the digital readers is 44 years old. The median is

44 years old.

Reaches

405,241*

people per week (paper + digital): that is 14.4 per cent more than the previous year.

The website KW.be has

68,000*

visitors per week. That is 60 per cent more than in the period 2017-2018.

*CIM figures for 2018-2019.

The regional newspaper De Krant van West-Vlaanderen reaches more than 400,000 people every week. The hybrid model combines digital and paper channels, and works according to the principle of 'digital first, best print.'

There are 1.2 million people in West Flanders. Almost a third of them read KW De Krant van West-Vlaanderen. 'We provide non-stop reporting and commentary on the news in the region every day on our website KW.be', Stefaan Vermeersch, the general director, tells us. 'And every Friday the readers find a pack of reading material at the shop or in their letterbox: KW De Krant van West-Vlaanderen, the provincial

newspaper, supplemented with one of the five local editions plus the lifestyle and entertainment magazine KW Weekend.'

1. How important is the combination of paper and digital? Is this type of hybrid model essential?

Stefaan Vermeersch: "This combination is a necessary step for every news brand. Our rule is: digital on weekdays, paper at the weekend. Our weekend begins on Friday, by the way, because Friday is KW day. The two channels are complementary: short, concise reports on the website and the more extensive stories in print. What is our goal? To put the news online as quickly as possible. And then to develop it on paper, where there is extra value in doing so. That is the 'digital first, best print' principle."

'We offer two reading formulas: either paper plus digital or digital only. The proportion of internet-only subscribers is growing by the year, but it is limited in comparison to the

377,000 people who opt for the hybrid formula. They get the news including the +zone every day (which is reserved for subscribers), and every Friday they get a printed package with digital access on our website to all five regional editions, which they can read on their PC, tablet or smartphone.'

2. Has the transition to the hybrid approach led to a reform of your editorial team?

Stefaan Vermeersch: 'Our editorial team currently consists of about fifty people: reporters, editors, news managers, regional managers, people in charge of the magazines and specials, layouters etc. We also have an editorial manager, an editor-in-chief, an editor-in-chief of opinions and a community manager.'

'We can also rely on a network of a good 400 freelancers. Together we aim to put at least two news reports online every day for every district we cover: all 64 of them. If anything



'People really are prepared to pay for regional news.'



'The two channels are complementary: short, concise reports every day on the website and the more extensive stories in print on Fridays.'



NEWS UPDATES IN YOUR MAILBOX

Anyone interested can sign up on KW.be for a midday and/or an evening update on the most important news in West Flanders. There are a few other newsletters as well, including a weekly selection of articles and a list of attractive promotions and campaigns. Stefaan Vermeersch: 'Touch points like these are important, because they let people try out our content. We keep them on board with our newsletters and give them a reason to come back.'



Stefaan Vermeersch

happens anywhere in West Flanders, we want to be the first people on it.'

3. How relevant is regional news? What added value does it offer your readers?

Stefaan Vermeersch: 'The spearheads of our reporting are local politics, family news and clubs and associations. Obviously sport is part of the mix as well. Regional news has always been important and that is not going to change. The West Flemish identity certainly has something to do with that. In a province like Antwerp, that sense of community is much less of a factor.'

'I also notice the interest in local reporting in the news groups on Facebook that refer to what is going on in their community. The regional television broadcasters are benefiting from this success story as well. We invest consistently in a large, professional editorial team and provide the subscribers with comprehensive regional reporting. The readers are prepared to pay the appropriate price for this service that is relevant to them: KW De Krant van West-Vlaanderen online and in print.'

4. The number of regional newspapers has been cut from eleven to five. What was the reason for that decision?

Stefaan Vermeersch: 'It is a logical move towards integration. Until recently, the Krant van West-Vlaanderen was an aggregation of the traditional titles that had been taken over or started up over the years. The evolution towards a provincial newspaper, which includes keeping the local identity, gives us the opportunity to publish under a single brand and to support that brand, KW De Krant van West-Vlaanderen, with strong marketing.'

'There is a local, traditional title for the provincial newspaper in each region. We have enlarged the regions and the reader gets considerably more news covering a larger area. This means that we now have the same subdivisions as the province itself: it is divided into five regions as well. We have also ensured that our editorial team evolved along the same lines during this process. In the summer months we will be thoroughly evaluating everything. At that point we might still make the odd adjustment here and there.'

5. To what extent does the weekend magazine KW Weekend contain regional information?

Stefaan Vermeersch: 'The subtitle of *KW Weekend* is: "Geniet van het goeie West-Vlaamse leven" (literally 'Enjoy the good life in West Flanders'). So readers find out everything about what our province has to offer and much more besides. Think weekend tips, an overview of what's on, a walking and cycling calendar and so on. We are considerably expanding our "Waar naartoe" (What's On) section.'

6. Your digital platform also offers sounds and images. What content do you use this medium for?

Stefaan Vermeersch: 'We are evolving towards videos and podcasts, and have already done a few fantastic things. For example, there was the video about a flower seller that went completely viral in 2018. Its maker, the reporter Kurt Vandemaele, followed it up with the series "Wie zieje gie" (Who are you). He is currently working on "10 000 stappen in..." (10,000 steps in...). Little films like this about people and local community life do really well on our website and the social media that refer to KW.'



Report

For love of the printing press

They are thin on the ground: media companies that are still investing heavily in their printing works today. Roularta is one of those which have consistently done so over the past decades. Today, that translates into an ultra-modern printing infrastructure and an impressive portfolio of national and international titles.

William Metsu, the managing director of Roularta Printing, has worked for Roularta for a good 36 years. During that period, he has seen the printing works in Roeselare grow enormously in both surface area and capacity. 'When I first came here, we had three rotary presses and a total surface area of about 2,500 square metres,' he tells us. 'Today the production area covers 35,000 square metres.'

Clearly that has everything to do with Roularta Media's strong growth as a publisher. 'In 1983, *Trends*, *Knack* and *Le Vif* rolled off the press, followed by *Plus Magazine* a few years later. Over time we have gained a whole range of French magazines and Roularta has put much more emphasis on attracting even more international customers and commercial printing. Today the commercial publications represent half of our volume.'

'Of course we didn't use to have the capacity for that, but look at all the things we produce today, both editorial and commercial publications.' Metsu gets up from his desk and shows us an impressive pile of magazines: from all kinds of advertising brochures and the professional magazine *Naily News* to *De Limburg Vakantiegids 2020*, the bi-monthly magazine of the VAB roadside assistance service and the European edition of *The Economist*.

Although print has spent years in the thick of the battle, Roularta has stubbornly continued to invest in new, ultramodern printing capacity. And now that appears to be paying off. 'Until the mid-nineties, we invested in

this fairly consistently, but then the investment machine went quiet for a decade or so,' Metsu recalls. 'If the management had not decided to set up a large-scale investment programme of 100 million euros in 2005, this printing works would probably no longer exist. Printing presses have undergone such a radical technological evolution in recent years – both technically and in terms of capacity – that you simply can't keep up any more if you're using machines from the nineties. Thanks to those substantial investments we are still growing, although it is true that the market has been taking serious blows. What is more, a large amount of printing capacity has disappeared from the market in Belgium in recent years, and Roularta has been able to reap the rewards of that as well.'

Luxury market

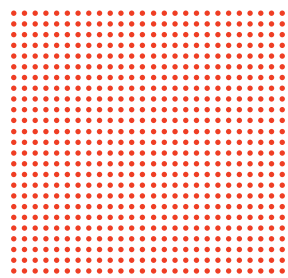
However it is certainly not all doom and gloom in the sector. It is true that newspapers have seen their print runs on paper declining sharply, but the magazine market has stayed relatively constant for all those years. As William Metsu says, 'This house will always believe in the potential of paper magazines. Certainly if we are talking about informative magazines, or niche publications that are mainly aimed at the luxury segment.'

And Metsu delves back into the impressive stack of magazines leaning against the walls of his office and lets us see a few examples of *The Good Life* and the French luxury magazine *Ideat*. These publications offer hundreds of pages of reading pleasure, often with impressive photography and printed on



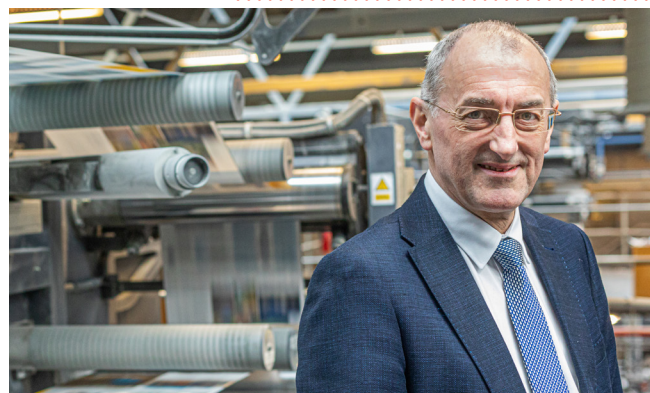
Weight of one roll of paper:

2,880
kilos



A printing works in figures

Dimensions of the new Roularta printing press, which will be installed in June: 10 metres high and 66 metres long.

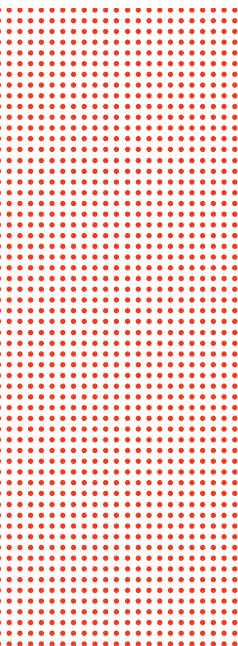


Print speed of the new printing press: 50,000 64-page sections per hour.



© Frank Toussaint

Total surface area of the printing works in Roeselare: 35,000 square metres.



'When I first came here, we had three rotary presses and a total surface area of about 2,500 square metres', he tells us. 'Today the production area covers 35,000 square metres.'

**William Metsu, Managing director
of Roularta Printing**

thick, attractive paper. 'Compare this for a moment to a similar publication on a tablet', he says almost lovingly. 'What the paper feels like, the way it opens out, even the scent of it. If none of that had any influence on the reader, the publisher wouldn't make all this effort. No, an online publication can never beat this.'

Last year, Roularta announced a serious new investment of 12 million euros in the form of a new rotary press. 'Actually it is a replacement for a 48-page press that is now 27 years old, which we are still printing news sections on today. If it were to break down suddenly, that would be a disaster for the publisher. It would mean that certain magazines stopped appearing from one week to the next.'

'Don't forget that Roularta is also the biggest player in Belgium today, purely in terms of magazines. There isn't really the capacity to replace us. Furthermore, we have the great advantage of having everything here under one roof: the magazines aren't just printed here, they are finished and shrink-wrapped as well. That is an important argument for our customers, because they can apply much tighter deadlines thanks to our tight logistics. It is also an important factor in the battle between paper and online publications: it means that magazines like Knack or Trends can stay very much up to date, even on paper. It is no coincidence that we now have customers here from a good 20 countries, with the Netherlands, France and England as the most important examples. *Bloomberg Magazine* and *The Economist* (in almost 90,000 copies per week) roll off the presses here as well.'

Life's work

Then we take a tour of the printing works itself: a gigantic labyrinth of pallets stuffed

with finished magazines, rattling machines and gigantic rolls of paper, pervaded with a sickly smell of alcohol and ink. Sections of all kinds of magazines are rolling past at impressive speed, and Metsu leads us up to the top of one of the big printing presses, 12 metres above the ground.

'Look, that's where our new press is going to be. It is just under 10 metres wide and about 66 metres long. It's coming from Manroland in Augsburg, which has been one of the four biggest printing press producers worldwide for decades. The Germans are absolute world leaders in magazine presses, and soon we will have six of the company's presses here.'

The new press will be able to print 50,000 sections of 64 pages each every hour. 'Of course we will only reach that maximum speed with large print runs, because it takes a while to get going. For that reason we will mainly use this press for magazines with large runs, such as *Knack* or the Dutch *Spoor Magazine*, which has a million copies four times a year. We also print the *Overstock* brochures here, for example, which is another run that easily exceeds a million copies.'

Metsu himself is retiring soon. When he is rushing from one machine to the next in the printing works, his love of the profession is apparent in every word and gesture. 'Actually this is my life's work. I am the one who negotiated the acquisition of the land to make the systematic extension of the printing works possible. The expansion of the prepress, the construction of the new buildings, the arrival of all these new machines: I remember it all as if it were yesterday. All those investments are paying off today: this is Roularta's life blood. I am absolutely convinced that print still has a great future in the years to come.'

Roularta Printing pioneers ISO certificate



© Frank Toussaint

At the end of last year, the Roularta printing unit in Roeselare was the first and only printer in the country to earn an ISO 50001 certificate. For an energy-intensive company, that is no mean feat.

all the printing processes that we do here will now be covered by this energy certificate', explains Peter Leroy, Production Manager at Roularta Printing. 'Specifically, we are committed to consuming a little less energy every year in our production process. That sounds somewhat easier than it is, because we have had a project manager here who has been working on energy efficiency for years. So we've already picked the low-hanging fruit.'

Roularta has a fairly long history of energy-saving measures. In 2005, the company joined the Flemish government's audit covenant, which was intended to help meet the

'All the printing processes that we do here will now be covered by this energy certificate. Specifically, we are committed to consuming a little less energy every year in our production process.'



Peter Leroy,
Production Manager at Roularta Printing

Kyoto targets. An energy expert drew up a plan that Roularta implemented. It was then subjected to a Flemish audit.

Paper and electricity

Now the company is raising the bar again with ISO 50001. 'We need to create a separate energy performance indicator for all processes that require significant energy consumption', Leroy tells us. 'Then it is up to us to fulfil those indicators by taking all kinds of smart measures. In terms of working with a printing press, that means for example that we need to print an increasing number of square metres of paper with one kWh of electricity. We currently have a total of 14 processes here for which we need to take an energy performance indicator into account.

Over time, of course, that will enable us to systematically reduce our entire energy consumption.'

It is not easy to obtain an ISO 50001 certificate: Roularta called in an external specialist who took almost two years to complete the task. 'Now we have set ourselves new goals for 2022, and we evaluate each year whether we are on track. We set the bar a bit higher every year. That means constant pressure from now on. We have already achieved the big wins; in the best case scenario, we will be able to perform a few percentage points better by 2022. Our new printing press will be arriving soon, and because it is equipped with the very latest technology, we will be able to drive our energy consumption down a bit more.'



'Our readers' market has grown by 2.3 million euros: that is gigantic, especially because 2018 was a fantastic year as well.'

Frederik Delaplace, CEO of Mediafin

Credibility is increasingly our USP

Mediafin, the publisher of the business newspapers De Tijd and L'Echo, was cruising at two speeds last year.

'We saw phenomenal growth in the readers' market, but the advertising market was lagging a bit behind. The result was a perfect balance. The total turnover fell slightly, although profits remained high. But a silver medal is not good enough. We want gold', says the CEO, Frederik Delaplace.

2019 was ...' Frederik Delaplace, the CEO of Mediafin, hesitates as he tries to find an adjective to describe the past year. 'Particularly challenging,' he concludes at last. 'The reason it took me so long to find the right word is that we have had a very different year in our readers' market to the one we had in the advertising market.'

'Let me start with the good news. In the readers' market, 2019 was our best year ever. We have never sold this many subscriptions before: we now have more than 60,000 paying subscribers. And we have seen explosive growth on our digital channels. That means that the basis of this company has an incred-



© Frank Toussaint

ible amount of traction on the market. Our readers' market has grown by 2.3 million euros: that is gigantic, especially because 2018 was a fantastic year as well.'

'I am noticing a rush towards quality and we are profiting from that. You can only catch the wind if your sails are tight, though. Our only USP is credibility, and Mediafin is increasingly the only market player that consistently achieves that. We are not prepared to compromise on that either. In a lot of our counterparts' digital models, there are sometimes other motives at play than 'write the best piece you can', I have noticed. You won't find us sending thirty news alerts for a storm with winds of 50 miles an hour or end-

less opinion pieces of whether there are two or three wolves running wild in Belgium.'

According to Delaplace, Mediafin does not change its journalistic approach from channel to channel either: 'The reports on our app are as reliable as the ones in the newspaper. This goes back to our most important decision ever: charging for use of our digital channels. That was ten years ago now. It was important for reasons of business economics, but also for the company's DNA. The payment model is the guarantee that our titles can offer the same quality everywhere, even on your mobile. That 'mobilification' is increasing at breakneck speed, by the way. Mobile has become our most important channel in just a couple of years. During the week, two thirds of our news consumption is now on smartphones.'

Jobs in new areas

This story of editorial success is mitigated by a difficult commercial year. 'The way companies and brands communicate has been changing at incredible speed over the past few years. We are also responding to that. Previously, customers who wanted to buy a page in the newspaper would only contact us at the end of the line. For the past few years, however, we have been turning that relationship upside down. We want to be there at the beginning of the advertising or communication cycle. That is why we sit down with our partners first to look at their communication needs, and only then do we propose custom solutions. That is less and less often simply a page in the paper or a website take-over.'

'To respond to the new needs, we are developing new jobs in content publishing, public relations or communications based on data,

for example. That is all going quite well, but not well enough. The change to traditional advertising threw a spanner into the works last year, partly cyclically and partly structurally. We lost 4 million euros in advertising revenue that could only partly be replaced with alternative income. There is nothing exceptional about that on the market, but that is cold comfort.'

'That is precisely the most important challenge for 2020 as well: to hold on to our growth in readers and find answers to the challenges in the advertising market quickly enough. We need to ensure that we can provide advertisers with data and digital solutions in the same way as big players like Facebook and Google, in a far more valuable context, knowing full well that we can never beat them in terms of quantity. We want to graft a quality model onto the new technologies.'

Even more independent

'Mediafin will continue setting its own course as an independent company. The past two years have been the best in our history. But that is quite simply our duty to our shareholders. I want to continue fulfilling that pioneering role, not just for our shareholders, but also because the 260 Mediafin staff are winners and we want to keep things that way.'

This goes back to our most important decision ever: charging for use of our digital channels. That was ten years ago now. It was important for reasons of business economics, but also for the company's DNA.

HR policy is an extension of our long-term vision

There is phenomenal diversity among Roularta's 1,300 employees. Journalists, editors, reprographers, art directors, IT staff, developers, bookkeepers, product managers, administrative staff, commercial representatives, printers, brand managers: these are just some of the positions we have.





'Of course we must not lose sight

of our core values in the midst of all this

digital magnificence. We are a media

company and content is king.'

Katrien De Nolf , HR director of Roularta Media Group

We also have a continual influx of people with skills that didn't even exist a few years ago. Right now we need strong digital marketers, for example, who have no difficulty negotiating the very newest media channels. And data specialists help us interpret the large quantities of data we have at our disposal. That offers a unique opportunity for both the commercial departments and the editorial teams to get to know our customers and readers even better.

Of course we must not lose sight of our core values in the midst of all this digital magnificence. We are a media company and content is king. We are still searching relentlessly for great writers who can tell exciting stories, investigative journalists who can get

to the heart of an issue and researchers who take data journalism to the next level. Our Trends Business Information is the biggest database of detailed information on all the companies in Belgium, from the largest corporations through to the tiniest sole traders. That is useful to anyone in search of financial and marketing data. First and foremost, though, it is fantastic material for the modern journalist.

Exciting sector

Of course all companies are desperate for data analysts and people with a lot of digital expertise, but they are hard to find. We publish job vacancies in print and online, and last year we recruited an HR researcher who actively seeks out the profiles we need. We need to convince them that there is no sector more exciting than the media. We are also in contact with schools so that we stay at the top of young people's minds when they take their first steps onto the employment market.

Furthermore, we mustn't forget our own staff when it comes to the digital shift. We are a company that is constantly evolving. And our fast lines of communication and decision-making mean there is a risk of some people not being completely on board if we step up a gear. Preventing that is a big challenge. You can only stay involved if you know the direction in which the company is going.

That is why we have created the Roularta Academy, a collection of internal and external explanations, presentations, info sessions and training courses. Taking these trainings helps our colleagues to support and achieve Roularta's goals better. They also experience personal growth and professional development.

Family company

People need to be convinced by our own corporate culture and the pleasant atmosphere in the workplace, and we succeed in doing that. As a family company, we have a clear long-term vision and that is not something separate from our HR policy. If we want to stay successful in the long term, it is crucial for us to pay attention to our employees' health and wellbeing.

We live in a time when burnout, depression and loneliness are social problems. We are not immune from that as a company. That is why we make space for our staff to do things during working hours that energise them even if these things don't necessarily have anything to do with their job. We organise workshops and training courses. We provide opportunities for sports. We encourage short meetings, preferably standing up. All of these things can only contribute to making our employees happier. And I am convinced that our customers and readers ultimately sense that too.



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