

Luxemburger Wort

Calling for a complete culture change

Like many other newspapers around the world, Luxemburg's leading daily, the Luxemburger Wort, is faced with the challenge of adapting their editorial products, services, infrastructure and IT to the changing needs of a once traditional print audience. One that is embracing the opportunities presented in the digital world.

Luxemburg is truly a pluralistic society. Of the country's half-million residents, only 290,000 are native Luxemburgers. A large proportion of the population are immigrants, primarily from Portugal and Italy.

Every day, 150,000 cross-border commuters come from France, Belgium and Germany to work. "There is nothing like our society anywhere else in the world," said Jean-Lou Siweck, Editor-in-chief, "not even in Switzerland."

And the Luxemburger Wort reflects that. Established in 1848 by the Saint-Paul Luxembourg (SPL) publishing house, the printed edition of the paper, with a circulation of around 70,000, has articles in both German and French. The newspaper runs websites in four different languages and with original content.

In addition to the printed daily and the 4 websites on www.wort.lu, the SPL portfolio comprises the weekly Télécran, the country's top-selling magazine and the weekly newspaper Contacto for the Portuguese audience as well as shares in Radio Latina.

Based in Luxembourg City, the company employs almost 400 people with about 100 journalists (all languages included). For years, the staff of the newspapers, magazines, website and radio worked independently of each other.

So, what prompted the company to redefine their multimedia product strategy? Jean-Lou explained, "We



Morning meeting at the newsdesk of Luxemburger Wort

saw that the newspaper landscape and consumer needs were changing and all around us, local papers were dying. We observed what the bigger newspapers elsewhere were doing and decided to be proactive ourselves and do something about changing our approach before it was too late."

That meant, among other things, having to properly merge the two very separate worlds of print and online and to create an organisation that puts the customer first and does not focus solely on platforms.

The Institute for Media Strategies (IFMS) was called in to set up and support the transformation process. Andreas Holpert, former business editor at the Wort, was appointed as the project manager with the tasks

to steer the journey from a single product to a multi-platform media company.

"Getting the setup and project strategy right was very important for us," says Andreas. "We were after all a very traditional newspaper operation and our colleagues did not feel the need to change strongly enough. So being transparent from the beginning about what we want to achieve and why as well as how we want to do it, was imperative."

The project plan encompassed five major phases: project setup, analysis and deep understanding of the market and existing organisation, definition of a pilot desk concept, implementation of the pilot project, and finally the roll-out across all desks.

Running parallel to the newsroom strategy project were projects to evaluate and introduce a new editorial system. In addition the existing office space was rebuilt to provide room for a newsdesk that manages digital and print newsflow.

Market insight and customer understanding

One of the major innovations in these kinds of projects was the commitment to invest in the understanding of the market and the customer. The Institute together with the international market research firm SINUS-Integral developed a concept that focuses on life interests and topics which are independent from media brands or media products.

Together with a value-based characterisation of the Luxemburger population and the identification of the brand perception, a comprehensive picture of the current position emerged pointing out the potential for future coverage levels and modes of presentation of the brand „Luxemburger Wort“ on different platforms and outlets.

Planning ahead

A further piece of analysis of the news already being covered depicted the proportion that was actually breaking news and what news could have been planned in advance. “Not all the news is on short notice and breaking,” said Andreas. “It is often said that planning is a natural enemy of journalists, but our goal to create a newsroom that can handle digital and print in the same quality, requires moving away from a 24-hour cycle mentality. This called for a complete cultural change, more intelligent workflows and better management of the workload.”

New roles in the newsroom

In order to raise the awareness and acceptance for the change a rather unusual way was chosen: All editorial staff were asked which newsroom concept they would prefer. The staff chose to implement the so-called “Newsroom 3.0” model, developed and implemented for the first time at Londons Daily Telegraph.

Core to the Newsroom 3.0 model is the shift of responsibility for digital and print content from platform specialists to topic specialists. This means not only new role definitions but also completely new roles in the newsroom.¹

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Andreas Holpert,
Managing Editor

The newsroom concept for the desk team was created with the dedicated role of a planning editor for all content published in future (beyond 24 hours to a year or even more). The Planning Editor is joined by two Daily Editors who work in shifts to ensure that there is always one responsible person on the newsdesk. Another new role is that of Visual Editor as well as a Social Media Editor.

One of those with a new title is Christophe Langenbrink, formerly Editor of International Affairs and manager of the print newsdesk, who is now Planning Editor. As such, he is responsible for identifying topics for the magazine, newspaper, and online, weeks or even months in advance. “That is a big shift in think-



From left: Editor-in-chief Jean-Lou Siweck and Planning Editor Christoph Langenbrink

ing right there, going from a 24-hour news cycle mentality. It's quite a balancing act, but I am open enough – and young enough – to adjust,” he laughed.

Along with the new job positions and the new editorial system, there is a new workflow in place designed to meet consumer needs throughout the day. “We used to meet twice a day to discuss topics to be covered,” Christoph said, “now we meet at least three times a day, bit shorter and more efficient: in the morning to discuss the day’s coverage, in the afternoon for the online peaks and in the evening for topics to be highlighted at 18:00, 20:00 and for the next morning at 6:30. Once a week there is a big planning conference to determine the angles and media, such as video, to be employed in covering a topic.”

People development and training

One major part of the transformation project was a 3-day multimedia

journalism seminar for around 100 editorial staff in German and French language. The training sessions, more than anything else, were meant to change the mind-set – the first step being to stress that the audience the reporters write for is not just family and friends, but a customer.

“It was a cultural revolution for the newspaper”

Christoph Langenbrink,
Planning Editor

Profiles derived from the SINUS study were discussed, so that the group could better understand the population segments making up the audi-

ence. The group then discussed work done in print and online from the previous days and talked about how things could have been presented in other channels.

During the seminar the group also took a look at other newsroom organisations around the world that had undergone a transformation to see how they were organised.

One of the core parts of the seminar was to undertake their own multimedia and multiplatform projects in order to get hands-on experience mak-

ing a video filmed with an iPad Mini and cut it using iMovie. To conclude the three days, the group simulated an integrated newsroom and by taking a big story, such as a plane crash at Luxemburg Airport or a royal wedding, and plan how to present a story as a whole on different platforms.

“People came in on the first day in a bad mood,” said Andreas, “full of fear that what they had been doing the past 20 years was of no value any longer. But after the 3-day programme was finished, most of my colleagues left with fresh air in their brains – with less fear, and in a much better mood.”

The new newsroom was not yet set up when training sessions ended and so staff could not immediately go into the new environment to implement what they had just learned. “A fundamental newsroom change takes years,” Andreas said, “it is not done in a couple of months.”

“It was a cultural revolution for the newspaper,” Christoph said. “In the past, online was viewed by some as lacking depth; print was for the realm of intellectuals. Now a new mind-set is required and that is something that takes time for people to change their ways.”

Christoph said that since implementing the change, click counts have greatly improved – practically doubling in six months to 100,000 per day. “For a country the size of Luxemburg with some 500,000 residents, that is saying something,” he commented. “By the clicks, we can tell now much better what is of interest to the readers in the different languages. It appears clearly that the readers’ interests and habits are not the same for the different communities.”

The editorial transformation project was completed in the first quarter of 2014. The first phase of the new editorial system is also already in use.



From left: Managing Editor Andreas Holpert and Desk Chief Marc Thill

The road ahead

What plans does Jean-Lou have for the paper in the future? In order to remain attractive to the multilingual audience who can access news from all over the world, he said, “We will reinforce content related to Luxemburg, give context to that news. The good old days when you could just take news from the wires and plug it in your paper are over.”

The bundling of resources in the integrated newsroom allows the journalists to devote themselves to their specific areas of expertise, which gives the reader value. The news evolves into more background stories that are planned rather than a rehashing of yesterday’s news.

Traditionally, local news came out of press releases and press conferences, now there will be an increase

in journalists doing their own research into items of interest to the reader. “Our goal is to give the paper a different look, a deeper background to the news,” Jean-Lou said. “We want to make Luxemburger Wort a

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Jean-Lou Siweck,
Editor-in-chief

more surprising newspaper for the reader, rather than a follow-up to news from the day before. With everybody operating websites, we are in greater competition with the radio and TV stations of Luxemburg and there is an increased need to keep the paper’s promise of more background and deeper analysis.”

And five years down the line?

“From the absolute peak about 15 years ago, we have lost 15-20% in the number of papers sold,” Jean-Lou said. Yearly print subscriptions lapse when subscribers change their way of consuming the news. The e-paper

was included with the print subscription and news online is still free, but Luxemburger Wort will be developing offers for the readers. “Paid content is one of the next major changes in our offering. We see the new newsroom structure and philosophy as one of the corner stones to offer attractive digital products.”

Jean-Lou’s focus is therefore on the most important resource in the company, the staff: “There is a lot of energy in the newsroom and it is my job to bring the ideas of the journalists into being.”

With the project having formally come to an end, “the intensity of change is still quite high – it is not yet the time to be able to sit back and appreciate the overall outcome of the changes. Overall, though, we are quite happy with the development and have noticed a significant improvement in quality online without a decrease in the quality of our print product,” Jean-Lou concluded.

1) For a detailed description of the Newsroom model 1.0 to 3.0 please go to the IFMS blog on www.ifms-ltd.com