



MULTI CROSS MEDIA IS THE WAY TO GO

Rik Rensen talks about his first year as Editor in Chief at Radio Netherlands Worldwide and the changes that have taken place at RNW

There have been many changes, small and big. But let me focus on the bigger changes. I have known the organisation for many years, from 1985-89 I was a correspondent for RNW in Italy, and in 2004 our Director General Jan Hoek asked me to do an evaluation, so I had the opportunity of getting to know this company extensively through talking with more than 100 people working in RNW. When four years later I was appointed Editor in Chief changes had already begun to take place, and I intensified them. The biggest change was to move from a mono media company to a multi media company working in a cross-media way. By multi I mean we had to start working not only on the shortwave radio but to put content on the website, we are working in ten different languages, so we intensified putting content – audio, video, text, photographs – on the website in ten different languages dependent on the media and distribution situation in the country we are targeting. We intensified our presence on the mobile platform, and we also started working more and more with video so we've been setting up a video department.

The video production is for your web?

Video production is for the web only, we make web videos for the different language websites. This video material is also distributed to a number of our 3,000 media partners worldwide. We are training our journalists to be multi-functional, if necessary. In future, a journalist has to be able to produce text, audio, video and photographs – that's a big cultural change. Cultural changes mean that you have to talk and explain, and talk again and explain again, training the existing journalists and bringing in some new people. Let me give you an example: we produce once a month a 12 minute interview about international affairs with our prime minister Jan Peter Balkenende, talking in English, and this is translated into the other languages. The interviewer is our Brussels-based correspondent Vanessa Mock. To my astonishment and amazement she had to be trained

only twice – she is a complete natural and very professional. The step from only making audio to also video has been accomplished faster than I could have hoped. Interactivity is also very important in the transition from mono to multi – you need to be interactive with your target groups which means you are not only pushing your content but you are also receiving comments back.

Was there resistance to the cultural change in the newsroom or did it go smoothly?

I always say to the journalist 'If you don't want to do it, then don't do it and just continue writing or making audio'. Which means those journalists that want to change become the role models in the newsroom, and they prove to all the other people that it is also fun to work multi-functional. But our journalists were very enthusiastic, certainly 80-90%, and I am not going to create war with the people who don't want to do it.

In the case of a major news story, RNW is up against the BBC and VOA which are big operators in Latin America – is it a worry to you that they have got more resources to throw at a story?

It is not a worry, I think it makes you more inventive. I found that out for myself when in 1989 I started up single-handedly the RTL newsroom, I was the first employee as the Editor in Chief and I could handpick the journalists who became part of the RTL newsroom. In the first few years RTL was the underdog. It makes you very inventive and creative, having the competition of BBC or Radio France Internationale, Deutsche Welle, Voice of America. Let's say the way in which we differentiate is that we always, also in international stories, try to find the Dutch angle; we also incorporate in those stories comments from Dutch communities living in parts of the world where news stories are breaking. Our presence in Latin America with the website and with audio broadcasts coming from a very small country which is the Netherlands with independent news which can be

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trusted, is also a differentiation.

Tell us about your multi-year plan for 2010 to 2014.

One of the main elements of the plan is that we want to be more relevant and to focus more intensively on the things we do because we have a limited budget. So focus is very important, knowing exactly in which countries we want to be present. We have intensified our presence in those countries where there is a lack of press freedom and also in countries that have a link with the Netherlands - in Africa, in Latin America, in South Asia. A greater focus on the web is important for us, and being more interactive. In Africa this means not only working together with partners on FM frequencies or using the shortwave but also using the mobile web. I have the feeling that in many countries in Africa the mobile phone at this moment is only used for SMS purposes and I think that we will have to wait to use the mobile platforms for the distribution of text, video and audio. So focus, that's new, and we can focus far better at this moment than in the past because we use the web. You can count your success if you use the web, or your lack of success. You can cooperate far better with media partners - not only radio stations but also TV broadcast partners or newspapers that are in need of content for their websites - because you can ask your prioritised media partners which operate in the heart of your target groups to report to you on how successful you are. And on the basis of success or the lack of success, changing your course is possible and also necessary.

What are the next steps?

The convincing process is over, people know that we have to work in a different way. One year ago when I saw the first videos, they were more or less TV videos, mini documentaries. To get people used to the internet also means that you have to make 'webbie' videos, short videos. We have set up a special website about swine flu in all the 10 different languages. We use an animated film to explain what swine flu is, how you can prevent it and

how you can recover from it. We have all these new possibilities to reach younger target groups, for example with the use of animation. At the moment we are preparing ourselves for a multi cross media way of operating in Africa for the FIFA World Cup. We have also established within our news room a small disaster team. Our experience was that if a big plane crash or earth quake or a tsunami happened we were very good at distributing the news but all the service information regarding the disaster was not present on our website, was not present in our radio broadcast, was not present anywhere. Now we have service information such as useful telephone numbers and what to do on the mobile website, on our normal website, in radio broadcasts, in our digital World Newspaper etc. And that's also the way to go in the future: looking at our target groups, we want to create not only content that informs about political, economic developments in the world but also content that you can use.

Looking back on your first year as Editor in Chief, have there been surprises?

A surprise in the positive sense was the realisation that people adapted much faster than I thought, the joy and the enthusiasm among the journalists. On the other hand, I also have to be cautious that I don't run ahead of the troops and when I look back I see I have lost them all. You have to be very careful that you don't go too fast, not only regarding the newsroom, but also regarding the countries where we are present. You and I we live in paradise regarding the fastness with which you can download information from the internet. But if I go to the north of Italy for example, there is no fast moving internet. Not all the countries in the world have the same possibilities. So we are thinking about ways in which we can adapt our website to light media versions.

What is it that you personally want to achieve?

To prepare the way and prove to the



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journalists of this organisation and all the people who support the journalists that it is necessary but also fun to use all the media platforms in a multi cross media way. Multi for me means putting the same story on different platforms – and cross means adapting your story, the content, for each platform: the mobile platform, the web on your laptop and your desktop, shortwave radio or FM radio. The thing you have to do, and you have to be clever, is to tease the story from one platform to the other. To train people not only in a multi but also in a cross media way means you have to put yourself in the position of the consumer, knowing exactly how you can create moments of contact with this consumer. And it's also fun to see people go from one platform to the other because you have engineered this in a clever way. If I succeed in convincing and training this newsroom – with the help of others – in a multi cross media way, then I have accomplished a very important goal.

How do you use media during a typical day?

That has changed very much over

the last couple of years. Instead of switching on the TV and reading the newspaper first thing, I now look at the RNW website on my laptop. At the same time I use my iPhone and scan some of the digital newspapers and all the important news, look at what the competition is doing, look at the New York Times – to prepare myself for our editorial meeting and also to see if I can contribute some relevant stories to the meeting. The moment the screen of my mobile device became as big as it is now and the quality of the video improved as much as it has done over the last two, three years, I switched from TV to my mobile device.

Rik Rensen, thank you.

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