The future of broadcast: putting the audience first (RTBF Journey: content first – Xavier Huberland, Directeur Général du Pôle Médias)

Article by Jolien Joris of 4P square

We don't have to tell you that the future of television broadcasters is threatened by the digital revolution. Our viewing habits have shifted significantly. Or do you still have satellite and cable TV offering you bundled channels to watch? Right, I don't think so. These days we all want to cherry pick our favourite channels, shows, movies etc. We have unlimited access to video channels such as Amazon, Netflix, Youtube and even free online channels. Obviously, this causes a big challenge for broadcasters such as RTBF, the radio and television broadcasting company of the French community of Belgium. To address this challenge, broadcasters need to rethink their decade-old model built around solid media pillars. And that's exactly what RTBF did.

Audience first

Until recently RTBF was very media-oriented with a distinct separation between 3 big pillars: radio, television and digital. However, the incredible advances in technology and the high quality of content available online, have led to significant changes in audience expectations.

And who should be the center of attention? Right, the audience. RTBF had a major wakeup call and decided to shift towards an audience-oriented and more horizontal organization structure. According to Xavier Huberland this makes it much easier "to be where the audience is". And that is crucial since one of the objectives of the Belgian television broadcasting company is to be the reference media of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, serving all audiences.

But... where is the audience?

Do you remember sitting on the couch together with your mom, dad and siblings watching your favourite family show? Well, good news, the concept of family viewing is not dead. 26% of young adults aged 18 to 24, use television in a family setting. Starting from 35, it even is the second most popular device to use together with family members. So, we are still sitting together as a family in the same room to watch our favourite show. But while parents are watching something on television, one child might be streaming a Netflix movie on its laptop while another is watching Snapchat series on its mobile phone. New media formats didn't kill the television star, but we expect to be able to watch what we want, whenever we want on the device of our choosing.

How to serve the audience?

RTBF wants to serve all four of its audiences - 'nous', 'affinitaires', 'jeunes adultes' and 'nouvelles générations' - by offering them the right content at the right moment on the device of their choice. Obviously, this requires cross-media content that isn't limited to a single format. For example, RTBF developed 'vews', short news videos primarily for the web, bringing information in a direct yet authentic way. By posting this content on social media, they try to reach young adults (18-35 years) who are looking for quick news updates rather than spending time watching the television news. After being spread online, these 'vews' are sometimes integrated in longer news programs. Another example of

cross-media content is RTBF shows such as 'The Voice' with digital extensions on Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook.

Creative kickstarter

The best has yet to come. Did you know that RTBF is the kickstarter for a new drama industry? By creativity in partnership, management and strategy RTBF has been able to build from the ground up a new television drama industry. In only 5 years, 5 successful dramas were broadcasted and at this moment 18 dramas are in development. With strong domestic ratings and international sales, this fiction creation seems very promising. Moreover, all dramas are available on Auvio, RTBF's livestreaming and replay platform.

We were not surprised to hear Xavier Huberland proudly tell that RTBF has already won 56 awards on several festivals. Because not only do they put their content and their customers first, but above all they put their audience first.