

How we work



New technology, new distribution channels, new products, new ideas, new markets. Always something new, whether an opportunity or a threat. How does a large organisation such as RTL Group, the leading European entertainment network, keep itself out in front, and make the most of the knowledge and experience it holds?

“Network is the crucial word here,” says Elmar Heggen, Chief Financial Officer and Head of RTL Group’s Corporate Centre, “It best describes the relationship between our profit centres. Each is autonomous, led by its own CEO. This entrepreneurial approach ensures they can act quickly and flexibly in their local markets.” But the whole network of strong local operations is also linked by the Corporate Centre. “Decentralisation is our organisational philosophy,” explains Heggen, “however, the Corporate Centre has a very important role, for example shaping and implementing Group strategy, finances, our overall portfolio, and important things like developing the entrepreneurial talents of the future.” So, how does advice and information flow around the network?

“Syocos”, says Claire Davenport. “Short for Synergy Committees,” she quickly clarifies. Claire is Executive Vice President for Corporate Strategy and Business Synergies at RTL Group. Synergies is something of a buzzword in the media industry but companies in this sector do find it hard to put a concrete figure on any kind of synergy. Claire explains why: “Well, if you are setting up a new strand to your business, it’s incredibly useful to talk to someone who’s done it before, been there in your situation. But you’d find it hard to put a number on how valuable that information is.”

So that’s the purpose of the Syocos. To share information across the various profit centres of the Group to realise benefits – tangible or intangible. So while each profit centre makes its own management decisions, it is free to draw on the understanding and expertise of other RTL Group family members. To learn from mistakes, duplicate successes, pass on ideas, make suggestions. So how does it work?

“We have established Syocos where the CEOs and senior managers of our profit centres get together regularly – whoever is most relevant to the Syoco in question,” explains Claire, “It might be at director level, or it could be the experts responsible for more specific areas. And sometimes we find it’s beneficial to bring together both so we can share our in-depth expertise with senior level decision makers throughout the group.”

The committees follow a classical pyramid structure. All the profit centre CEOs are members of the Operations Management Committee (OMC), which meets every six to eight weeks. Then there are three major Syocos reporting in to them – one for Programming, one for Radio, and one to look at new Business Models. Each of these three then has appropriate sub-meetings feeding into it. So, for instance, the Programming Syoco sub-divides into Rights Negotiations, News & Current Affairs, Entertainment Formats, and International TV Research.

“It really allows TV and radio companies who aren’t competitors to learn from each other’s experiences, especially where markets are similar,” continues Claire, “It’s helpful in negotiation tactics too, and in finding partners. It also allows us to act as a group when appropriate, to offer something pan-European, which no other group can do in the same way.” The information exchange isn’t limited to committee meetings, of course. There are regular visits to each other’s offices to see how things work, and managers and directors know who to call at other profit centres when information is needed quickly.

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Elmar Heggen, Chief Financial Officer and Head of the Corporate Centre of RTL Group



Examples of subjects discussed at length in 2006 are VOD (video on demand) models, purchasing of new media rights, user-generated content and social networks plus, of course, the regular discussion of which shows work, and why – whether on RTL stations or competitor stations, as well as scheduling, promotional and production ideas.

One idea for 2006 was the introduction of the ‘Creative Circles’ programme. This project, developed by Corporate Human Resources, involved 12 young executives researching creative projects and developing them into new business ideas. As well as helping the Group identify and develop creative and management talent, it helps the participants broaden their business knowledge. Romain Mannelli, Executive Vice President Corporate HR, explains: “The approach is two-fold: the participants receive high quality training sessions in the areas of creative thinking, presentation skills, project management and working across cultures. At the same time, they create innovative business ideas for our Group. Overall a win-win situation for the participants as well as RTL Group.” Elmar Heggen confirms the approach: “Our young talents pitched three new business ideas to the OMC and we saw all three as worthy of further consideration and have assigned a senior mentor to each project.”

The three ideas from the young executives were all programme-based. But what else do the Sycos themselves expect to be discussing over the coming years? “An evolution of the topics discussed this year,” says Claire, “ideas on production and entertainment formats, and particularly as we are accelerating towards digitalisation, more and more we are exchanging views and advice on digital business models and digital switchover.”

Executive Committee

Gerhard Zeiler
Chief Executive Officer

Elmar Heggen
Chief Financial Officer and
Head of the Corporate Centre

Operations Management Committee

Gerhard Zeiler
Chief Executive Officer
Member of the Bertelsmann AG
Executive Board

Jane Lighting
Chief Executive Officer,
Five

Alain Berwick
Chief Executive Officer,
RTL Radio and Télé Letzebuerg

Christoph Mainusch
Chief Executive Officer,
RTL Televizija

Tony Cohen
Chief Executive Officer,
FremantleMedia

Romain Mannelli
Executive Vice President
Corporate HR

Claire Davenport
Executive Vice President Corporate
Strategy/Business Synergies

Anke Schäferkordt
Chief Executive Officer,
RTL Television

Vincent de Dorlodot
General Counsel

Nicolas de Tavernost
Président du Directoire,
M6

Philippe Delusinne
Chief Executive Officer,
TVI S.A.

Andreas Walker
Executive Vice President
Regional Operations

Axel Duroux
Chief Executive Officer,
RTL Radio (France)

Fons van Westerloo
Chief Executive Officer,
RTL Nederland

Dirk Gerkens
Chief Executive Officer,
RTL Klub

Gert Zimmer
Chief Executive Officer,
RTL Radio Deutschland

Elmar Heggen
Chief Financial Officer and
Head of the Corporate Centre

Eduardo Zulueta
Managing Director,
MABUAT (Spain)

Oliver Herrgesell
Executive Vice President
Communications and Marketing