If You Can't Beat Them, Build an Alliance

How Belgian publishers compete with the Duopoly

No one knows their readership like a local publisher. However, in 2016, Belgian publishers noticed a decline in ad revenue that they attributed to a familiar interloper: the Duopoly. Facebook and Google's granular behavioral and interest data offered advertisers the ability to target the audience that local publishers had spent decades building. These platform giants were capturing most of the region's ad spending, and individual publishers didn't have the data or tools to compete.

To even the playing field, three leading Belgian publishers—IPM, Produpress, and Pebble Media—forged the DaviD alliance, the Digital Alliance on Valuable Inventory and Data. This alternative to the global networks would offer competitive features while showcasing local publishers' strengths—namely strong brand recognition, an on-the-ground understanding of local audiences, and support staff that nurtured personal relationships with advertisers.

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Pieter Jadoul
Business Strategy and Development Director at Pebble Media

Four distinct challenges

The alliance had four distinct challenges to over-come. First, while the shift to programmatic buying hadn't caught Belgian publishers entirely by sur-prise, none had taken the steps needed to really capitalize on the technology's efficiency. They still relied primarily on direct sales teams who were skeptical of or not adequately trained for program-matic platforms. Nor had they built technology that could sufficiently address advertiser needs.

Advertisers accustomed to working with glob-al platforms were pushing for the same kind of high-quality, standardized data from independent publishers. To compete, DaviD would have to de-liver behavioral, interest, and demographic data that was rich in relevant attributes and updated in real time. So advertisers who wanted to find a new parent interested in buying a minivan could do that just as quickly through DaviD as on Facebook.

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Further, advertisers insisted on new levels of trans-parency. While Facebook and Google benefitted from a logged in state and the data agreements that govern them, local publishers had to assure their clients that the data they used was GDPR compliant. Advertisers wanted to know where and how publishers collected their data, that readers understood their methods, and that the data rep-resented a real audience with the promised attri-butes and demographics.

Meeting those needs would require collaboration among competitors. DaviD members committed to sharing data and best practices, splitting the build budget and implementing a common standard for data collection, analysis and reporting that would motivate advertisers to spend more money with the alliance instead of Google or Facebook. Finally, they agreed to enough transparency to assure ad-vertisers that their data was "fresh" and represent-ed actual people.

Taken together, DaviD built a one-stop shop for brands and agencies—a complete programmatic ecosystem.

The solution—a flexible platform unrivaled in Europe

DaviD decided to partner with Cxense to build a system unrivaled by any other European alliance. They needed technology that would merge their inventory and their data sets on a platform that included shared data management, sell side, and demand side technology. The new system had to allow publishers to collect and analyze data, create segments, sell inventory and allow advertisers and alliance members to gauge each campaign's success. In other words, they would have to build a complete programmatic ecosystem.

Cxense' DMP became the foundation for the ambitious project. The Cxense platform captures data from every publishers' site, enriches it with first- and third-party data when needed, and creates the 90 ready-made audience segments DaviD offers its advertisers. Publishers can also use the system to create bespoke segments for clients who want to reach just the right niche. "The Cxense DMP is the glue that holds the DaviD alliance together," said Pieter Jadoul, Business Strategy and Development Director of Pebble Media.

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Those APIs played a role in standardizing publisher data per advertisers' wishes. Each publisher has integrated a Cxense script that tracks audience data consistently across properties. However, the platform also allows for Chinese walls between publishers—each publisher can see all of their data and segments but need only share agreed upon information with allies.

In addition to the DMP, DaviD's ecosystem includes a supply-side platform where publishers put their inventory up for sale and a demand-side platform where advertisers can buy it and get real-time reporting on campaigns. Taken together, they've built a one-stop shop for brands and agencies.

The **DaviD network** in numbers

120 WEBSITES

260 MIO.
PAGE VIEWS

20 MIO.
UNIQUE VISITORS

Finally, the alliance used Cxense DMP as the basis for a fair and transparent way to calculate earnings for its members. Rather than take their chances with ad-hoc agreements, DaviD created a remuneration algorithm that calculates each publisher's contribution to an advertisers campaign in real-time using ad impressions served. By taking negotiations out of human hands, the alliance ensures a fair distribution of earnings and good relationships among the partners.

Reach and results

DaviD's network, connected through Cxense DMP, comprises 120 websites with 260 million page views and 20 million unique visitors. The media network available to advertisers for programmatic buying consists of 200 websites, manages 6 billion bid requests each month and reaches 30 million unique visitors. By contrast, Facebook reaches about 7.5 million Belgians, according to a report by Statista. While the alliance is still new, early indicators point to success. Still, it has ambitious goals and plans to grow from its three founding members. "We want to enlist every publisher in Belgium. That's our goal, and I think it's in the cards," Jadoul said.

Most importantly, there's interest from advertisers. "All the big agencies are signing up. The DaviD alliance is getting a lot of support from the local offices of all the big international agencies already," said Jadoul. "That's an excellent sign."

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