Inside Mediahuis’ 12-month sprint to supercharged advertising ROI
An inventive data scientist with the right tools made all the difference

Key results

- By integrating data from every asset onto the Cxense platform, Mediahuis created a unified, segmentable and marketable audience.

- Mediahuis based their digital strategy on Cxense’s out-of-the-box DMP, allowing them to focus resources on creating a compelling offering for their ad customers.

- Ad sales and data science teams worked closely together to create highly marketable custom segments and campaigns that increased CTR by 26% and boosted conversion rates to up to 60%.

- Leveraging the Cxense API, Mediahuis was able to stitch together publisher and client data to track user behavior and deliver an increased RoI.

- A combination of reader trust, targeted campaigns, inventive data science, a brand-safe environment and GDPR-conformity has made Mediahuis more competitive against global platforms.

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Jessica Bulthé, Data scientist, Mediahuis
Leading European media company Mediahuis, which runs over 40 of the biggest news, classifieds, and career websites in Belgium and the Netherlands wanted to create an advertising experience that could match the duopoly’s level of granularity while offering a level of service and flexibility the giants never could.

They began with a few advantages. To start, in an area with 6.4 million residents, 4.4 million of them are registered Mediahuis readers, that’s almost 70 percent. This large local audience logs 320 million page views per month on the networks sites, a brand safe environment trusted by readers and advertisers alike. But Mediahuis lacked the data-literacy and platform technology it needed to integrate siloed data from each publication. They called on Cxense to help them bridge the gap.

“Our digital strategy is reader-centric, with a focus on selling subscriptions,” says Mediahuis strategy director Geert Desager. “That doesn’t mean no advertising; it means the advertising needs to be more personalized, more relevant. That’s where Cxense and their approach to data come in.”

Like most publishers, Mediahuis had reams of data culled from millions of reader interactions with its sites each month. To create a unified, segmentable audience, they would first need to integrate all data onto a single platform.

They would also need artificial intelligence and machine learning organize, enrich and analyze that data in an efficient manner. Only then would they be able to achieve the results its advertising clients wanted.

Even with a large in-house team, a publisher might be able to build a unified data platform in 18 months. But Mediahuis wanted to be up and running within a year. Cxense’s out-of-the-box DMP offered Mediahuis not only the quick start it wanted but the flexibility it needed to create the outstanding campaigns that would draw advertisers and raise revenues.
With Cxense’s DMP in place, Mediahuis recruited Desager to chart a course to higher revenue and several data scientists to make the journey. Together, they paved the way for a slate of new advertising products and bespoke services that could truly set them apart from their global—and local—competitors.

Data scientist Jessica Bulthé began using Cxense to analyze Mediahuis’ troves of first-party data in order to create a number of category-specific as well as bespoke segments. The DMP allowed Mediahuis to target readers based on previously unavailable criteria, such as socio-demographics, intent, and interest. But advertisers soon wanted more.

“Just having a segment of men and women in certain age brackets isn’t enough anymore,” said Bulthé. “Brands want it to be more specific, they want something more niche.” Bulthé realized that by using Cxense DMP, she could offer her clients something global ad platforms never could—campaigns that combine data from Mediahuis and advertising clients to drive specific business goals.

“Using Cxense, I was able to link our data with our advertisers’ and say, ‘These are the readers we need to target, and this is what they read which means this is the branded content they might be interested in.’”

Jessica Bulthé
Data scientist, Mediahuis

First-party data enables the niche segments advertisers want

For instance: One of Belgium’s largest insurance companies came to Mediahuis for a native advertising campaign it hoped would drive conversions. But branded content is a famously upper- to middle-funnel tactic that doesn’t traditionally drive conversions. To get the client’s business goals, Bulthé and her team got creative.

To start, Mediahuis dropped a pixel on their clients’ site, then saw who responded to banner ads that drove to their branded content. Once that data was cross-referenced with its own first-party data, Mediahuis was able to identify readers interested in the company’s car insurance.

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Mediahuis then used the combined datasets to re-target the native ad viewers, serving more relevant messaging alongside the content likely customers were inclined to consume.

As a result, conversion rates skyrocketed. About a quarter of the people who read the native content went to the insurance company, resulting in a

Bringing accountability to branded content
traffic increase of 16% for the duration of the campaign. Once on site, about 60 percent of the readers converted, said Bulthé.

Already now, Mediahuis’ new offering of Cxense powered ad products and campaigns makes up 27 percent of their advertising sales. These targeted campaigns deliver click-through rates that are 26% higher on average than non-targeted campaigns.

What’s more, Cxense’s API made implementing this audience matching offering painless and easy, Bulthé says. “Without Cxense, we would have had to manually import all of the data,” Bulthé says. “But Cxense made it easy because their API calls upload everything automatically, which means we always work with the newest data.”

Mediahuis’ investment in data has paid huge dividends. “Our advertisers have always appreciated the close relationship we have with our readers,” Bulthé says. “With the help of Cxense, we’ve built targeting and reporting capabilities that rival Google and Facebook. It’s so advanced, advertisers are surprised we’ve been building it for only a year.” Bulthé says advertisers also trust Mediahuis more than global platforms because the publisher handles their data more transparently and ethically.

“We don’t use our advertisers’ data for our own or a third party’s benefit,” she says. “That’s a crucial difference. When you put for example a Facebook pixel on your site, Facebook uses that data not only for you but also for their own goals. With Cxense, we can assure our clients that their data is used only for their campaigns. We don’t repurpose it for anyone else. That creates a lot of trust.”

“More trusted than the Duopoly and just as effective”

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Mediahuis now runs multiple, custom-audience campaigns simultaneously, each day, across its network of sites. “We currently have more than 30 live pixels running on our sites for various brand campaigns. It’s going pretty well, there’s a high demand.”

By using Cxense to create nuanced audience segments, Mediahuis has discovered its specialty as a mid-funnel ad seller. “Cxense has helped us better understand our true value to advertisers and build ad products that meet their specific business needs,” Desager says. “Thanks to Cxense we have the flexibility we need to create outstanding campaigns that drive revenue for our advertisers and ourselves.”

Moving forward, Mediahuis plans to use Cxense to move down-funnel by creating performance products that compete with the giant platforms and drive its own eCommerce business. “The focus on short-term results is still very, very heavy, and incredibly important to advertisers,” said Desager. “It won’t be easy, but with Cxense as a partner, we’re confident that we’ll succeed.

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Geert Desager
Strategy director, Mediahuis

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