

Developing an updated corporate brand strategy

VORARLBERGER MEDIENHAUS IS CHANGING its corporate brand to Russ Media, moving from a single newspaper to an international media brand. **by gerold riedmann**

Until now, we have not really communicated our group-level achievements in public, partly because dozens of different company names and brands made it difficult to see the big picture.

But two years ago, we began a series of brand workshops with external consultants to give our most important brands a slight lift. At least that's what we thought back then. As a result of these workshops, we are now in the process of renaming our company portfolio and, more importantly, giving our media group a new umbrella brand.

The population of Vorarlberg is 372,000, and our newspaper, Vorarlberger Nachrichten (VN), reaches 60% of them. We have built a wide spectrum of brands around our flagship newspaper. Our regional online news portal, VOL.AT (Vorarlberg Online), has a 65% reach, and some of our free newspapers have grown to an 80% reach. Since we're also serving the region as an Internet Service Provider and a phone company, there is not too much more room to grow.

Our company names are as fragmented and specialised as the niches we serve. Our national digital ad sales network in Austria runs under the brand austria.com/plus. In Romania and Hungary, we are operating under the name Inform Media. In Germany, we're either known as VM Digital (a venture capital player specialising in niche topic portals or market places) or as Quoka.de (which has gained the national No. 1 position for private classified ads in Germany).

Complicated, to be sure.

Getting all members of our top management to an equal level of brand awareness was the primary goal at the beginning of the process to help us understand a variety of essential tasks, including:

- >> How to transform our readers into loyal fans.
- >> Get our brand contact points under control.
- >> Under-promise, over-deliver.



[founder]

Much has changed in the newsmedia industry since Vorarlberger Medienhaus founder Eugen Russ bought his first printing company.

>> Excellence. Excellence. Excellence.

Our product brands have been sharpened through this process. But the hardest lesson was accepting that Vorarlberger Medienhaus is not an appropriate employer brand for our 1,500 employees in four countries. It just didn't fit.

That's why we are developing a new corporate brand strategy, which will be implemented in the course of this year. The hub of this strategy is the new umbrella brand Russ Media, with which our company aims to strengthen its identity.

Vorarlberger Medienhaus, built in Schwarzach, Vorarlberg, in 1996, will in the future serve as the headquarters of Russ Media, with 450 of the company's 1,500 employees working there.

The new name, Russ Media, goes back to the roots of the media company, in reference to the founder Eugen Russ (1877-1962), the grandfather of the present publisher, Eugen A. Russ. In 1919, Eugen Russ laid the foundation for the company's success by buying a printing company in Bregenz, Vorarlberg.

Innovation has played an essential role in our media company. And it will continue to do so in the new Russ Media — a name that reflects both our local roots as well as the innovative and truly international character of the company. ■



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