

The newsroom explained

IMPROVING GOVERNMENT'S INTERACTION ONLINE

In Northern and Western Europe, internet penetration is the highest in the world, with on average 92% of people having access to the internet. And in the Netherlands it is even higher: 97% of the population uses the internet and four out of five people are active on social media services such as WhatsApp and Facebook. This also results in a distinct shift from government communications and interaction towards online channels.

For a faster reception of online signals and a better anticipation of social discussions, an increasing number of Dutch municipalities establish a Newsroom. In this Like! Report, this work approach is elucidated by the Dutch municipalities of Groningen and Rotterdam and the province of Drenthe. Their experiences provide insight into the motives, design and effects of this method. Each organization places its own emphasis, but the common denominator in using a Newsroom is the desire to increase situational awareness, to respond more alertly, and to survey the relation between signals across all communication channels so as to prevent the interaction from fragmenting.

With a Newsroom, local authorities can communicate integrally on the basis of a joint method in order to increase both communication capacity and customer focus within an online situation that is becoming increasingly complex and demanding.



Gemeente Groningen



Gemeente Rotterdam

provincie Drenthe

Provincie Drenthe

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DEFINITION

What is a Newsroom?

A Newsroom is a method by which existing processes such as monitoring, identifying, analysing and acting upon the online media are gathered together within a particular physical location. In doing so, it is usually a combination of the taskfields of webcare, data analysis, web editing, news editing and spokespersonship. The Newsroom is not necessarily one workspace, but when employees are at a calling distance this certainly stimulates knowledge transfer and speeds up the coordination.

Marianne Post, Newsroom coordinator at the municipality of Rotterdam: 'We already did analyses, took care of online monitoring and created content. It is not so much the fact that we carry out these tasks, as how we do them that has been changed by the Newsroom's introduction.'

Where does the Newsroom come into being?

Setting up the Newsroom is often an approved initiative of the communications and services professionals. It usually starts as a pilot of several months, in which existing tasks and teams are physically grouped together. Without a great deal of elaboration and formal decision-making beforehand, it is mainly a matter of starting up and getting going!

Carine Plantinga, online communications advisor at the municipality of Groningen: 'During a meeting for the larger Dutch municipalities, we first heard about the Newsroom concept. Dutch municipalities such as Almere and Utrecht were pioneering in this way. That brought to mind the possibilities for Groningen, as we immediately recognized the added value.'

TEAM COMPOSITION

What positions are active in the Newsroom?

The Newsroom is a collaboration between the positions of webcare employee or client advisor, data analyst, web editor, business journalist, spokesperson and communications advisor.

Marianne Post: 'By combining tasks and positions in the Newsroom, the position of the Online Communications workfield within the organization's hierarchy improves. By more clearly showing what we do, our visibility increases. The Newsroom can achieve results not only by presenting but also by giving feedback as to a coverage's effect.'

Position	Role concept
Webcare employee or client advisor	Takes care of signalling news items based on online media-monitoring.
Data analyst	Provides the interpretation and analysis of items identified on the online media.
Web editor	Surveys the coverage's consistency and then publishes it through the company's online channels.
Company journalist	Keeps in touch with other media and ensures that one's own coverage has added journalistic value.
Spokesman	Forms the link to the executive board and monitors the reputation of managing directors.
Communications advisor	Takes on the role of account manager as to a specific realm and monitors the internal message.



COVERAGE

What starting points does the Newsroom take as to content creation?

The content created for the Newsroom should be of interest to a broad target group. The intention is to link up news with political priorities, managerial priorities, current services, city marketing or crisis communication. The newsroom has its own mandate, anticipating on and directing new information whenever this is expected. Employees combine storylines and translate signals into actual reporting. The Newsroom must do this early on and sometimes receives embargoed content so as to be able to anticipate on things. Content from the Newsroom – such as messages and videos – is frequently adopted by the regular media and thus increasingly tends to replace traditional press releases.

Marianne Post: 'With creative content, the Newsroom can respond to the experience within the city. A good example of content creation is the "Chip your cat" campaign which helps to return missing cats to their owners. In addition to covering the main message of the campaign, the Newsroom also presented an interview with a couple who found their cat back after three years. By doing a human interest story, attention is drawn to the campaign in a different way.'



MONITORING SYSTEM

What is the online media-monitoring system?

This is the ICT system with which online sources are monitored, reporting is done by way of searches, and online dashboards are shown on screens. Both the entering of searches and compiling of reports requires a dynamic management due to changing topics and changing needs. If necessary, a search gets adjusted and corrected several times, in order to pinpoint the language and tone of voice within an online discussion more precisely. The monitoring system mainly provides topical insight, and is not intended as an archive of searches over time. As soon as a search becomes dysfunctional, it is first deactivated and then discarded.

How is the online media-monitoring system structured?

The implementation of an online media-monitoring system is not designed in detail on the basis of a blueprint, but comes about organically. The starting point is mostly the domain classification used by the communication consultants. Frequently used search entries are:

- social projects, tasks in which the organization is involved;
- spatial projects, such as the construction of a new theatre;
- special cases of high political sensitivity;
- management and directors, the reputation of individuals;
- neighbourhoods, including how they are geographically located;
- events that attract crowds and audiences.

What sources does the Newsroom consult?

The online media-monitoring system is fed with online reporting on social media, news reports from both newspapers and regional broadcasters, information from the Customer Contact Centre and reactions or comments by people on the corporate channels. In addition, offline signals are received via the networks of spokespersons, communication consultants, community managers and area managers, which are discussed during the daily work meetings.

Carine Plantinga: 'Influencers – called "frequent writers" in Groningen – are followed separately online during important events, such as earthquakes. This is because they are often forerunners as to public opinion and constitute a voice for a larger group of the inhabitants.'



How does the Newsroom enhance data-driven working?

Combining data sources from the Newsroom with those from research departments within a joint data warehouse, enables a better trend research and contextual analysis. Data makes it possible to show multiple trends over the years and to place messages within a broader context. The result is that people's personal preferences have less influence on the analysis process and that there is more room for neutral consideration.

Bart Raaijmakers, coordinator of the Customer Contact Centre and communications advisor at the province of Drenthe: 'I expect that within five years' time the simpler questions can be entirely digitally handled by Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems, such as SIRI, Alexa or Google Assistant. Residents are increasingly using voice response systems. Then one says: "Hey SIRI, please report to the province that a traffic sign has come down on the A37 at hectometre marker 12." This adapted interaction will also change the Newsroom's signalling function in the years to come.'



REPORTS

How frequently does the Newsroom disperse reports?

The data analyst does a simple daily or weekly report containing an updated situational presentation in which the municipal executive board's priorities and the reputation of governance are central. These simple reports are distributed widely to hundreds of employees by email and are published on the intranet. In addition, the data analyst on request provides comprehensive reports with more interpretation and context, intended for a specific group of employees. For example, monitoring during events or demonstrations with various search requests and a greater frequency as regards a direct tuning to an internal project team or the security collaboration between the mayor's office, the justice department and the police.

Carine Plantinga: 'If the municipality carries out roadworks, then this results in different traffic flows through a neighbourhood. The communications advisor knows this and communicates this to the Newsroom, where a search request is created within the online media-monitoring system, so that also online coverage as to the situation is monitored and analysed. What are the volume and sentiment here? Are there any questions or complaints? Is additional communication called for? As long as the nuisance continues the Newsroom is used. The moment the work has finished, the online reporting stops, is archived and is subsequently discarded after a certain period.'

How are the reportings appreciated?

Regarding reports, the level of abstraction and the target group are determined in advance. By every few weeks checking the requirements as to coverage within the target group, reports can be adapted regarding content or frequency. Periodic evaluations and adjustments are necessary to keep the relevance of the reports up to standard. At all levels of the organization, there is attention and appreciation for the daily reporting. For instance, in the run-up to an election, administrators want to know what their personal online reputation is, so that the interest in the reporting increases.



What is narrow casting?

By way of digital dashboards, the online media-monitoring is shown on larger screens in the Newsroom. Thus, everyone in the room can jointly watch the real-time information. It is possible as well to use narrow casting on the executives' floor, so that the online sentiments are also directly visible to them, thus reinforcing the situational awareness among executives and their staff.

Bart Raaijmakers: 'By way of narrow casting, we would like to offer employees more insight into what is happening outside the walls of their own organization. Think for instance dashboards on planning spatial projects, in which you can filter the message flow and can present relevant content in its original form, whereby it is directly shown what people are saying about your project.'

SKILLS AND EDUCATION

What is the level of working and thinking within the Newsroom?

Most employees in the Newsroom operate and think at a level of secondary vocational education (Dutch: MBO+). But more important than their educational level is one's affinity with social media and one's situational awareness. Which are competences that are not easy to acquire. The Newsroom places qualified employees at the front of the organization. By a targeted recruitment policy, the Newsroom is able to start out right away at the desired level of working and thinking. If there is any question of an *intake stop*, one may temporarily hire qualified staff in order to operate at the required level right from the start of the Newsroom.

Bart Raaijmakers: 'Dealing with (online) media requires situational awareness, which is the basic competence here. In addition proactiveness is important, so that employees of their own accord will turn to policy staff whenever they think something needs to be done.'

What skills do Newsroom employees train?

The most frequently trained skills include writing texts for online media, creating online advertisements, operating the online media-monitoring system, interpreting online coverage and other general internet skills. These training skills are taken care of internally and also purchased externally. In addition, a lot of attention is given to coaching, intervision (also with other organizations) and training on the job. A Newsroom often starts out with generalists who gradually specialize themselves at their own initiative.

Webcare

Het webcareteam van het KlantContactCentrum (i.s.m. Newsroom050) heeft in 2018 ruim

- ▶ **84.000** berichten ontvangen via WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter en Instagram.
- ▶ **1.600** berichten per week gemiddeld.
- ▶ **10.000** meer WhatsApp-berichten.

Een lichte daling t.o.v. 2017 (97.783).
Oorzaak: 25.000 minder Facebook-berichten.



DE REACTIETIJD VAN HET WEBCARETEAM

In **98%** van de gevallen wordt binnen de servicenorm van 24 uur beantwoord. Een uitstekende score.



BERICHTEN PER SOCIAL MEDIAKANAAL

WhatsApp vormt inmiddels **62%** van het aanbod.

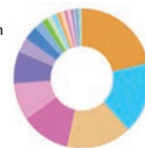
Facebook zakt weg (was in 2017 43%, nu **21%**).



DE TOP 5

De top 5 van meeste vragen/meldingen in 2018 gingen over:

- Dienstverlening algemeen
- Openbare ruimte
- Burgerzaken
- Afval
- Parkeren



Example of a report

In this report the municipality of Groningen provides insights about online media usage in 2018. It shows the number of messages they have received and shared per channel on a monthly base. Other insights concern response times, servicelevels and frequently asked questions per subject.

What is the age structure of Newsroom employees?

The Newsroom is not 'a bunch of whelps', although within an organization this is often their image. The age of Newsroom employees varies from 25 to 55, and therefore reflects the regular organization. Advantageously, the age structure of the team is complementary, because different ages complement one another. For example, young people are often a bit more perky and jocular, while older people usually have a well-developed sense of responsibility when making complex decisions.

Carine Plantinga: 'It would be logical if first-line Newsroom staff who initially take care of signalling, are more highly appreciated salary-wise than is the case at present. Because the increasing use of online media the more complex tasks move to the front of the organization.'

OCCUPANCY

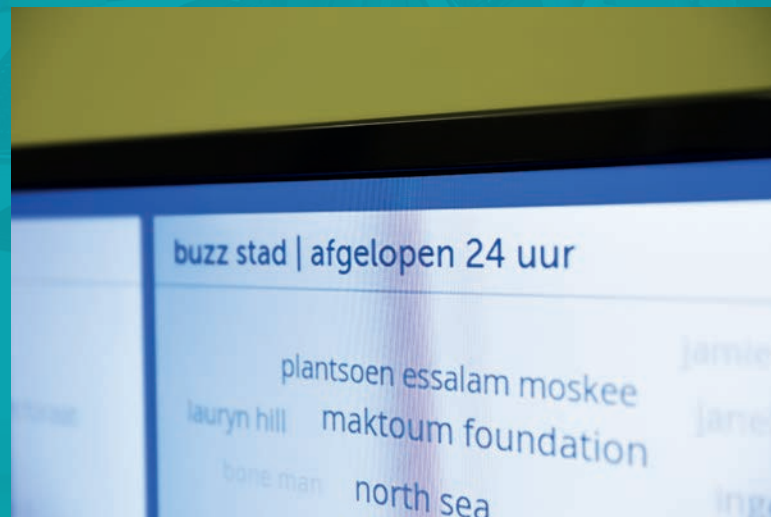
What is the Newsroom's average occupancy?

The occupancy of the Newsroom varies as to the organization and mainly depends on the staff available for data analysis. This is due to the fact that often a variety of positions may take on the function of data analyst – for instance in the manner that communication consultants also carry out other tasks – meaning that in practice the Newsroom is operational between three and five working days on a weekly basis. At the weekends, the Newsroom is inactive unless a crisis or emergency occurs. When an organization starts out with the Newsroom, the capacity load further increases because the outside world grows accustomed to this, so that expectations are created.

How often does a work consultation take place?

The working day starts with a half an hour's consultation in which all the positions involved gather in the Newsroom. Then one assesses what is going on within the organization and current affairs are discussed that have been identified outside the organization by way of webcare. The advantage of a daily work meeting is that employees can also easily contact one another later and fine-tune (online). So, a 'Daily Scrum' stimulates the organization's ability to learn and increases alertness.

Bart Raaijmakers: 'The Customer Contact Centre is the starting point for the Newsroom at the province. The client advisors who provide telephone, email and webcare deliver the first trigger for an action in the Newsroom in 80% of the cases.'



COOPERATION

How does the Newsroom cooperate with specialist departments?

With a view to promoting the newsroom, employees are shown around in the Newsroom and presentations are held for specialist departments, for instance to explain how the Newsroom connects you to views in the outside world. In doing so, the communications advisors take on the role of account manager vis-à-vis specialist departments, and utilize the relationship and knowledge position that they already have in their regular cooperation with these domains. If online signals regularly come in for a specialist department, then the Newsroom talks to the relevant department in order to reach a solution. Escalation towards higher management levels is prevented as far as possible, peer cooperation is key.

Marianne Post: 'I am convinced that one should not profile the Newsroom externally. We communicate with the outside as a single organization, as the municipality of Rotterdam. Profiling the Newsroom is only relevant internally towards colleagues with a view to the correct positioning.'

Interreg North Sea Region

Like! Report

The Newsroom Explained

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Jasper Mulder, online communications advisor at the municipality of Rotterdam

Carine Plantinga, online communications advisor at the municipality of Groningen

Bart Raaijmakers, coordinator of the Customer Contact Centre and communications advisor at the province of Drenthe

SEVEN TIPS FOR STARTING UP A NEWSROOM

- 1 Do not start with a detailed plan of action, but work on developing the Newsroom as a pilot, so that you have the freedom to try things out.
- 2 When starting up, use the knowledge and experiences of other organizations that have already installed a Newsroom and consult relevant publications.
- 3 Ensure that people who need one another in the process can work together within a physical location where the online signals come in so that the reaction speed increases.
- 4 Strengthen the situational awareness of the entire organization by distributing signals proactively; send reports, show online dashboards and visualize information.
- 5 Make sure that you can carry out the webcare through an online media-monitoring system, do not tinker about with a smartphone.
- 6 Set up a central editorial team for the management of the corporate accounts and, in addition to online media, also use offline media such as a local newspaper to distribute the Newsroom coverage over all channels.
- 7 The Newsroom is no place for scaredy-cats, only for people who enjoy online media and have the right work attitude. Hire for attitude, train for skills!

