

A web channel for preschoolers

A conversation with Jan-Willem Bult*

KRO runs the 24/7 Internet channel www.kro.nl/kindertijd for preschoolers with free access all over the world. What is the idea behind KRO Kindertijd?

As a young father, when my daughter was about 2 or 2.5 years old, she wanted to watch television. Hence, at certain times of the day we switched on the television, but either there was nothing on, or the shows that were on were not really exciting. Just by coincidence, I got a phone call from a small private children's channel. So I stepped into the world of children's television at that moment. And one of my very personal goals was to create a preschool brand completely centred around children. That was the start.



Screenshot of www.kro.nl/kindertijd © KRO

Ill. 1: www.kro.nl/kindertijd is a 24/7 web channel especially for preschoolers

What characterises this brand?

We believe in the autonomy of children and want to focus on their power and talent; our aim is to show them the beauty of everyday life. In addition, the concept of KRO is based on 5 values, which are family, friendship and cooperation, spirituality, learning and skills, and expression (i.e. the right to be yourself).

What kind of content is offered on the Internet channel www.kro.nl/kindertijd?

It is a 24/7 web TV channel with a pretty high standard of digital imaging. The content includes everything we produce ourselves and some of the programmes that we acquire. In fact, what we do is an extended version

of our daily half hours on terrestrial TV. Generally, in a half hour block you will see, among other things, a preschool documentary. This is key, since the audience can immediately identify: this is KRO Kindertijd, because nobody else will produce a preschool documentary similar to that. It has a very specific look and feel and is based on a couple of very specific rules (see Bult, 2007). After the documentary we might schedule a preschool live-action series like *Linus and Friends*, a Scandinavian co-produced, family-oriented drama series with a 6-/7-year-old boy as a main character, or we might show a reality series, a preschool cooking series (*Piece of Cake*), or very strong brands such as *Wooly and Pip*.

How do you schedule the programme?

The schedule is first and foremost oriented towards the content. We schedule in half-hour blocks. Each of them will consist of a mixture of animation and live-action, fiction, facts, and emotions. This is something that I keep very much in mind: if you have watched half an hour of KRO Kindertijd, which 2 or 3 emotions will you remember, or how will you feel after this half-hour? And, of course, we consider the weather and the feelings caused by it.

All jesting aside, do you really schedule according to the weather?

Yes. When we start broadcasting on our national children's channel at

7:45 a.m., I often look outside, and, on one day or another, it might be a little bit colder than the week before, and then I think: we should have opened differently. But you have no chance there. On traditional television everything has to be fixed at least 6 weeks before you broadcast, because it has to be printed in a television magazine. An Internet channel offers much more freedom. If the reality of a 5-year-old looks totally different today because of the weather, I can go to my office in

you would get into the programme at minute 7. So you might lose interest, because you have already missed 7 minutes of the adventure and you don't know exactly where you are. So we scheduled it in a way that whenever you come to the website between 12 and 12:11 p.m., *Frog and Friends* will always start from the beginning. The next programme, let's say a 5 minute programme, is scheduled at 12:11 p.m.; so it is scheduled to 12:11 till 12:16 p.m. Hence, you will follow

rights. That is step 1. If we acquire or buy a programme, this is just one of the rules. If you want to be treated by the KRO Kindertijd brand in the Netherlands – the number 1 brand, because we have the leading rating in the Netherlands – you have to deliver us those rights that make it possible for us to not only broadcast on the terrestrial channel, not only on the digital channel, but also on our Web TV channel – in Dutch language. Here, we probably have a little advantage that we are not broadcasting in English or Spanish.



Screenshot of www.kro.nl/kindertijd © KRO

Ill. 2: Due to the ingenious scheduling, a show starts anytime you visit the KRO Kindertijd web channel

the morning and change the order of the programmes. The Web TV channel is very flexible in that.

Normally, if you turn on the television, you are right in the middle of a programme. But anytime you visit www.kro.nl/kindertijd, it magically starts with a show. How do you do that?

In fact, this is also a way of how we schedule. It is not a 24/7 stream. It works a little bit like a jukebox. In the jukebox, we change the starting point of our list of programmes – not on the clock, but on the click. At the moment we have, for instance, scheduled *Frog and Friends*, which lasts 11 minutes, at 12 p.m. But you click on the Web TV channel at 12:07 p.m. Normally,

the schedule, but with a couple of minutes delay if you get on the channel late. Our way is a very inventive way. I can also say that it is a very cheap way of doing it. But it is not always a matter of money; it is always a matter of the goals that you want to achieve, the surface you want to give, the brand you want to be.

Your Web TV can be seen all over the world. How do you handle the rights clearance?

If we produce our own productions, we clear the rights worldwide. In some cases, the co-producers, if we co-produce the shows, own part of the rights. But then we have cleared the streaming: Dutch language Web TV

How do you measure the success?

The good thing about it is: anything that is digital can be controlled and can be measured very easily, especially the Internet. People have to create a user account on our website. We had a period of time when we used to have over 30,000 unique visitors a week. Those unique visitors often came back and used many of our pages and the Web TV. In the Netherlands, we have about 2,000,000 kids 3 to 12 years, and about 500,000 of them are called “preschoolers”. In the preschoolers’ TV market, KRO Kindertijd delivers the most successful programmes and is the leading brand. ■

REFERENCES

Bult, Jan-Willem (2007). *Children in the centre*. In: *TelevIZion*, vol. 20, no. E, pp. 10-11.

* Shortened version of a conversation between Jan-Willem Bult (KRO) and Dr. Maya Götz (IZI). Jan-Willem Bult is Creative head of Children & Youth department of pubcaster KRO in Hilversum, The Netherlands.

