

Leading the Revolution

As the media industry undergoes rapid, widespread changes, Berlingske Media is at the forefront of the digitalisation and print evolution.

Images courtesy of Berlingske Media

Iconic Danish media company Berlingske Media has a longstanding reputation for trustworthy and innovative news coverage. With a plethora of newspapers, websites, digital platforms, and national and local radio stations in its stable, Berlingske Media is informing, entertaining and engaging consumers using all kinds of channels from paper to web, mobile, tablet, newsletters, radio, video, podcasts, events and e-commerce.

Lisbeth Knudsen, CEO and Editor-in-Chief at Berlingske Media, sat down with *The CEO Magazine* to reveal the revolution that Berlingske and the media industry are experiencing.

***The CEO Magazine:* You've been in the business for 35 years and CEO and Editor-in-Chief for seven years. How have you ensured that Berlingske remains at the forefront of technology and digitalisation?**

Lisbeth: The media business is in a kind of revolution at the moment and it's for five main reasons. One is the technology and another is the collapsing of old business models. Another reason is the totally new media environment that we're now faced with. For a small country like Denmark, we've been used to competition from Danish colleagues, but now the competition is global and big.

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Global companies are now represented in Denmark. The fourth reason is the fact that consumers' behaviour and use of media changes dramatically these days. All media channels are affected by these changes.

The fifth part of this media revolution is a revolution of the mindset and the skillset of the people working in media. You can have a very difficult challenge with your staff, because excellent and loyal colleagues can suddenly become the wrong ones for future needs.

You need to cope with those five major changes in your business. During the financial recession, instead of just sitting and waiting for the crisis to fade away, I started very early on to think about the changes that we needed to make.

We have been the frontrunners of an integrated news production where the journalists work on all different platforms and you don't set up special units to work on a particular platform, like mobile or tablet. My thinking is that from the start we needed to introduce the multimedia production and accompanying cultural change so that we could understand the dramatic changes in consumer behaviour.

Many businesses today have experienced big changes in consumer behaviour and that's certainly the case with the media industry. If you have some very

loyal and brilliant employees who work with the mindset from the old business then you need to change that by letting them see the existing challenge to develop journalism in new formats. This has also been part of my strategy.

Another aspect is to introduce an innovation program. In media in the past, innovation was about reviewing your newspaper every second or third year. In the new world, you need to make changes to make innovations. You need to open new products at a speed that we have never seen before, and then you need to close some of them again if they aren't successful.

You need to establish a more dynamic environment to be able to cope with the ongoing revolution and changes in customer behaviour. My strategy has been to look at all the changes at once and not just take them step-by-step, because I think we underestimate how long it takes for a company culture to adapt to a new environment. You need to push hard to get things moving and at the same time look out for those in the back who need some extra help and support and training.

With the launch of the Berlingske tablet app, how are you adapting to and leading consumer behaviour in the media sphere?

There are two things here at stake. One is that you need to think >



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A constant need for wise moves



“Acting on the global energy market is like playing chess against a gigantic computer that never sleeps. Therefore, we constantly monitor all our markets and we are always ready for appropriate response. It is not enough just to know the rules of the game. If you don’t have extensive experience and overview, you will soon find yourself checkmated.”

Jørgen Holm Westergaard, CEO - Energi Danmark

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about the content that you put into the tablet. The tablet is a totally new reader experience, not just getting some short news snacks. If you want to go onto a tablet and not just use your smartphone, you want to have added value to the news, you need three-dimensional infographics, you need perspective, you need fantastic pictures, and you need good video.

You need to look at how the consumers use the tablet. Tablet reading is very much a late-evening experience for many people. They sit and watch television, they get bored by that, and they take the tablet out and look for better experiences there. We did a lot of research and found that we should make a special edition only for tablets of the Berlingske, going out at five o’clock, with totally new stories and more visuals and infographics. This is part of our approach to adapting to new consumer behaviour.

The other thing is to understand the interaction and functionality that has to go into a tablet reading experience. We established a special unit with a lot of competencies in using mobile and other devices so we could have the user experience injected directly into the editorial thinking.

You’ve said previously that print won’t die, but it will change. How do you see it evolving five, 10, and 20 years from now?

First of all, you need to change your print product if you have a newspaper. The way we have chosen to go is to change our newspaper to what we called a ‘news-zine,’ a combination of newspaper and magazine. We do a daily news-zine in print where of course you have an overview of the most important news chosen by our professional staff but, most importantly, you have added value to the news that you could access online or on mobile. You need to put into the printed paper more perspective, more comments, more analysing, and more special experiences that you can only get in print. So the



newspaper is transformed into a sort of daily news magazine which interacts with more content on the other platforms.

Many people say that print is dying, but in April we launched a totally new national newspaper for children. *Kids’ News* is our new publication and it was prompted by research we conducted that suggested that children, parents, grandparents, and teachers wanted us to do this new publication for children from six- to 12-years-old on paper and not just as a digital version. This is because people seem to like the idea of going offline for a period of time, because people spend most of their day in front of some screen. They really like the idea of going offline and concentrating for a moment on something on paper.

I think that paper will serve as a kind of relief or an outlet to go deeper into an issue that you want to learn more about. Even the children would like to go offline sometimes. They’re even stressed from being on Facebook all the time. I think print will change but paper is still the most convenient media platform. You don’t need to have electricity or a specific device to be able to use the newspaper. It’s always there, you can take it anywhere, and it has some very good reading experiences.

As the oldest newspaper in Denmark, how are you utilising its longevity as the industry goes through such rapid change?

We have a history going back to 1749 when the first edition of

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Berlingske was published. We have been telling the history of Denmark for 265 years and this gives us a lot of experience. The problem is that experience doesn’t count on the internet. You either put up some great content and people like it, or they don’t and will look elsewhere.

Brand value is something that’s very important to us. We have a special authority and a special position as being a trustworthy media outlet. I think people in the future will seek media brands that have a trustworthy background to cope with the huge information stream that they get every day. We are very careful to protect this. You have to be very open about how you work to keep this trust. We are working with letting our audience come behind the scenes and understand how we work with the stories. That is one way to build trust. Another one is building close relations every day to your audience by engaging them in the stories, by using their expertise and experience.

There’s a lot of pressure on media now because there are more people hired to manipulate information than to give you trustworthy information. PR consultants and marketers and spin doctors have a bigger presence than professional journalists, so this is the challenge we have. I still have the hope that people will search for trustworthy media in this very intense and dynamic environment that we live in. That’s the future of media. ●