

Newspaper re-designed to become the “ultimate browser”

HOW AUSTRIA'S VORARLBERGER NACHRICHTEN worked with Swedish designer Per Boström to make a local newspaper that already reaches 70% of its community even more successful, attractive, and readable. **by gerold riedmann**

Never change a running system, that's what they say.

Well, the Vorarlberger Nachrichten (VN) system actually was running very well. Circulation figures have been more than satisfying, market share growing. Seventy percent of local residents read our daily subscription newspaper, which received the “Newspaper of the Year” award at the World Editors Forum in 2006.

There hasn't been a desperate need to change. Yet we wanted to get closer to our idea of the newspaper as being the “ultimate browser.” We hired 28-year-old Swedish designer Per Boström to do his first newspaper redesign for a non-Swedish customer.

The ultimate browser. The efficiency of a printed newspaper is unrivaled — and will not be beaten in the next years. VN is designed to be readable in 20 minutes; usually there are 800 news bits in one edition. Compare this amount to a 20-minute news show on television. If they are fast storytellers, they will squeeze 15 stories in their air time. Even the mighty internet is not yet as efficient as printed newspapers. Because it is still in its Stone Age,

there's no chance to read or skip over 800 news reports in 20 minutes.

The briefing sessions. We first heard about Boström's work for Metro, the world's largest newspaper. He did a major redesign for them in 2006, for which he was awarded “Art Director of the Year.” In the briefing sessions in early 2009, we discussed how we understand “local, local, local.” Out of the 360,000 inhabitants of the state of Vorarlberg, VN runs photos of roughly 100,000 of them within its pages in one year.

Readers in the driver's seat. The whole redesign project was accompanied by our reader advisory board. We introduced this consulting authority in 2007, willing to get even closer to our readers. In late 2009, the consultation with the reader advisory board and the first test print was a huge success. After five minutes of reading, page turning, and rustling, we got all the feedback we needed. Good feedback. Our readers picked the important body text typeface, for instance. They gave us the strong feeling we were headed in the right direction.

The first redesign briefing with Boström took place in early 2009. Six months later, on December 3, the first issue of the all-new VN was delivered to every household in Vorarlberg. Accompanied by a party in our printing house with 1,500 readers attending, the new design had a perfect start — including a kitschy firework show.

Via VN, we prompted our readers to call and give us their opinions — and we answered every single call the next morning. Although the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, one big mistake was criticised in 95% of the calls: the Sudoku game was inexcusably scaled down to the great displeasure of our riddling community.

Well, that was easy. We changed it the next day. ♦



{redesign}

Vorarlberger Nachrichten is designed to provide 800 bits of news that can be read in 20 minutes.



Gerold Riedmann is deputy editor-in-chief of Vorarlberger Nachrichten in Vorarlberg, Austria, and headed up the redesign project. He can be reached at gerold.riedmann@vn.vol.at.