



With the appointment of Wendy Pouw last year, Publicis Benelux has its first Chief Digital Officer. Pouw has been director of VIA for the past three years and must focus at the agency group on the complex business issues that customers face due to digital transformation. The appointment is in line with the growth of Publicis, which is reaping the benefits of the full integration of the disciplines of media, creation, production, dynamic content, commerce, influence, and data with 'The Power of One' strategy.

2021 was primarily a successful year for Publicis, although CEO Jacco ter Schegget would rather speak of a Dickensian year. He quotes: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." "I think we've all struggled to maintain our energy levels in another corona year. Despite this, Publicis has experienced good growth. If you look at the industry figures, we are organically above average. We have further strengthened our commerce branch (a promise Ter Schegget already made last year). We work with Procter & Gamble, among others. We have further developed the Epsilon data proposition. There isn't a pitch anymore that

doesn't involve Epsilon. And, of course, there was the Boomerang acquisition. We have also set up the new label Le Pub with Heineken as a starting customer. We now

work there for several customers. We also won several pitches, such as Stellantis (including Fiat, Chrysler, Opel, Citroën) and Puma.'

With all these developments comes the expansion of the team. The creative top was reinforced with CCO Eduardo Marques and Executive Creative Directors Maarten Vrouwes and Friso Ludenhoff and then followed the appointment of Wendy Pouw. "We need a few good seniors at the top of the advice pyramid," Ter Schegget describes it.

This year's theme is, among other things, the move, in March, from the building on the highway in Overamstel to the Boomerang building in Amsterdam North. Incorporating Boomerang was a welcome innovation for Publicis, according to Pouw. 'It is all about the connection between brands and people through content, after which it is desirable to automate content production further. Boomerang is good at that. In addition, with Boomerang, we get a lot of young people on board. It's a different kind of thinking. Especially in dynamic times, it is terrific to bring in fresh blood. The collaboration with Boomerang has already brought us a lot in a short time.'

In Boomerang, Publicis Benelux is also finding its way to internationalization, says Ter Schegget. "With their expertise in content automation, they work for Heineken, Amazon, Spotify, Albert Heijn. Boomerang participated in three of the most recent major international pitches. Then you can see where the Netherlands distinguishes itself. We have a very deep creative tech pool. We can compete with London with that. With all the Brexit troubles, Amsterdam seems to have become a fully-fledged international alternative."

With the acquisition and the rapid growth in general, it was time for the Publicis top to get together to discuss the next steps. That happened around the arrival of Pouw. 'On the one hand, this growth is still very local for us, for example, in ad tech and media. But many

brands regionalize,' explains Ter Schegget. 'The growing parties do so quickly because they have an international

offering from Amsterdam. We are now building that too. On a European level, clients often look for an alternative to an agency in London. Amsterdam is international, we have a good ad tech pool, and people want to work here.'

Pouw: 'The push forward and focus on tomorrow is powerful here.' She consciously chose Publicis. "I was impressed by the talented and wonderful people who work here. In all conversations, I noticed that it gave me energy and wanted to be part of it. Publicis also has a strong tailwind. Won many pitches, the technological possibilities, and the opportunity to build internationally. I think all the puzzle pieces are here on the table. At Publicis, it is also true that we work full scope and not in silos.'

During her directorship of VIA, the merger between IAB and VEA came about as proof of the further integration of the market. "Consumers have been thinking that way for a long time, but in this industry, that development has slowed down."

You could also say a bit sourly: why only now a Chief Digital Officer at Publicis Benelux? Shouldn't that have happened years ago? Ter Schegget: 'Of course, I wondered that myself. I started in this industry in 1998 at an internet company, and it was still written with a capital letter I at the time. At the time, Google still had the pay-off "Don't be evil". A lot has happened in the meantime. With all the current expertise – I prefer not to talk about silos – you as an agency need someone at the very front of the organization who exactly understands the question and whom you should contact for a complex digital customer issue. In many organizations, this is not the case. Wendy is particularly good at that. She is very good at distilling the marketing issue at a customer's C-level level and then linking the right people together on the customer and agency side. As Chief Digital Officer, Wendy is, therefore, someone who can look at complex business issues from a digital transformation

perspective. Name me ten brands that truly understand full-funnel marketing. That isn't very easy. Wendy is very good at that."

There are so many practical steps behind digital, says Pouw. "The things that go less well are often in the details. We also have to deal with legislation. It is constantly changing and presents many challenges. Therefore, the complexity and importance require someone within an organization who is constantly involved in it. In its totality, nothing can go outside without someone looking at it from a digital perspective.'

Many organizations focus heavily on directly measurable (sales) performance, while brand and product awareness are also fundamental. And see if you can get it right. That's pretty much the challenge facing the agency world. Meanwhile, creation

remains the most important pillar. Ter Schegget: 'People are in a constant state of excitement these days. Who else can I trust? Will there be another lockdown? So it would be best if you had beacons that tell you functionally and emotionally what they stand for. Those are brands. From Bill Bernbach with his Volkswagen expressions "Lemon" to now. We do see that good content is becoming rarer, whether you're watching the News or an Instagram post. There is diarrhea of content, but make content that truly touches you.'

The world has become much more volatile. A Calvé (a well-known Dutch peanut butter brand, ed.) campaign used to last for years. Nowadays, we are already thinking about what should happen next week, says Pouw. 'There is enormous pressure on it, while people are well aware that the balance between short and long term is important. Do we as marketers have the patience to go long-term, and can we sell that in the boardroom? Then you come to the issue of CMOs in the boardroom. In the meantime, a new generation is arriving, GenZ, that wants to know from brands what they stand for and what they can do for them.'

According to Ter Schegget, communication with GenZ is one of Publicis' spearheads. "We have put much energy into research on this. GenZ is not just the next generation. Their expectations of brands are so different. The big difference with generations before them is that they also produce themselves. Consuming and producing overlap, and at the same time, they are super-volatile. Because they are part of the global content environment, the identity change goes very quickly.'

Pouw: 'GenZ does not know a world without internet and interactivity. That's in their nature. That is why digital should be much more interwoven in all layers of your organization. In ten years, GenZ will be buying houses and having children. It is not yet the primary target group for many brands, but we have to get ready for it now.'

Publicis also looks for brands to find out their position and proposition for tomorrow's customer. Pouw: "Then you quickly come to the question of how you communicate on TikTok and what you do with the metaverse, while there will almost certainly be another channel in the future."

The metaverse and GenZ come together, sees Ter Schegget. "Metaverse is nothing more than digital avatars, a digital identity, and they have been around for a long time. GenZ also changes identity, gender fluidity, in daily life. They can be "themselves" in different environments. Then comes the interesting question of what

the rights of an avatar are and do you have the same rights online as in everyday life. None of that has been thought about yet. The internet started as an ethical sanctuary. Now we are in a platform world with walled gardens. Those are exciting developments.'

Pouw: "We are in a kind of perfect storm. Of course, there's much hype, but it's coming, and we see many opportunities there. The same goes for GenZ in recruitment. The demand for talent is huge, and GenZ will soon enter the market en masse. How do you deal with that?'

Publicis saw that Boomerang is successful with 'Boomerang for better', which means you can spend part of the time on initiatives outside the company. "We thought that was so important that we set up 'Publicis for better.' If the whole world is looking for talent, how do you distinguish yourself as a company? We constantly think about that. We recently started The SPA, Shaping Progress Academy, a worldwide academy where interns work with us for six months. The best creative directors teach, and you can join after six months.' Publicis Groupe is at the forefront of new ways of working and talent development, says Ter Schegget. For example, the group recently launched Work Your World, a program that allows all employees to work for a maximum of six weeks a year from an international location of their choice.

Back to the 'The Power of One' thought that Publicis Benelux has. It seems that other agency groups and holdings are increasingly choosing that direction as well. Is that true? Ter Schegget: 'You see two movements: the traditional communication holding companies and the local parties that are consolidating, and you have the experts. Everything in between is tough. So you either do one thing very well, or you offer everything. If you do the latter, make sure you have one P&L. I've worked together in all sorts of constellations. I've seen that there's always nagging when you have different P&Ls. When I came here 2.5 years ago, I immediately said that: one P&L. Of course, there are different practices, but we don't care where the euro is earned. Then things will fly."

Pouw: 'Theoretically everyone sees that integrated working can lead to success, in practice you have to make it happen. You have to invest a lot in that way of working. Because you can like each other, you have to do it together. From what I've seen and heard, no one in the other desk groups has gotten that far yet. Publicis has already taken this route before and is therefore already further. That makes a huge difference. We notice it on the floor, in pitches, at customers. When the corona

pandemic started, already did the first part of the integration process took place. When everyone started working from home, we all became very efficient. So there is also pressure on processes and systems, and things go even faster. The timing of The Power of One was perfect."