

Customer
Success
Story



Revolutionizing Retail Marketing across the Colruyt Group brand portfolio.

Creative Automation frees up resources for
bespoke projects.



Drive brand consistency and creative productivity for 30 brands in food, health & well-being, non-food, and energy – that’s the objective Kathleen Bauwens and her in-house agency team set at Belgian retail giant Colruyt. An ambitious change program ensued to help the organization to deliver by adopting state-of-the art technology and a new, unified way of working.

Presenting on main stage at the recent CREATE '23 EU Community Conference, Kathleen Bauwens (Business Application Manager at Colruyt Group) shared a story with many different layers. To support marketing communications for more than 30 retail brands in the Colruyt Group holding, Belgium’s largest in-house agency was established. There, more than 280 professionals (among which 48 designers, 27 copywriters, 60 photographers and videographers, and 24 webmasters) work to produce more than 1500 campaigns annually. If this already sounds like a lot to oversee, just imagine what happens once all these brands, teams, disciplines, planning tables and brand guidelines are put into motion! Bauwens likens the image to a big, messy bowl of spaghetti – one she is determined to untangle once and for all!

**Watch Kathleen’s session at
CREATE '23 EU: “How Colruyt Group
is revolutionizing retail marketing
through creative automation”**



New service model for *resource optimization.*

Colruyt Group decided to introduce a new service model, as a filter between the demand coming in from the brand marketers and the in-house agency tasked with fulfilling their requests.

3 pathways were created:

- **Co-creation**
- **Self-service**
- **Bespoke projects**

With the latter meaning “good old-fashioned human hustle” that requires intense collaboration between the requesting brand marketer and a project team within the in-house agency.

For each of these 3 tracks, the process of campaign briefing, productions, approval flow, and executions was defined – each with its own level of creative automation. **Ultimately, the goal is to automate as much of the recurring work as possible, and free up resources for bespoke creative projects.**



25 percent of creative service requests go to *Co-creation*.

To illustrate the impact of creative automation at Colruyt Group, Bauwens shared the example of a themed magazine, like a Spring Magazine, commonly requested by a number of the group's brand teams. In the old days, these requests would turn into as many bespoke projects, each weighing heavily on the in-house agency's resources. Today, a combination of a clean Digital Asset Management system (it went from 84 to 2.5 terabyte after a serious clean-up), and a robust creative automation infrastructure means brand marketers can do 80 percent of the work themselves. How?

"The team at Marketing Communication Services has created smart templates for plenty of recurring publications, including themed magazines. Each brand marketer has access to this treasure trove of templates, as well as all product information, all lifestyle pictures and every piece of text every crafted for all brands. Marketeers can simply drag and drop these elements into the template, creating a basic lay-out for the magazine. With a wave of a digital wand, 80 % of the work is done!," Bauwens explained. "Next, our in-house agency team - copywriters, graphic designers and photographers - work their magic to spice things up or create new extra content where necessary."

Having the ability to automate to this level of completion is a real blessing for the in-house agency, considering there are thirteen different versions of a common theme magazine requested to cater to diverse needs, including two languages for the Belgian market, varying page counts for different target groups, different logos, tailored promotions and store-specific customizations.

Today, 25 percent of the in-house agency's incoming requests qualify for this partially automated co-creation process, which isn't limited to just magazines but extends to a wide array of multi-channel communications.



Self-Service automates *35 percent of recurring requests.*

The second pathway available for brand marketers planning for a new campaign, is the Self-Service Route. The in-house agency has created a self-service store, where marketers have access to smart templates of assets like flyers, posters, online banners and more, all pre-designed, high-end, on brand and ready to use. These templates are created based on brand guidelines, and include all the necessary brand restrictions to prevent marketers from going off-brand. Instead, they allow store managers and marketers to customize a few key details, like the specific location, time, and the product or service they wish to highlight.

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Once they have finalized the asset they can either dispatch it to our in-house printing partner, or simply hit the ‘Download’ button. They can execute instantly or within days, depending on the type of assets they produced. Through this self-service system, the in-house agency team automates 35 percent of our recurring orders.”

Kathleen Bauwens, Business Application Manager Colruyt Group

40 percent: good old-fashioned human hustle.

With almost two-thirds of the inbound creative service requests falling into the co-create and self-service categories, 40 percent of the available creative resources can be focused on bespoke creative projects – the kind of projects where creatives are challenged to give it their very best. “At the end of the day,” Bauwens explains, “this is what creative professionals want to be working on. So, it’s true that automation initially may have seemed like a threat to some of the team. However, by unifying how we work and automating recurring tasks, we were able to free up significant time and resources for the more complex marketing initiatives requiring human creativity and ingenuity, or ‘the good old-fashioned human hustle’, as I like to call it.”

Changing is hard work.

Changing to the new creative paradigm at Colruyt Group didn't happen overnight. "It takes a lot more than just setting up the new IT infrastructure needed to drive self-service and creative automation," Bauwens said. "We have also dedicated plenty of time and effort to change management. We appointed key users for each of our brands, who double as ambassadors to their colleagues, and spread knowledge and enthusiasm about the project within their teams, and raise any concerns they may come across."

For the technical side of the program, the program's steering committee built a strong technical design team who create the templates for the co-creation and self-service processes. These experts have comprehensive knowledge of all recurring tasks across all Colruyt Group portfolio brands. Their insights proved to be invaluable in preparing the creative automation workflows, as they often debunk wrong assumptions.

"Lastly," Bauwens concluded, "we recognize the importance of organizing roadshows within our company. These events not only ensure our initiatives stay at the forefront of our collective focus, they also provide teams with a platform to brainstorm and explore new opportunities brought about by creative automation."

Leading from the front, rising from the ranks.

While the change project is still underway, early results are promising and Bauwens is convinced they are on the right track to deliver ever better results for Colruyt Group. "Yes, both in terms of efficiency and quality of work. We spend our best people and hours on the most complex tasks, which is great for everyone involved. And while the strategic choices are made top down, we are actively involving all employees in a bottom-up manner, ensuring a holistic and collaborative approach to change within our organization. Or to put it another way: 'Leading from the front, rising from the ranks' - this is how we adopt a completely new way of working, the new normal for Colruyt Group."

About COLRUYT GROUP

Founded in 1928, Colruyt Group is a family business which, over three generations, has grown into a retail group with 774 owned stores, more than 33,000 co-workers, and a diverse portfolio of food and non-food formulas in Belgium, France and Luxembourg. Consumers can go to one of the more than 40 Colruyt Group store formulas, web shops or services at every stage of their lives.

Every brand has its own identity, but our underlying mission, values and principles are the same.

In this way every brand contributes to our aim for 'simplicity in retail'.

www.colruytgroup.com/en

