

JOBS Audiovisual

Switched on to cater to broadcasters' needs

By Patricia Kelly

17.09.2009 / 04:25 CET

Meeting a man whose passion for technology has matched the expansion of the European Union.

Hans Deforce and his partner Andrea Waeyenbergh were early pioneers of independent audiovisual services in the European quarter. They set up their company, Headline, 19 years ago with one camera and only a promise that the French broadcaster TF1 would become a client.

Nearly two decades later, they have 20 cameras, a fleet of satellite trucks, 15 people on the payroll and freelancers on the books to provide services to clients including the BBC, Euronews, RTL and all the Scandinavian broadcasters.

As the EU has expanded, Headline has attracted more broadcasters from eastern and central Europe wanting to cover news about the EU in Brussels.

But the number of companies providing audiovisual services has also mushroomed. To survive, Headline has had to be innovative and offer what Deforce describes as "added-value services", such as a team of researchers and state-of-the-art digital equipment. During Deforce's time in the industry, equipment has become smaller, lighter and more sophisticated. There are also more ways of covering a story.

"We don't have to be on the spot for every picture we take, which gives us more flexibility and the ability to cover more ground," he says.

The European institutions' enthusiastic embrace of new technology has also played a part, as they supply broadcasters with video.

Logistical skills

Much of the business is based on logistical skills. Deforce believes he acquired them growing up around his father's furniture business and by being a volunteer leader with the KSA, a popular Catholic youth organisation similar to the Scout movement.

While at Leuven University, where he read political science and later studied press and communications, Deforce discovered the university's studios and cameras and was inspired to enrol at the RITCS film school in Brussels.

"For the first time in my life, I loved going to school," he reminisces. His first job, at the age of 26, was as a camera assistant at BRT, the Flemish arm of the Belgian state broadcaster. He remembers it being "very badly paid", not being allowed to touch the cameras and having to wait tables at weekends to make ends meet.

Two years later, he joined a team at the Flemish Ministry of Culture providing free audiovisual services to theatres and cultural organisations. And there he might have stayed were it not for a friend who wanted him to help shoot the opening of IKEA's store in Amsterdam for Swedish television. Real television beckoned, and Deforce went freelance in 1986 for Videopool, one of the first ventures in Brussels offering audiovisual



INNOVATIVE Hans Deforce and Andrea Waeyenbergh.

Related articles

- [Google's books deal under scrutiny](#)
- [Reding wants digitisation of books eased](#)
- [The score on licensing](#)
- [Europe's digital edge being 'blunted'](#)
- [Commission switched on to internet copyright changes](#)
- [In tune with the needs of the EU's new pirates](#)
- [Commission looks to pull the plug on illegal downloading](#)
- [State aid limits to be clarified](#)
- [Online services to be tested for value](#)
- [New Microsoft system will not come with web-browser](#)

Advertisement

facilities. He had always wanted to be his own boss, he says.

A few years later, Deforce and Waeyenbergh – who are still 50:50 partners in the business – set up Headline, renting a floor of a house on Avenue Diamant. That house is now one of three adjacent houses they have accumulated and knocked through to create a warren of offices, studios and editing suites connected by kilometres of cables.

New technology

Deforce is fascinated with new technology. He had, he says, three mobile phones before the first network in Belgium was operational. The same willingness to experiment is evident in his management: he claims to have been the first in Brussels to use 'one-man bands', making one person, rather than two, responsible for shooting and sound. Most are also expected to edit, a practice known in the trade as 'shoot-edits'.

In 2000, Deforce bought his first satellite news-gathering truck. "It was a huge risk, but it was the missing link." He now has four – there are only seven used by private companies in Belgium – with the latest addition to the fleet a €600,000 high-definition satellite truck.

Next on the wishlist – the price tag is a hefty €5 million – is an outside-broadcast truck capable of handling three- or four-camera events. He also hankers after a large studio and often toys with the idea of knocking down Headline's three houses to create one.

As he says, "I'm not happy unless I've got a new project under way".

Patricia Kelly is a freelance journalist based in Brussels.

© 2009 European Voice. All rights reserved.