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NRJ, Radio Nostalgie Boost Synergy

BY MARC MAES

BRUSSELS — On 29 May, Radio Nostalgie and NRJ kicked off a new era of cooperation from their new joint headquarters.

The new facility groups the two stations in a single building and aims to benefit from keen synergies between the two stations.

The new building, located in the Brussels media district and within walking distance of RTL, BeTV and public-service broadcaster RTBF, offers 1,500 square meters of office space and room for 11 studios. The main studio can hold up to 50 people, allowing the stations to host debates and unplugged concerts.

In a span of less than five working days, both Nostalgie and NRJ moved into the new premises.

The idea to team up dates from December 2008, said Marc Vossen, director general of Radio Nostalgie.

“First of all, there was the evolution in the audiovisual landscape with major media-groups taking over. Sitting alone in a corner was no option for the future,” he said.

On the national level, NRJ/Nostalgie wanted to position itself as third multimedia group, Vossen said, alongside De Persgroep N.V., owner of Q-Music, JOEfm, VTM, 2BE

and JIMtv, and the RTL-Rossel group, which operates Bel RTL and Radio Contact.

Vossen takes it even further saying the partnership NRJ/Nostalgie also claims a top three position in the French-language radioscope, next to the private Bel RTL network and public-service broadcaster RTBF.

“A second reason to join forces is more obvious,” said Bruno van Sieleghem, director of NRJ Belgique, “We have common shareholders.” NRJ Belgique is a daughter company of NRJ Group S.A. of France; Nostalgie is co-owned by NRJ France and the Corelio press group.

“A next logical step is joining up to mutually strengthen each other. *L’union fait la force*, so to say,” Van Sieleghem said in a tongue-in-cheek reference to the current Belgian political situation.

A further element inspiring the two French-language networks to team up was the fact that, from top to bottom, from the board down to the workfloor, both station’s management and staffers got along very well.

“It will always remain a people’s story,” said Vossen, “And whatever your plans may be, people have to get along before everything. This was a unique opportunity

to take on the challenge, and today we don’t talk about fusion, merger or exchange of shares — it’s about two companies working together to reinforce each other.”

Practically speaking, the complete back-office of the two stations — finance, human resource, administration, marketing, Web design and technical facilities — was brought into a “groupement d’intérêt économique” (GIE) agreement covering both stations.

“This GIE-construction allows us to maximize the result of two complementary stations: NRJ targeting the 12–35 audience; Nostalgie serving the 35+ audience, working together. The GIE is essential in terms of economical scaling, and we didn’t have to license any workers,” Vossen said.

NRJ and Nostalgie complement each other more than just in terms of target audience — while NRJ is a strong player in organizing national events like “NRJ in the Park” and NRJ in concert shows, Nostalgie has established itself as a reliable partner for local events (600 events in 2009) organized across Wallonia.

Traditionally, national advertising for the two networks was handled by different sales-houses: Régie Média Belge (RMB) for NRJ, and IP for Radio Nostalgie, and this will remain unchanged under the new agreement.

“First of all because we both have a contract with our respective saleshouses; second, because we are very happy with them; and, finally, we see a big advantage in having both companies in-house. We will be able to improve our relationship with the two ad saleshouses and get the best of both worlds,” Van Sieleghem said.

Marc Vossen also said he sees a bright future for the Nostalgie brand in Belgium, being the only national brand broadcasting for both the Flemish north and the Walloon south of the country.

“The Flemish Nostalgie network is owned on a 50:50 basis by S.A. Nostalgie (with Nostalgie France and the Corelio press group) and the Concentra press group — I believe that the strength of the three groups

will become an extra push for the Flemish Nostalgie station, which already today shows positive audience ratings.”

Vossen calculated that, with NRJ and Nostalgie enjoying a daily audience reach of 700,000, and with Nostalgie (south) and (north) having a similar reach, the joint-force operation puts the 1 million listener figure for Nostalgie as a national brand within realistic distance.

“Which will then make us the third national brand in Belgium — and what’s even more important, we build a bridge between the Flemish north and the francophone south, not so evident in times when separatists want to split up the country.”

Apart from the fact that NRJ and Nostalgie were located on different addresses, they also both had totally different studio configurations, with Nostalgie driving a DHD RM 4200 console and NRJ being controlled by an Audioarts D-70 desk, with Zenon-Media automation software as the only element common to both stations.

“The idea was to have four studios with a similar technical lay out,” explained François van Reybroek, sound engineer and project manager in the new NRJ/Nostalgie constellation.

“That’s why we opted for a completely new configuration, based on Axia Audio consoles and networking. Actually, apart from the fact that both stations were on a completely different technical platform, we were seduced by the Axia equipment with NRJ Radio in Paris and the fact that other in other major French cities where Chérie FM, Nostalgie and NRJ share studios in a building, Axia was a great solution for rapid changes and full interconnection among studios.”

Van Reybroek said that SAVE Diffusion was the logical choice to serve as integrator for the installation because the French company is a distributor and integrator for both Axia and Zenon-Media and has expertise with both brands.

“Their thorough knowledge of both consoles and automation software was crucial in



our decision,” he said.

The fully digital studio setup includes two tandem studios for each station, each equipped with Axia Element consoles, which are used for on air, broadcast assistance, voicetrack recording and production of audio sequences. A fifth console is used in the common live studio.

An updated version of the Zenon-Media SEND 3 playout system and Cartwall jingle player act as content engine for the stations. Van Reybroek is also currently testing different types of monitor screens for the studios.

Telos Talkshow telephone hybrids were installed pending the release of the new Telos VX phone system, which will be integrated as part of the VoIP network used in the building.

Two smaller production studios with a common voicebooth and three editing rooms complete the new workspace for the two stations.

“The big advantage is that we have invested in a joint landscape for two radio stations,” said Van Reybroek. “Up-to-date equipment, all studios connected to each other for efficient transfer of data and content, a joint maintenance and technical crew and yet, the

two stations remain fully independent.”

The Axia network was crucial in helping to establish communications through the studios; whenever the Axia goes on air in a studio, the Zenon-Media automation system is ready to go, too.

“Everything is managed by Axia on the different levels. The smart integration between Axia and Zenon-Media enables several advanced features, such as automatic operation upon silence detection,” said Van Reybroek.

In the event of silence, the SEND Studio Player kicks in automatically after 5 seconds and then automatically switches to the SEND Emergency Player in the terminal room after 10 seconds if the studio player is unable to activate the program.

“In addition, the system allows for swift interchange between studios even during playback of individual songs,” said Van Reybroek. “The two stations’ signals are then channeled into a satellite bundle for transmission to the respective transmitters, 40 for each station. As for redundancy, we have backup transmission via continuous IP lines.”

The new radio headquarters will be officially inaugurated in September.