

All set for the future.

Tera's solutions at the Pcm Uitgevers (The Netherlands)

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Over the last few years, Amsterdam-based PCM Uitgevers, which publishes four of the five national daily newspapers in the Netherlands and has around 50 per cent of that market, has been undergoing somewhat of a transformation. Formed in 1994 by newspaper publisher Perscombinatie, following the acquisition of book publisher Meulenhoff and Nederlandse Dagbladunie (publisher of Algemeen Dagblad and NRC Handelsblad) a year later, PCM's majority shareholding was acquired by capital venture company, Apax Partners, in June 2004. Since then, the group has launched two newspaper titles, reformed existing ones and has plans to add more products to its offering including e-newspapers.





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Gé van den Heiligenberg,
PCM's Group Technical
Director

These changes, and indeed the ones to come, have become possible in part to the replacement of legacy editorial systems, making a significant difference to the operation of the newspapers' newsrooms in terms of flexibility and efficiency. For the daily morning newspapers, the broadsheet De Volkskrant (circulation 293,118) and the compact Trouw (circulation 107,569) in Amsterdam, and for the daily evening broadsheet, NRC Handelsblad (circulation 245,845) in Rotterdam, this has involved installing a complete editorial and content management system from Milan-based Tera Digital Publishing. In the case of the first two newspapers, the Tera GN3 editorial system replaced Atex and MediaSystemen systems, while in Rotterdam, SII and CCI systems were replaced.

All the newspapers in the group also installed Tera's Tark archiving system, replacing Digital Collection, FRS and Fotoware systems. In other words, in total, seven systems were replaced by one integrated Tera system.

By anyone's standards, this was a complex installation. For one thing, the numbers involved were large. For example, a total of around 1,000 seats were installed, making it the largest Tera installation in the world.

In addition, the Tark archiving system, which runs under Microsoft Windows on two servers each with four CPUs, can be accessed via its Web interface by almost 1,500 journalists, editors and librarians from a number of different sites across Holland, as well as correspondents from around the world. It also involved the transfer from the old archives of some 3.4 million stories and over 150,000 pictures.

Although the Tark system is common to all the newspapers, when it comes to editorial, each newspaper is strictly independent: their constitution not only demands a free press but also a diverse one. For example, De Volkskrant which was established in 1921, originally had close ties to the Catholic community, whereas Trouw, which began as an underground resistance newspaper during the Second World War, initially was strongly oriented towards Protestant communities.

NRC Handelsblad, on the other hand, has origins going back to the early 1800s. It first appeared under its current title in 1970 following the merger of the Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant and the Algemeen Handelsblad.

This independence meant that each newspaper had to have a completely separate Tera editorial system with its own servers and configured to meet its own specific needs. In addition, each newspaper has its own separate remote offices such as in The

Hague, Utrecht and Amsterdam (for the Rotterdam-based NRC Handelsblad), all of which have to be linked into the individual systems and supported.

When it came to the Tark archiving system which is used by all the newspapers, the newspapers' independence also resulted in Tera having to develop filter software to handle the complex copyright issues, as well as enable each newspaper to push out XML data for their own Web editions which currently are created using a separate Escenic Internet publications application.

If things were not complex enough, PCM's IT systems are outsourced to Getronics Pink Roccade. As a result, all the servers for the Tera systems had to be installed off-site at Pink Roccade's office.

Affordable and configurable

Under such circumstances, the obvious question to ask is why go for a completely different editorial system. Would it not have been simpler to upgrade the current systems?

However, as is pointed out by **Gé van den Heiligenberg**, PCM's group technical director, the opposite was the case.

"Tera offered the best quality and price. We had very old Atex and SII systems so it was quite a change but I think some people wanted to have a bigger change. The Tera editorial system did not look that much different so, basically, they were afraid that it would not offer enough possibilities.

There were other systems which were sexier on the outside with a lot of buttons but you can have too many buttons, too many offerings. Journalists need simple tools which will enable them to type and edit their stories. I think that Tera is excellent for this. Simple tools are also easy to learn.

All the users are happy with the system including the board of PCM. That is the most important thing since we are here to create stories, and the system should support and help us to make the stories in the newspaper better. Despite outsourcing our IT and facilities management, we were still able to manage this project in such a short time and so successfully."



Tera continued to do everything we asked of them. Even when we were being very demanding, they still came back with a smile and helped us out. It was overwhelming in terms of service.

Jeroen de Witte,
Project Manager





People at the Trouw, Amsterdam



This was in a large part due to the project management carried out by an in-house team which was set up specifically for this project.

Headed by **Jeroen de Witte**, the team consists of four core people from the different newspapers who were supplemented as necessary by staff from the suppliers as the systems were implemented.

The project was divided up into four phases. Phase zero involved putting forward a business case for a new system and investigating the suitable suppliers. From a list of ten possibilities, a short list of three was produced. More detailed questions were asked and site visits were made to check out the various systems.

In de Witte's view, Tera was a relatively straightforward choice since, although there were a number of new systems around, PCM wanted proven technology, and to use a mainstream database and several different workflows. He was also very impressed by the Tera people.

As he explains:

"Whatever we requested, the answer always came back "yes". Whatever we asked, they said they could do it. There were no big no's. We thought that it could be just a marketing ploy but it turned out that they really could do all the things we asked. We also found the Tera people very flexible and helpful. We were somewhat afraid that once we had signed the contract that this would disappear but it did not happen. They continued to do everything we asked of them. Even when we were being very demanding, they still came back with a smile and helped us out. It was overwhelming in terms of service. The system itself is very flexible because it is scriptable. So, basically, we have been able to do everything we want in the way that we want. We did not even have to change our workflows, nor did we lose any function. For me, as a project manager, it was very simple to say yes to Tera because they are so service orientated."

However, PCM wanted to be completely sure.

It was therefore decided to set up a pilot 'common ground' GN3 editorial system in order to prove the concept. It would also mean that the actual implementation could be carried out that much more quickly.

Having proved the concept including successfully producing complete pages of

De Volkskrant, the PCM board decided to go ahead with the Tera system provided that a number of features were added to the system. The development of these was undertaken in the summer/early autumn of 2004 and installation began in the October.

The Tark system was the first to go live. This occurred in February 2005 across all the group's newspapers. It was followed by De Volkskrant going live with GN3 in April. The installation of GN3 at Trouw began a few weeks later and went live in June with NRC Handelsblad in Rotterdam following in December.

As De Witte admits, the schedule was very tight but as he explains, *"By implementing the pilot system, we had a common ground. It was like having a menu from which each newspaper could choose its specific needs such as system configuration, fonts, page layout, scripts and so on. This meant that we were able to implement the systems that much more quickly."*

In addition, by consolidating the systems and using standard hardware, there have been significant cost benefits. For instance, maintenance costs have been almost halved, being 54 per cent of what they were previously.

This figure includes the depreciation of the total hardware investment in three years. As the new system can be used both as traditional fat clients -installed on the local PC- and as thin clients -using Citrix- , it also means that it can be used remotely via an Internet connection to PCM's VPN and without the need for a specially installed PC.

Simple and flexible

So how are the journalists finding the new system? Ton Treur, page designer at Trouw, having worked on the Tera system for four or five months, said,

"Everything is different. There is nothing the same but that is not a problem any more. We have got used to it and we like it very much. We can see what we can do immediately and it is much easier to choose the pictures."



It was quite a change but it was a good one. Change is always difficult but it was much less difficult than we expected. I think I can say that on the whole we are glad to have the new system.

Jan Peter van der Kamp
production manager
at de Volkskrant





People at de Volkskrant



He added:

"Recently, a young 18 year old joined us straight from school and on her third day she started producing pages."

Kees Smedes, assistant editor at Trouw, reported:

"We did have a very old Atex system, so it was time to move on. It was quite a change but it was a good one. Instead of having several systems with interfaces which could break down, we now have one system and that is a great advantage.

The introduction was good. Change is always difficult but it was much less difficult than we expected. I think I can say that on the whole we are glad to have the new system. In relation to the Atex system, it is a big step forward."

The people at De Volkskrant hold a similar view.

For instance, **Jan Peter van der Kamp, production manager**, said:

"The change over was difficult because we had been working with the Atex system for many years. However, I must say that the introduction of Tera went very smoothly and things have settled down a great deal now. I think the system is very flexible and it is easy to adapt the workflow to the way you want it, so that's a big advantage.

I think it was a necessary move and a good move. We have not had any major problems with the Tera system."

Just as importantly, the Tera system is enabling PCM to introduce new products as was pointed out by **Guus Beek, information manager of NRC Handelsblad**.

"The installation went very well. In fact, we are so happy with the system that last month we launched a new publication, NCR Next. We implemented this ourselves using the Tera system.

We found it easy to do with the system and the result is above our expectations.

Despite everybody talking about publishing on the Internet, we have been able to launch a new printed edition with the Tera system which is being very successful in the market."

Nor is PCM stopping here.

It has already moved on to Phase 3 of the Prisma project.

This will not only include enhancing the current capabilities of GN3 and Tark but also implementing the Internet publication module, Site Manager 2 for which PCM was a development partner, and Newsroom Management, the new GN3 application for managing all newsroom activities including the diary function and budgeting.

As Van den Heiligenberg concludes:

"Having implemented Tera at all three newspapers, we are now in the next phase.

We have already introduced an extra morning newspaper and an extra weekly newspaper. We are also updating our Web sites and are exploiting our archives more than we could have done with our old system. So we are trying to get all the business advantages from this new system that we can. We are not going to sit still.

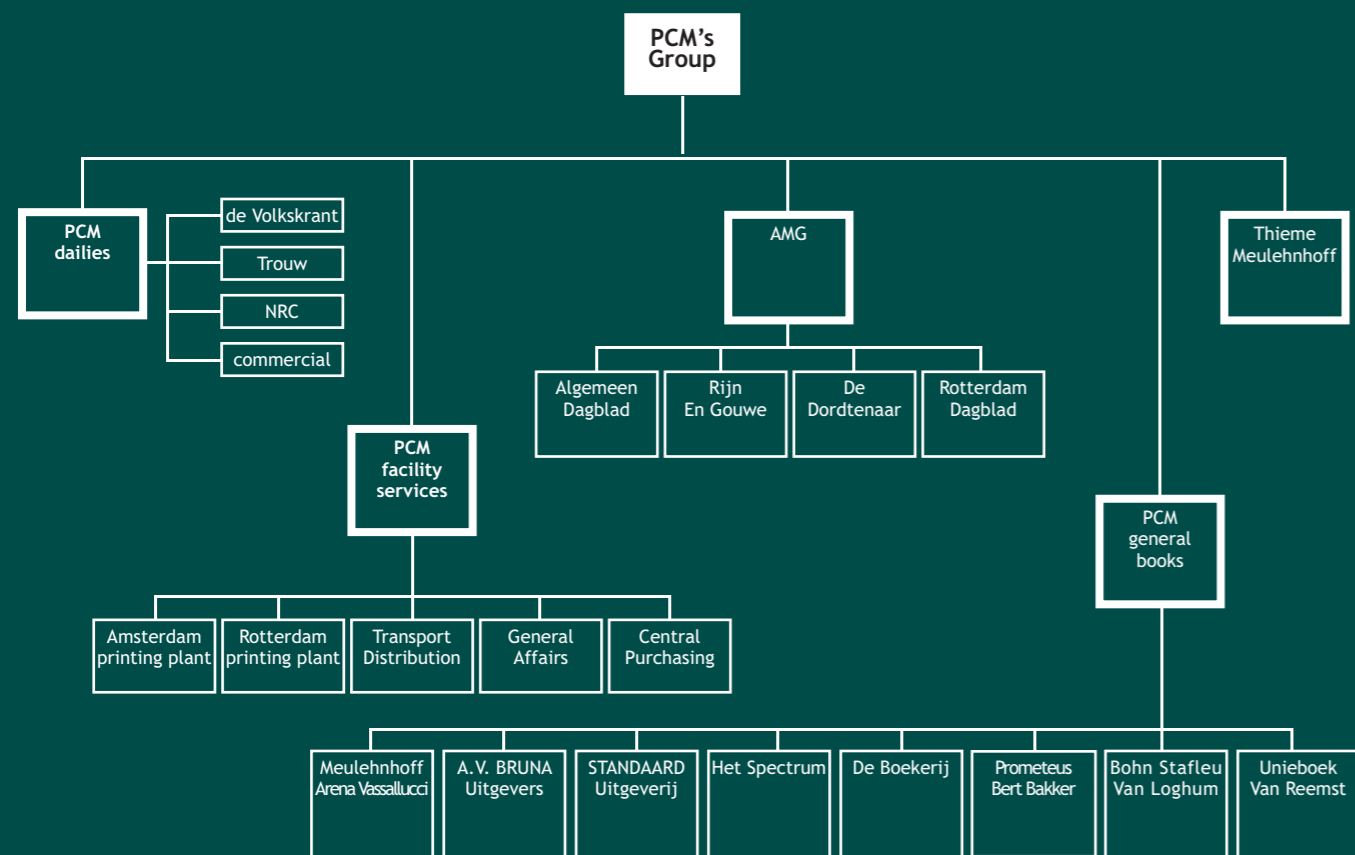
In Tera, I think we have someone who also wants to advance into new areas.

For example, we are starting up a newsroom management project to manage the newsroom better. We are also probably going to use our newsroom to produce radio broadcasting, maybe narrow band television broadcasting or Internet broadcasting, and we are looking into producing e-newspapers."



The Prisma Team





About PCM Uitgevers

As one of the largest publishers in the Dutch language region, PCM Uitgevers (*PCM Publishers*) is primarily active as a publisher of daily newspapers, freesheets, trade and professional books and educational publications.

The group is divided into a holding company office in Amsterdam and a number of subsidiaries.

The organisation employs a total of 3,600 people.

Shares and shareholders

The holders of the shares are APAX Partners, Foundation Democracy and Media, De Volkskrant Foundation and the Foundation for the Promotion of the Christian Press in the Netherlands. The shareholdings are as follows: APAX Partners 52.5%, Foundation Democracy and Media 41.9%, De Volkskrant Foundation 4.3%, Foundation for the Promotion of the Christian Press 1.3%.

The mission statement of the company aims at sustaining pluralism and free speech in an open, democratic society.





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