

The E Polis Group  
Italy  
A Case History



Beyond syndication

## Beyond syndication.

E Polis, reinventing the tradition



Innovate without running after new media at any cost but reinventing your own vision and way to look at “the printed paper”. E Polis: a challenge that’s been won and that sets a new relevant milestone in the Italian and international daily market. §

The printed newspaper can still be a most profitable business. §

### In the beginning

E Polis is probably the most innovative publishing group to make it on the Italian newspaper scene.

Nichi Grauso, the Italian media tycoon known for his innovative ideas and the speed with which he catches the wave of change, fine-tuned the project between 2000 and 2004, the year when the first daily title of the group went live.

Mr Grauso is not a newcomer to this kind of venture.

Founder of one of earliest Italian “private” radio stations, immediately followed by a commercial TV channel, Nichi Grauso meets the press when he decides to buy the Unione Sarda, the number one regional in Sardinia (Italy).



To the Unione Sarda, Grauso adds another paper, the Polish daily *Zycie Warszawy*, followed by the acquisition of a TV channel, also in Poland.

Meanwhile he comes across the early Internet, immediately understanding its huge potential.

With the help of a team of experts, Grauso studies and acquires Video On Line, the first Italian Internet provider that was completely free - a project that the Italian tycoon replicates in several countries across Northern Africa and in Albania.

Video On Line (VOL) is then sold to the Italian telephone company Telecom that converts it into its national portal, TIN.it

After the VOL adventure, Grauso decides to take some time to rest and study the changing world of media, only to come up with the innovative project of E Polis, with which to challenge the Unione Sarda and the whole of the traditional Italian press - to use a word dear to Grauso himself.

### The Italian scenario

The Italian market is characterised by two significant aspects: the news stands as the exclusive channel of distribution, and the presence of advertising agencies, companies that operate outside the publishers and that sell the advertising space.

In 2004, the state of the Italian editorial market did not differ much from the rest of Europe, and the Italian publishers, along with their international counterparts, were facing a double challenge: both readership and advertising revenue were falling.

In the struggle to fight the loss of readers who abandoned the printed paper for other alternative media, such as radio, TV and the Internet, publishers tried to react with a heavy use of products distributed with the paper itself, such as CDs, DVDs, books, and other collectibles.

Then they tried with the full colour paper, but this only partly satisfied the advertising buyers, who had become more demanding in terms of segmentation of the audience and potential to reach it.

In this scenario Nichi Grauso launched the first local title of his newspaper group, *Il Giornale di Sardegna*, a 64-page tabloid paper distributed daily in the metropolitan area of Cagliari, Sardinia.



We took care of every single detail of the project. Our newspaper has been studied to win the fidelity of the reader: we gave more room to sections dedicated to in-depth analysis on the daily themes. Then local news and sports had another major role, with culture.

Antonio Cipriani  
Group Editor in Chief

### An Italian case

In 2006 Nichi Grauso's E Polis was recognized as the "editorial case of the year" for the Italian market. Especially in the beginning phase of the project, many labelled it as the "usual foolish operations" promoted by Nichi Grauso, the Italian media tycoon particularly known for his futuristic visions. Grauso is famed for creating the first private TV channel in Italy and launching the first free Italian Internet provider.

E Polis, which grew from *Il Giornale di Sardegna*, is a group of 15 local free daily papers. The company publishes a free paper of the highest quality: 64 pages based on a wise mix of international and local news, presented to readers in an extremely appealing layout. The structure allows a vibrant and authoritative approach to news.

After the launch, the overall circulation settled at around 700 thousand daily copies, seven days a week. The advertiser response, lukewarm in the beginning, immediately grew. The rapid success carved out an important space for the new group in the Italian news scene.

"The E Polis editorial project is quite simple," says Antonio Cipriani, editor in chief of the group. "We know that the only profitable chance that television leaves to newspapers is about the local communities. We chose to focus on the cities. The Italian history has been built upon the city republics, real hearts of the economy and cultures of those times. The strong local focus of the group is evident in the choice of its name. In fact, E Polis in Greek means "the city". The name of each paper immediately suggests its strong bonds with the local communities—using the name of the city set after the definite article "Il" [the] to characterize the uniqueness: *Il Venezia*, *Il Bologna*, *Il Napoli*..."

"The name "E Polis" itself is present in the mastheads of Rome and Milan, the two Italian metropolises. More than elsewhere in Italy, these two cities represent the core of the project: a news network whose goal is explaining the local news to the national readers and interpreting the global news for the local reader."

E Polis in Greek means *the cities, or the towns* - it reflects our firm intention to base our papers in the towns of the Italian provinces. Our country formed around the Comuni, the free-cities of the Middle Age, natural expansion of the families...  
"[...] it is there, in the heart of the towns, that we will fight our battle against *the traditional press*."

Nichi Grauso  
Publisher of E Polis



E Polis is organized as one large newsroom deployed across the country



“Each reader recognises the distinctive marks of the community they live in, from the phone number to call the local newsroom, to the wide selection of local news. Our goal is to become the neural system of the communities.” Reader enthusiasm for the concept is demonstrated by market research regularly commissioned and conducted by Ipsos, a respected market research company in Italy.

What are the reactions of the professionals of the Italian media world?

“Of course in the beginning everyone was openly sceptical,” explains Nichi Grauso. “Both publishers and advertisers were sceptical. A free daily is automatically perceived as a poor quality product, another advertising tank offered to a public of non-readers.”



“My belief is that, once the industrial production processes have been automated, it takes the same effort to create a good product as a bad product. But the public response is different. The feedback we get from our public is comforting: our reading index is almost double that of the other free press. E Polis is a paper that our readers also love to take home.”

“Advertisers, doubtful in the beginning, were convinced by the massive feedback of our readers, so that we are abandoning the double distribution channel in favor of a new distribution channel that permits us to better target the final reader.” According to all the market research, E Polis is perceived as a simple and clear daily.

In the newsroom



“Both publisher’s and editor’s instructions were clear: to organize the mass of news that floods the information scenario,” says Sergio Juan Sanchez, responsible for the graphic project of the paper. “Our effort focused on the details of a modern project: captivating graphics, a modern look; and a number of strong signals to allow an easy understanding of the product.”

“With Antonio Cipriani we tried to mix the explicit information (the data) with meaning and significance expressed through the use of graphics—from infographics to the in-depth-boxes. Then we spent a great deal of time on educating and training the staff to understand the project until they made it theirs and used it properly.”

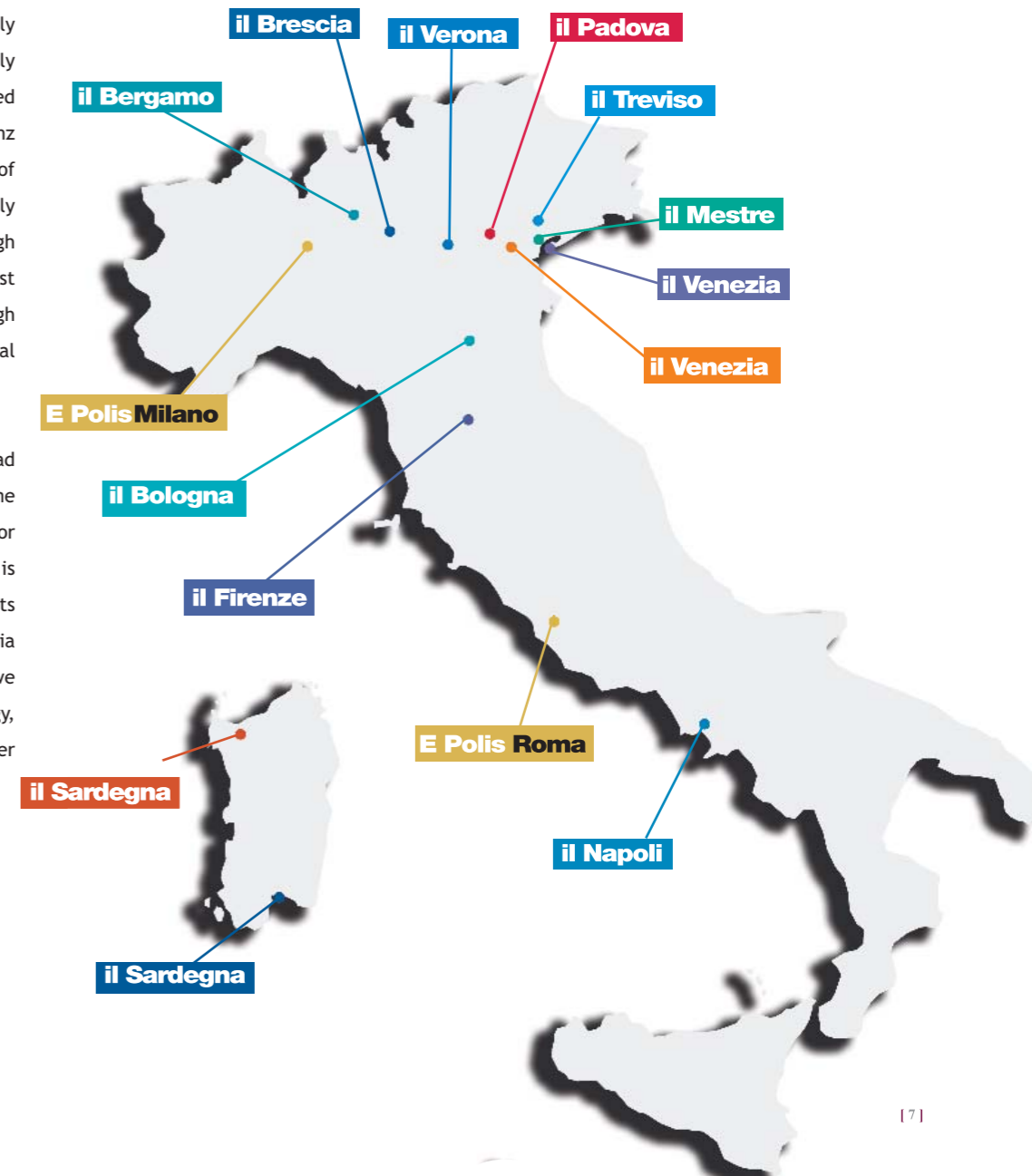
### When technology brings barriers down

“A big help came from Tera’s solutions that allowed us to focus on the content, sparing us all the recurring little actions.”

From a technology point of view, the Tera content management system GN3 has been installed in a modular way, following the growing number of users.

“More than 150 users, mostly journalists, connect daily to the server farm located in Cagliari,” explains Franz Rossi, Managing Director of Tera Digital Publishing. “Only 40 of them do it through a local network, the rest connect remotely through the Internet from their local newsrooms.”

“The E Polis system is spread all over the country. In some cities, Rome and Milan for instance, the newsroom is virtual and the journalists connect to the system via UMTS or ADSL. To do so we chose the Citrix technology, thoroughly tested in other



editorial realities that use our content management system. Citrix technology allows the users to work from a remote location as if they were physically present in the newsroom.”

“We work side by side with the group technical department led by the IT manager Reinier van Kleij to streamline each phase of the workflow, favouring the automation and the optimization of the process. Each night E Polis produces 15 64-page editions for a total of 960 pages. 500 pages are unique, 200 carry advertising or are gathered from external service bureaus. All this is done by 130 journalists and five graphic operators.”

“The most interesting thing of this project is that E Polis is a continuous work-in-progress idea. Mr Grauso pushes us to expand our limits. Recently, we integrated a complex advertising front-end system. And we are currently working on delivering the content to an important Italian Internet provider as part of an existing project that comprises the integration of different media.”

The total approach is definitely the hallmark of E Polis: a perfect integration of editorial, graphic and technological projects to create a product that responds to different local demands. E Polis is a challenge—a bet on the future of the printed medium. Nichi Grauso is truly convinced that what’s old in the industry is not the printed paper but the way publishers think of and produce it. This has been the rule on which Grauso built the E Polis network, and, judging from the results, the bet has





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