EFFICIENT MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION IN BENELUX

Navigating cultural and market dynamics in Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg

EFFICIENT COMMUNICATION IN BENELUX

Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg have been officially linked together since 1944, and the Netherlands and Belgium have a much longer shared history. It is therefore not surprising that the Benelux countries are often regarded as a single region in terms of sales market and communication.

The temptation to talk about a 'Benelux culture' is also understandable. The fact that Belgium and Luxembourg share French as an official language, while the Netherlands and Belgium share Dutch, naturally further reinforces this image of unity– especially for foreign clients, for whom the travel distance from the northernmost part of the Netherlands to the southernmost part of Luxembourg is often a mere fraction of the travel distance across a state or province in their home country.

In reality, though, there are clear differences. And these differences have implications for the approach to communication in the three countries of Benelux.

In this paper we look in detail at some striking differences and give tips on how to communicate as successfully as possible in the Benelux region.

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A. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The most striking differences between the Benelux countries are found in the field of culture. The Dutch organizational sociologist Geert Hofstede captured the cultural profile of different countries using his 6-D model, where 'D' stands for 'dimensions'.

Hofstede compares cultures according to the following dimensions:
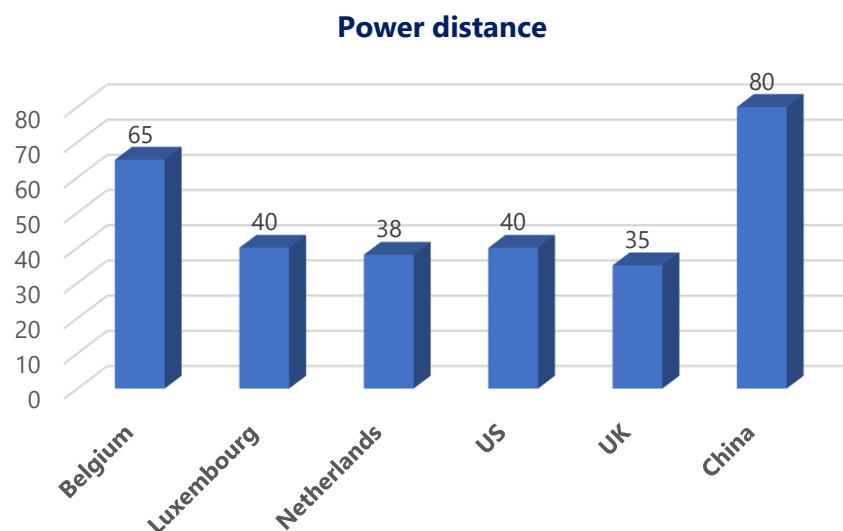1. Power distance
2. Individualism/collectivism
3. Motivation towards Achievement and Success (formerly Masculinity vs. femininity)
4. Uncertainty avoidance
5. Long term orientation
6. Restraint/indulgence

In order to put the differences between the Benelux countries into context, we have also included the figures for the United States, the United Kingdom and China in the graphs in this paper. The maximum score is 100.

1. Power distance

Power distance is defined as *the degree to which the less powerful members of a country's institutions and organizations expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.*
People in high power distance societies (Belgium) accept a hierarchical order in which everyone has a place that requires no further justification. People in low power distance societies (the Netherlands and Luxembourg) strive to equalize the distribution of power and demand justification for power inequalities.

Power distance

With regard to power distance, what do you need to take into account when communicating with and for organizations?

Short power distance
- few supervisory personnel
- decentralization is popular
- pragmatic relationships between superiors and subordinates
- privileges and status symbols are unwelcome

Long power distance
- more supervisory personnel
- centralization is popular
- emotional relationships between superiors and subordinates
- privileges and status symbols are common and popular

The use of the polite '*u*'-form that is common in Flanders can appear formal or distant to the Dutch, but a Flemish person is still more likely to be upset by being addressed as *je* than by being addressed as *u*.

Source: Flemish Government

2. Individualism/collectivism

Individualism/collectivism is about *the degree of interdependence within a society*.
In individualistic societies individuals are expected to take care only of themselves and their immediate families, whereas in collectivist societies a person belongs to groups that take care of each other in exchange for loyalty.

Individualism/collectivism

Belgium: 81
Luxembourg: 60
Netherlands: 100
US: 60
UK: 76
China: 43
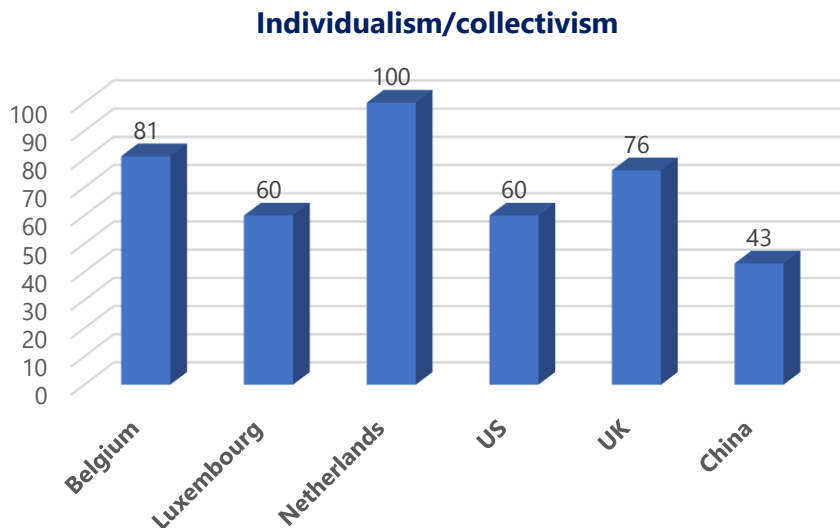
With regard to individualism and collectivism, what do you need to take into account when communicating with and for organizations?

Collectivism
- harmony must always be preserved, and direct confrontation should be avoided
- mistakes are a source of shame for yourself and your group or team
- people score as 'introverted' on personality tests
- showing sadness is encouraged, whereas showing joy is not
- the social network is the main source of information
- personal relationships take precedence over tasks
- equality is a collectivist ideal

Individualism
- an honest person says what he or she thinks
- relationships are a matter of personal choice and must be maintained
- resources are owned by the individual
- mistakes are a source of guilt and loss of self-esteem
- people score as 'extroverted' on personality tests
- showing joy is encouraged, whereas showing sadness is not
- media are the most important source of information
- tasks take precedence over personal relationships
- freedom is an individualistic ideal

3. Motivation towards Achievement and Success

Motivation towards Achievement and Success (formerly Masculinity vs. femininity). MAS: In this dimension, masculinity is defined as "a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material rewards for success."

A high score (Decisive) on this dimension indicates that the society will be driven by competition, achievement and success, with success being defined by the winner / best in field - a value system that starts in school and continues throughout organisational life. A low score (Consensus-oriented) on the dimension means that the dominant values in society are caring for others and quality of life. A Consensus-oriented society is one where quality of life is the sign of success and standing out from the crowd is not admirable. The fundamental issue here is what motivates people, wanting to be the best (Decisive) or liking what you do (Consensus-oriented).

Motivation towards Achievement and Success
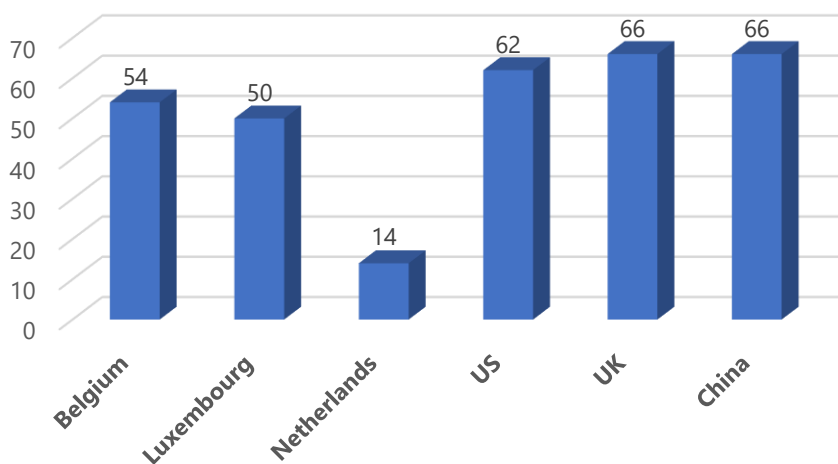
With regard to motivation towards achievement and success, what do you need to take into account when communicating with and for organizations?

Consensus-oriented
- relationships and quality of life are important
- women and men should be modest
- egos are hidden
- 'work to live'
- greater proportion of women in high-status occupations

Decisive
- challenge, salary, recognition and promotion are important
- men must be assertive, ambitious and tough
- women should be tender and relationship-oriented
- egos are inflated
- choices are based on career opportunities
- 'live to work'
- greater proportion of women in low-status occupations

4. Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is about *the way a community deals with the fact that the future is always unknown*, and how threatened people feel by uncertain situations.

Belgium scores very high on this dimension, with 94 out of 100, whereas the Netherlands scores 53 out of 100. Belgians will therefore go to much greater lengths than Dutch people to avoid uncertain situations and risks.

Uncertainty avoidance
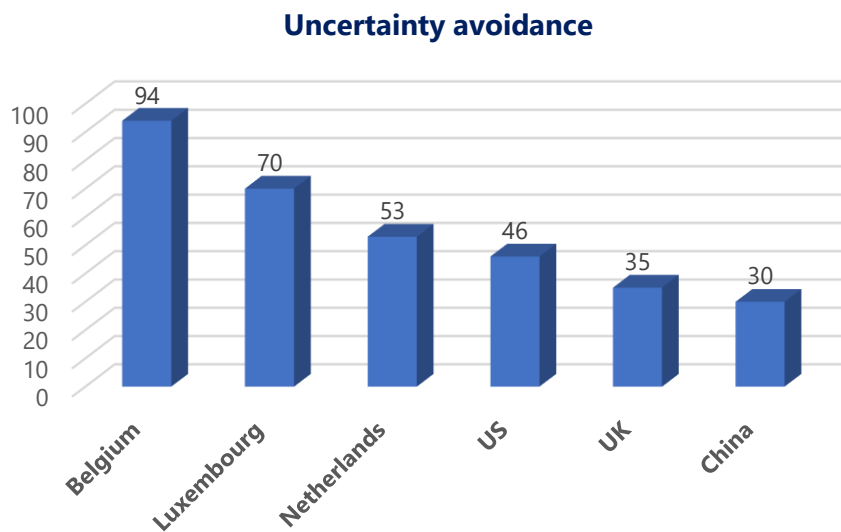
With regard to uncertainty avoidance, what do you need to take into account when communicating with and for organizations?

Low uncertainty avoidance
- low stress, low anxiety
- high score for 'friendliness' in personality tests
- weak superegos
- things that are different are interesting
- people feel happier
- fewer concerns about health and money
- risky investments
- there should be no more rules than strictly necessary
- tolerance for ambiguity and chaos
- better at inventing, less good at applying
- belief in generalists and common sense
- open-minded

High uncertainty avoidance
- high stress, high anxiety
- high score for 'neuroticism' in personality tests
- strong superegos
- things that are different are dangerous
- people feel less happy
- more concerns about health and money
- conservative investments
- emotional need for rules, even if these are impracticable
- need for precision and formalization
- less good at inventing, better at applying
- belief in specialists and technical solutions
- conservatism

'Officially, we speak one language in the Netherlands and Flanders. The problem is that the Dutch as a whole are not interested in the Flemish. I notice this in my students, who know nothing about Flanders, don't find Flanders interesting and only have a rudimentary idea of what Flemish sounds like, although they can recognize it right away. Moreover, they also definitely look down on the Flemish. Conversely, Flemish people have the idea that the Dutch are highly skilled speakers of the Dutch language, and that they are more self-confident and assertive. You therefore end up with a typical accommodation situation. This Flemish lack of confidence about language is reflected in the way they adapt to Dutch norms.'

Stef Grondelaers, Belgian sociolinguist at Radboud University Nijmegen

5. Long term orientation

The long term orientation dimension is about a society's traditions, norms and values. It describes *how a community maintains links with the past while looking ahead to the future*.

Long term orientation
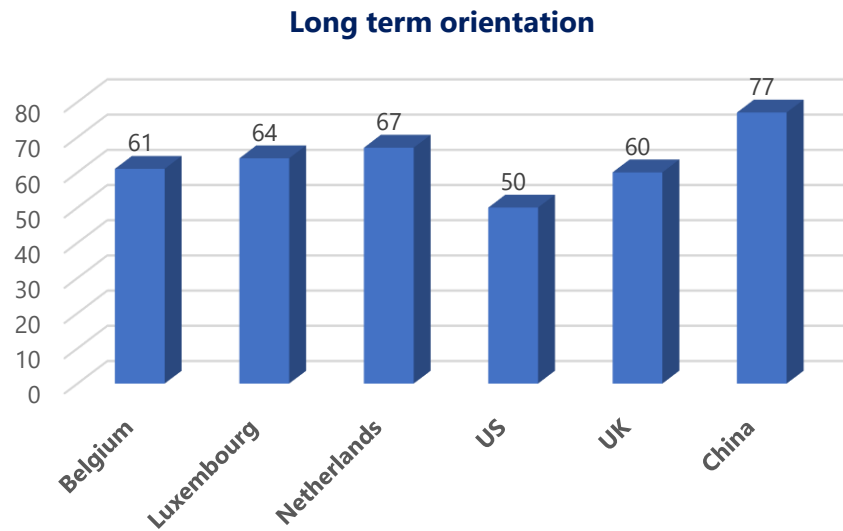
With regard to long term orientation, what do you need to take into account when communicating with and for organizations?

Short-term orientation
- time-honored traditions and norms are difficult to maintain
- avoiding loss of face
- meeting social obligations
- creativity and innovation

Long-term orientation
- pragmatic approach
- the pursuit of rewards in the future
- sustainability
- persistence
- thriftiness

6. Indulgence

The restraint/indulgence dimension looks at the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised. It is about *the extent to which there is social control within a community.*
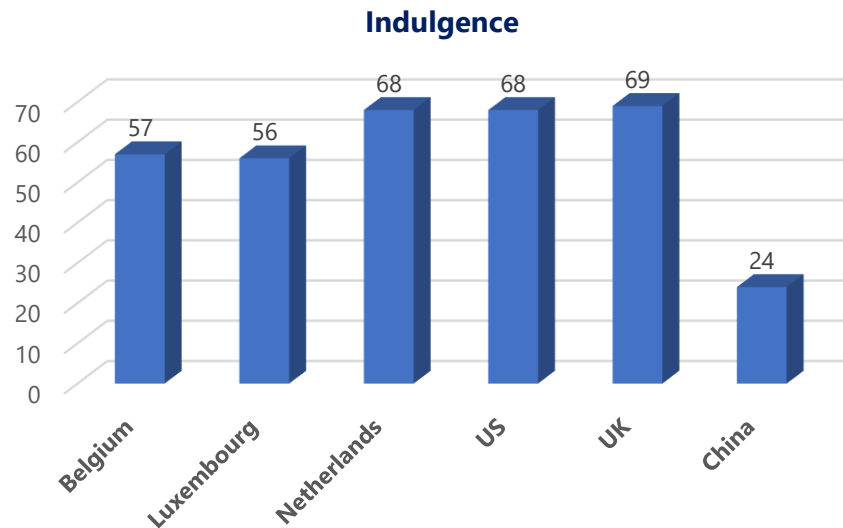
Indulgence

With regard to restraint/indulgence, what do you need to take into account when communicating with and for organizations?

Indulgence
- enjoying life
- optimistic
- free time is important
- spending money

Restraint
- needs are suppressed
- strict social norms

The dimensions made concrete
The main differences between the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg are observed on the dimensions of *power distance, Motivation towards Achievement and Success (formerly Masculinity vs. femininity) and uncertainty avoidance.*

Power distance
The power distance in Belgium (60) is clearly much greater than in the Netherlands (38) and Luxemburg (40). This means that it is more accepted in Belgium for people higher up in the hierarchy to have more privileges than their subordinates. Belgium is clearly a more hierarchical country than the Netherlands and Luxemburg; the Netherlands and Luxemburg have a flatter structure. Dutch and Luxembourg employees therefore want to be treated 'as equally as possible', The Dutch are known for engaging in endless discussions along these lines, while Belgian employees expect the manager to be 'the boss' to a much greater extent and to make decisions.

Addressing people by their title is therefore also more important in Belgium, as is the use of polite verb forms, especially in the initial phase of contact.

The power distance in Luxembourg is lower than in Belgium, but higher than in the Netherlands. Like in Belgium, hierarchy is respected, and authority is more pronounced in formal settings. However, Luxembourg's power distance is softened by its multicultural environment, where interactions may vary depending on whether the communication is in French, German, Luxembourgish, or English. Luxembourg's international workforce also brings elements of more egalitarian cultures, especially in business sectors dominated by expats. There is an increasing trend toward less hierarchical structures in younger, international companies, reflecting the influence of the broader international business culture.

Uncertainty avoidance
Belgians (94) are much keener than the Luxembourgish (70) and Dutch (53) to avoid and eliminate uncertainty. They do this, among other things, by being well informed, by opting for proven quality and above all by building relationships. Personal contact plays a big role, far more than it does in the Netherlands. In general, one can say that a Belgian goes for the 'contact' and a Dutch person for the 'contract'.

The advantage is that once a relationship of trust exists, a Belgian is generally a more loyal customer or partner than a Dutch person. Since relationships are so important, it is much harder for a Belgian to break them. A Belgian will often do business with his or her 'friend' even if he or she is not offering the best price.

Luxembourg, like Belgium, scores quite high on uncertainty avoidance. This is reflected in the cautious and risk-averse approach often taken in business decisions. Luxembourg's financial sector, in particular, emphasizes stability, trust, and proven quality, given the country's role as a key player in European finance.

Building personal relationships is just as important in Luxembourg as it is in Belgium. Many Luxembourgers know each other, went to school together, and will therefore tend to do business with their acquaintances. Also, they will often prefer to do business with a Luxembourg service provider rather than an outsider.

The multicultural aspect of Luxembourg adds another layer of complexity: while Luxembourgish nationals might prefer personal trust-based relationships, international professionals often bring a more transactional approach, similar to the Dutch 'contract over contact' mindset.

Motivation towards achievement and success

Despite the Dutch 'big mouth', Dutch society (14) is a lot more feminine and consensus-oriented than Belgian (54) and Luxembourgish (50) society. This is reflected in the fact that both men and women are expected to be modest and tender-hearted and to share tasks equally. For example, it can be seen that part-time work is far more common in the Netherlands than in Luxemburg and Belgium, including for men. In the Netherlands, it is expected that everyone will be free to share their opinion and a consensus solution will be sought.

In Belgium, people keep their cards much closer to their chest, and above all defend their own position; a compromise is eventually reached, which involves an equally great sacrifice on everyone's part. In other words, this is a conflict model in which the outcome is a ceasefire. It is also striking that status is much more important in Belgium than in the Netherlands. A high-ranking person wears expensive clothes and has a nice car of the right make and a big house. This is much less accepted in the Netherlands. For example, the Dutch prime minister cycles to work. Cutting an impressive figure is thus more important in Belgium than in the Netherlands.

Luxembourg falls closer to the middle on the masculinity/femininity scale. There is a strong focus on quality of life, with many companies offering flexible hours. Also, Luxembourg became the first country to offer free standard- class public transportation, aiming to reduce traffic and fight pollution. However, widespread teleworking is quite limited, due to the challenges faced by cross-border workers, who must adhere to strict annual teleworking day quotas to comply with national tax regulations/bilateral agreements.

> *'Belgians meet when they have a problem, the Dutch meet until they have a problem.'*
>
> *Dick Dresselhuis. D-advice bvba*

In Luxembourg, status symbols are very present. A glance at the car brands on the streets or the luxury watches worn by C-Suite executives shows that having a high-ranking position often comes with material signs of success.

International marketing and communication

It goes without saying that Hofstede's six-dimensional model can be very useful in international marketing, as it allows businesses to adapt their products and services and their communication to local customs and preferences.

For example, a car manufacturer that wants to market its cars in a country with high uncertainty avoidance needs to emphasize their safety. In a country with low uncertainty avoidance, on the other hand, it can base its communication on the social image that the car confers on the buyer. Mobile phone marketing is another interesting example of the application of Hofstede's model: if you want to market mobile phones in China, you can present a collective experience. In the United States, however, it is better to show how an individual uses the phone to save time and money.

B. MEDIA

The media landscapes in the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg differ considerably.

The Netherlands has approximately
- 1,700 consumer and trade magazines
- 6 public TV channels and 15 commercial channels
- 6 public radio stations and 12 commercial stations
- 9 national newspapers
- 19 regional newspapers
- 500 free local papers
- 6.2 million .nl sites

For Belgium, the total figures are as follows:
- 800 consumer and trade magazines
- 4 Dutch-language public TV channels
- 5 French-language public TV channels
- 1 German-language public TV channel
- 23 Dutch-language commercial channels
- 18 French-language commercial channels
- 17 public radio stations and 18 commercial stations
- 8 Dutch-language national/regional newspapers
- 7 French-language national/regional newspapers
- 1 German-language regional newspaper
- 1.7 million .be sites

For Luxembourg, the total figures are as follows:

- 1 Luxembourgish-language public TV channel (RTL Télé Lëtzebuerg)
- no dedicated French-language public TV channels
- no German-language public TV channels
- 2 Luxembourgish-language regional channels
- 2 Luxembourgish-language public radio stations (RTL Radio Lëtzebuerg, and Radio 100.7)
- 5 private and international radio stations, broadcasting in French, German, and English
- 3 French-language national newspapers (Le Quotidien, L'essentiel (free daily), Virgule (free daily, online only)
- 6 German-language national newspapers (Luxemburger Wort, Tageblatt, Journal (online only), Reporter (online only); L'essentiel (free daily
- English-language national newspapers (Luxembourg Times, online only)
- Portuguese-language national newspapers (Contacto)
- 3 weeklies in different languages (Telecran, Revue, Land)
- One business publication (Paperjam, FR)
- One Xpat magazine (Delano, EN)
- Very few specialised media, for instance in the fields of Finance, Horesca, Food, IT …..
- .lu domains: >100,000 registered .lu websites.

The main difference is in the language in which you offer your content in the different countries. For the Netherlands this is very simple.

If you want to serve the whole of Belgium with your content, you need to make sure that it is available in both Flemish and Walloon. The German-speaking community also has its own media, but this minority is served either on a tailor-made basis or with the Flemish- and Walloon-language content that the other media also receive.

While Luxembourg has fewer media outlets compared to its Benelux neighbours, due to its smaller population, the media landscape is multilingual, catering to the country's trilingual population (Luxembourgish, French, and German) as well as to a significant number of English-speaking expats. This linguistic diversity requires businesses and communicators to adapt their media strategies carefully based on their target audience. Luxembourg's press and online publications are vital for reaching both local residents and the international business community.

'Luxembourg is a prime example of a multilingual society, where multilingualism is a normal part of daily life. It is both a source of opportunity and a challenge, particularly when it comes to social integration and equal access to information.'

Fernand Fehlen, Sociologist, University of Luxembourg

Radio and TV

To be honest, radio and TV are not something our offices deal with on a daily basis. For us, they are a part of the marketing mix that usually reduces our clients' ROI. For some businesses, though, radio and TV advertising is relevant, which is why we briefly outline the possibilities here – on the assumption that you own or work for a business with relatively deep pockets.

Radio and TV advertising in the Netherlands

The Dutch public broadcaster is allowed to devote up to 10% of its broadcasting time every year to advertising, with a maximum of 15% per day. This applies to both radio and TV. The public broadcaster is not allowed to interrupt a program with advertising, whereas commercial broadcasters have more options for broadcasting advertising. Advertising is therefore usually broadcast on public radio and TV on the hour, just before or after the news. Commercial channels also often have an ad break on the half hour.

Radio and TV advertising in Belgium

The Belgian public broadcaster is not allowed to broadcast advertising at all; advertising is of course allowed on commercial channels. These may show a maximum of 144 minutes of advertising between 6 am and 6 pm, and a maximum of 72 minutes between 6 pm and midnight, representing a maximum of 20% per period. Children's programs, programs with religious content, worship services and newscasts may not be interrupted by ad breaks. Furthermore, advertising should never have a negative impact on the program, and the advertiser must take account of the program type and natural breaks. Similar rules exist for ads broadcast on the radio. All ads must be clearly distinguished from programs.

Radio and TV advertising in Luxembourg

Luxembourg follows a similar model to Belgium regarding public and commercial broadcasting. The public broadcaster, RTL Télé Lëtzebuerg, is not allowed to air advertising during its news programs or children's programming. Advertising is generally permitted on commercial channels, but it is subject to strict regulations, especially regarding the protection of minors and the clear separation between editorial content and ads. Television advertising is limited to 12 minutes per hour, and like in Belgium, ads cannot interrupt certain types of programs, such as news, religious services, or shows aimed at children. Radio advertising in Luxembourg is subject to fewer restrictions, but the same principle of clear distinction between content and ads applies. Luxembourg's smaller size and the significant cross-border audience for both TV and radio lead to the fact that many Luxembourgish businesses advertise on French and German channels as well, to reach a broader audience in the Greater Region (which includes parts of France, Germany and Belgium).

Print and online media

For our field, the print and online media are more important than radio and TV. However, the position differs considerably between the three Benelux countries. The main difference is that so-called free publicity and media relations in Belgium, while not actually at death's door, are certainly on artificial ventilation. Dutch publishers, who also outnumber their Belgian counterparts, are still slightly more open to placing PR content than their Belgian colleagues. In Belgium, good content is of course of interest to the media, but it is increasingly common to pay for its inclusion. In Luxembourg as well, it is usual for companies to place ads in order to get PR coverage, especially in prominent business publications like *Paperjam*.

It should be noted in passing that this trend is also on the increase in the Netherlands, for the understandable reason that publishers have to make a living too.

Whichever Benelux country you offer your content in, keep in mind that an advertising budget (of whatever size) will considerably increase your visibility and impact.

Types of content
Wisse Kommunikatie, Insticom and PR-B therefore advise their clients not only to focus on so-called earned content in their communication campaigns, but also to spend time and resources on the other three components of the PESO model, with the corresponding content output.

Paid	Earned	Shared	Owned
Advertising	Opinion articles	LinkedIn	Website
Advertorials	Press releases	Instagram	News letter
SEA / remarketing	Reviews	Twitter	Brochure
Whitepaper	Technology papers	Facebook	Demos
Sponsored posts	Tips & tricks	YouTube	Social media
	Case studies		Email campaign

Social media
The use of social media in marketing, communication and PR continues to grow in importance. This is true not only in B2B trade, but also in B2C, according to a study by Accenture. The management consultancy firm says the global 'social commerce' industry will grow three times faster than the traditional e-commerce sector. Social commerce means that consumers' entire shopping experience – from product awareness to payment – takes place on a social media platform such as Facebook, TikTok or Instagram. Social media platforms are increasingly focusing on this, and businesses should therefore do likewise, especially in a B2C environment.

We have put together some useful figures for you below regarding social media in Benelux.

The basic figures (in millions)

	Population	Mobile connections*	Internet users	Active social media users
Netherlands	17.94	23.31	17.47	15.10
		129.93%	97.38%	83.61%
Belgium	11.76	11.38	11.50	9.17
		96.76%	91.00%	77.97%
Luxembourg	0.67	0.89*	0.65	0.31
		134.6%	99.0%	46.6%

* For the Netherlands and Luxembourg this number exceeds the population because many people, particularly cross-border workers in the case of Luxemburg, have multiple mobile subscriptions.

The difference in social media use between the three Benelux countries is clearly shown in the graph below.

Social media use in Benelux

	WhatsApp	TikTok	Facebook	Instagram	Pinterest	X	Reddit	Youtube	LinkedIn	Tumblr	Other
Lux	58.05%	31.34%	52.73%	13.39%	14.06%	12.99%	2.67%	2.33%	58.30%	0.58%	0.01%
BE	35.71%	34.35%	61.62%	11.66%	12.42%	8.66%	2.09%	2.10%	42.00%	0.33%	0.01%
NL	73.57%	33.50%	59.78%	15.35%	12.22%	7.33%	1.93%	1.74%	64.40%	0.26%	0.01%
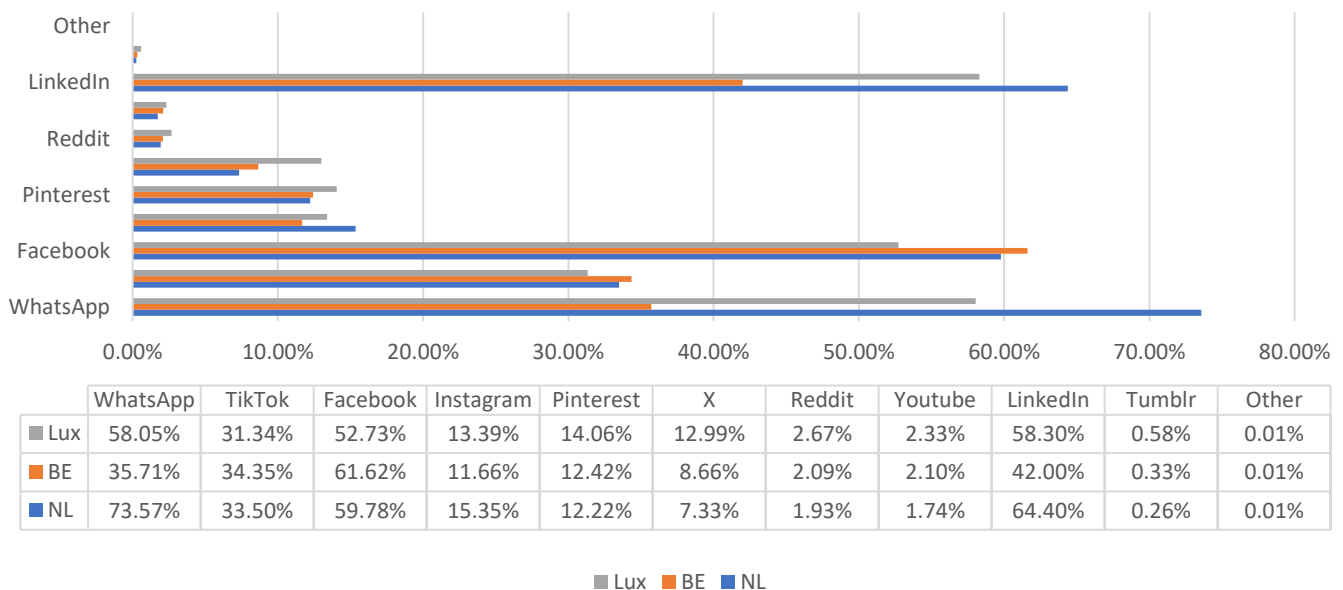
The differences in the use of WhatsApp are particularly striking. It is wise to keep these in mind when determining the most suitable social channels for a particular client or Benelux campaign.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is used over 35% and 15% more in the Netherlands than in Belgium and Luxembourg, respectively. In this context, it could be a good idea to consider the still relatively unknown phenomenon of WhatsApp marketing for campaigns for the Dutch market.

Especially if you combine your Facebook or Instagram campaign with WhatsApp marketing, you will steal a march on your competitors. In your post on Facebook or Instagram you can make it possible to contact your company via WhatsApp, for example for free advice, an introductory meeting or a scan. WhatsApp is informal in nature, and your customers and leads can decide for themselves where and when to send a message. Contact can be made fairly anonymously. Moreover, you generate awareness on social media and can build a lasting, personal relationship with your potential customers.

LinkedIn

All three countries are still a bit behind on the possibilities when it comes to LinkedIn. Although user levels are very healthy at 64%, 42% and 58% in the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg respectively, we know from experience that the possibilities that LinkedIn offers are not used optimally.

For example, it is fairly easy to create a thought leadership position by running a digital authority program (DAP), boosting corporate, employer and personal branding. Both in Belgium, Luxembourg and in the Netherlands such a program has met with considerable success – provided it is used systematically and with sufficient frequency.

In Luxembourg, LinkedIn adoption stands at 58%, a notable figure given the country's relatively small population. Luxembourg's international business environment and its role as a major European financial hub contribute to LinkedIn's popularity as a key networking tool. Despite the strong adoption rate, many companies in Luxembourg have yet to fully tap into LinkedIn's potential to strengthen their corporate presence, enhance employer branding, and foster meaningful connections with both local and international professionals. Given the high level of engagement on the platform, LinkedIn is an essential tool for B2B marketing, recruitment, and professional networking in Luxembourg's business landscape.

- Businesses spend 30% of their online time on social media interactions*
- 82% of people are more likely to trust a company whose management team engages on social media
- 78% would prefer to work for a company whose management is active on social media
- 81% believe that CEOs who engage on social media are better equipped to lead companies in the digital age than their peers who do not do so
- 85% believe that CEOs can use social media channels to improve employee engagement
- 86% rate CEO engagement on social media as 'somewhat important', 'very important' or 'mission critical'
- 77% of consumers are more likely to buy from a company whose CEO and management use social media

* https://visual.ly/community/Infographics/social-media/ceos-social-media-statistics

Language
No article about Benelux would be complete without a section on languages.

Let's start with the Dutch language. In the Benelux context, there is no such thing as 'the' Dutch language. Flemish differs so much from the Dutch of the Netherlands in terms of pronunciation, use of words and grammar that TV programs in both versions of Dutch are invariably subtitled when they are broadcast in the neighboring country.

This is explained on the Flemish government's [language advice website](#) as follows: The differences between Dutch in the Netherlands and Dutch in Belgium are closely related to the history of the two parts of the Dutch language area. The Dutch that was spoken in Belgium a hundred years ago was peppered with dialect and with words and turns of phrase taken from French. Through the bourgeoisie, numerous French influences had penetrated the Flemish language. In the course of the twentieth century there was an increasing focus on correct language use and on adopting a purer form of Dutch in Belgium. Those who championed these developments strove to bring Flemish completely into line with the Dutch of the Netherlands on the grounds of its superior prestige. As well as being directed against dialects and French influences, these efforts to police the language also had an emancipatory purpose: a polished and refined standard language was a way for the Flemish to improve their lot.

Standard Dutch in the '50s and '60s
In the fifties and sixties, the golden years of language policing, Standard Dutch promotion centers or 'cores' were established and campaigns were conducted throughout the media, including language tips in radio and TV programs and columns on correct language use in newspapers and magazines. Numerous books were also published promoting a 'purer' form of Dutch. The strict Netherlands Dutch norms of the language police left almost no room for Flemish input. Belgian-Dutch words were rejected and replaced with alternatives from the Netherlands. It was not just dialect usages and Gallicisms that were condemned: typically Belgian-Dutch words and expressions that were not linguistically objectionable were rejected if they were not used in the Netherlands: *luidop* became *hardop, plattekaas* became *kwark*. In short, respectable Flemish folk had to learn to speak like the Dutch.

Two linguistic poles and tolerance
The strict Netherlands Dutch norm has lost ground in recent decades. It has become clear that two poles have developed in the standard language: a form of standard language that is customary in the Netherlands and a form of standard language that is customary in Belgium. Most, but not all, words and constructions are shared by these two poles. Instead of outright condemnation of all (Belgian) differences, there is now an understanding that limited geographical language variation is nothing to worry about, and is in fact perfectly normal. A more tolerant awareness of norms is developing, with respect for the individuality of the standard language in Belgium.

This history, combined with the cultural differences mentioned earlier, means that Belgium and the Netherlands differ much more from each other in terms of communication than many people think. The presence of French as the second official language (the primary language for 40% of Belgians) makes the approach of the Belgian media even more interesting: much of the professional media appears in both languages.

In practice, this means – especially with trade magazines – that you must always offer your content in both French and Flemish. Our choice of the term 'Flemish' here rather than 'Dutch' is deliberate. A text with typical Dutch vocabulary and grammar has the same effect as the 'hard g' on natives of Antwerp who see their beautiful city being overrun by loud Dutch people every day – it is extremely annoying. As a result, the text will simply not be published, due to its lack of linguistic finesse.

Multilingualism in Luxembourg

Luxembourg is a resolutely multilingual environment: the majority of Luxembourgers speak four languages and the rate of foreign residents almost reaches 50% of the total population. The languages spoken vary according to the context. Within the field of administration, at least the three administrative languages – Luxembourgish, French and German – are used, while German is the dominant language in print media. At work, in the public sphere and as part of collective activities, however, it all depends on the context.

Luxembourgish is the most widely used language on Luxembourg's radio stations and TV channels. Yet other languages are available, such as French, Italian, English and Portuguese.

Luxembourg's written press has always been multilingual. German has traditionally been the language of choice for the written press, although French has made up ground in traditional dailies and certain weekly newspapers. By contrast, articles in Lëtzebuergesch are still the exception. Since a few years ago, there has been a number of publications in English.

Luxembourg's multicultural landscape creates a unique environment for media and communication strategies, where understanding the nuances of when and how to use Luxembourgish, French, German, or English is essential for effective outreach. In practice, this means that content producers targeting the Luxembourg market must be prepared to offer their materials in at least French and German, and sometimes in Luxembourgish as well. For corporate and international audiences, English may also be necessary. The choice of language is not just a matter of preference, but a critical factor in reaching the right audience and maximizing the impact of communication efforts.

C. CONTENT

Resources
As well as language, there is another element that determines whether a particular vision, opinion or series of facts is adopted: the content. There are many ways to convey content, but only one way to do so optimally: relevantly.

What works in the US in attracting the interest the media in a given topic will not necessarily work in Flanders, and is even less likely to work in the much less masculine Netherlands, to return to the dimension described earlier. This means that a literal translation of a US press release or article will never have the impact of a carefully localized version.

The relevance of a number of ways of presenting content to the media is shown in the table below. It goes without saying that it is necessary to look at what is useful for each client, situation and campaign, but the table offers some guidance on what works well in the Benelux and what generally works less well.

1 = common / relevant
2 = less common / relevant
3 = not common / relevant

	Netherlands	Belgium	Luxembourg
Trade fair and conference support	3	2	1
Blog	1	3	3
Comment bank	2	2	2
Newsjacking	1	1	1
Journalistic content automation	1	2	3
Customer visit by media	2	2	2
News alert	2	2	2
Opinion article	1	1	1
Press release	2	1	1
Press conference	3	2*	2
Press relations	1	1	1
Media roundtable	3	2	2
White paper	1	2**	2
1:1 interview	1	1	1

* depending on the sector and the nature and urgency of the news
** usually paid in Belgium

News

Short term: newsjacking

As is typical in communication and PR, our offices are always alert to the possibilities offered by current events. We usually map out the 'standard' news stories and activities in a yearly plan, but a more opportunistic approach is also taken from day to day.

Our preference is to put the news angles of the day in an overview and in a comment bank, where we collect news items and any views our clients may have on them. We regularly draw on this comment bank and send this 'take' on a news item to journalists who write about the subject.

This approach works very well in the Benelux, both because there are enough media outlets to send this material to, and because the media dynamics in our countries are well suited to it.

The rhythm of the news follows the 1-24-7 principle:
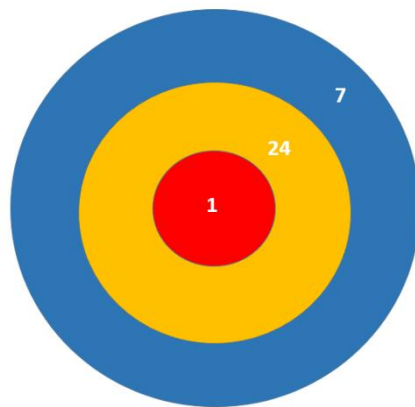
A news event takes place at moment 1. During the *first hour* the journalist only has information about the event, and can only report the facts.

In the following *24 hours*, the journalist has time to find out how the event came about. He or she will collect additional information and consult sources.

In the *7 days* that follow, the media try to discover new angles, expert insights and interesting details; this kind of information can be found, for example, in the Saturday supplement of a daily newspaper.

Between phase 1 - the incident - and phase 2 - the 24 hours in which the journalist has time to further investigate the incident - newsjacking is a highly effective way of moving the journalist in your direction or that of your client. This is because a journalist by definition looks for reliable sources with expertise in order to have a story ready before the general public latches onto the issue. The agency thus produces content that responds to the breaking news and contacts the journalists who have made the topic their own. This is the point at which PR is most effective.
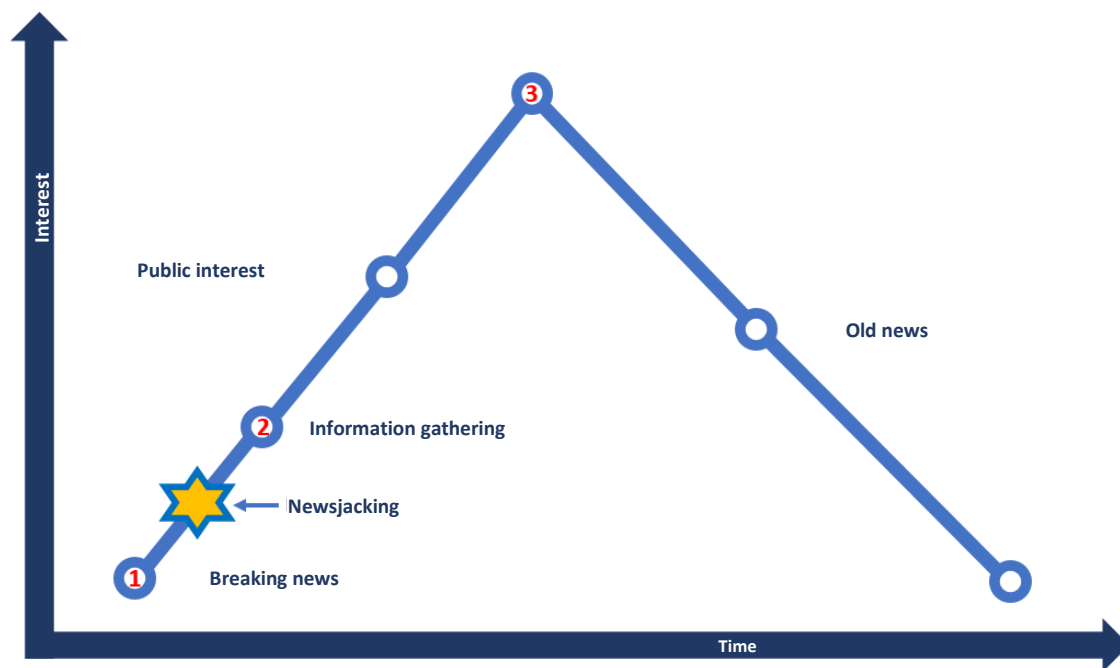
D. MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION TRENDS

- • 'Communication is making a shift from promotional to purpose-based'
- • 'It's all about acts, not about ads'
- • 'Good marketing equals good content, at the right time, aimed at the right target group via the most relevant channels'

These are statements recorded during discussions with communication specialists within the Worldcom PR Group. And they are also a good summary of the trend in the Benelux countries. Research already shows that CEOs and CMOs place DEI, sustainability and talent retention high on companies' list of priorities, and we see this human touch reflected in ways of communicating. Business is no longer about making a 'fast buck': building long-term relationships is now the number one priority for many companies.

This shift can be observed in the world of marketing and communication, especially in the Benelux. Although we tend to follow the Americans and the British, we now seem sufficiently sure of ourselves and decisive to dilute the masculinity of their culture with a good dose of genuine, sincere attention.

This new focus is reflected, for example, in the diminishing impact of the traditional press release, in the restrictions imposed on online portals by Adblockers and the restriction of third-party cookies, and in the renewed attention for and interest in larger-scale journalistic output and forums, to name but a few innovations at random.

Communication and marketing are becoming more in-depth. A pop-up with a call to action is nowhere near enough any longer: first a relationship has to be built with the recipient of the messages. A precondition for this is that communication must be well organized, so that it can be used systematically and consistently, and reach the right target groups with the right messages and themes via the most relevant channels.

But well-organized communication does not happen by itself: it requires manpower, budget, processes, vision and persistence. Using the model on the next page, which is based on Content Strategy Inc's Content Maturity Model, you can determine for yourself which communication phase your organization is in, and what you can do to take this crucial part of your business to a higher level.

The model can be downloaded here in PDF format.

The organization of communication

The organization of communication	1. Ad hoc	2. Simple	3. Organized and repeatable	4. Sustainable and managed	5. Optimized
Characteristics	Lack of structure and uniform practices in content development Content creators are hired and directed by someone from a different field Quality of content depends on individual creators Little or no ability to understand customer needs	Some structure in content creation support Management brings together previously isolated content creators Rudimentary quality assurance, such as editing, final editing and peer reviews New initiatives are often abandoned under pressure of deadlines, constantly changing demands and resistance to change	Most personnel are willing to follow standards, processes and templates Support from a strong leader[1] who has a vision for the organization and understands the importance of good content in conveying this vision Planning and quality assurance are a matter of course and integrated into every project Possibility of adapting and reusing outdated content, conducting customer surveys, testing content and training staff	Management is able to change without any compromise on planning, quality assurance, recruitment and training and budget control Increasingly sophisticated methods for conducting customer analysis, needs research and usability and ROI analyses Communication is recognized by the organization as an effective discipline and is an important partner for other departments such as product design, marketing, PR, support and customer experience	Everyone is actively involved in promoting high-quality content throughout the organization The team embraces and encourages content KPIs and recognizes the importance of analytics Content strategy is seamlessly aligned with business strategy Communication sets out the main focuses of content within the organization and within the content community
How to make progress	• Draw up a strategic communication plan • Formulate your core messages on the basis of a messaging session • Invest in communication research	• Draw up a content plan • Invest in advertising and media planning • Invest in social media support	• The PESO model is used to build brand awareness and reputation with stakeholders • Invest in thought leadership using a DAP[1]	• Invest in employment communication and employer branding • Invest in PR when launching new products and services • Invest in a corporate communication plan • Pay attention to DEI	• Automate the distribution of high-quality content to leads and customers • Increase your sales by responding to the behavior and interests of your leads using journalistic content automation

Strategic improvements ──────────────────────────────────► **Operational improvements**

E. AFTERWORD

In summary, while the Benelux region is often treated as a single market, each country - Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg - has its own unique cultural and media dynamics that require tailored communication strategies. Understanding these differences is key to ensuring successful media outreach and engagement.

While the information provided in this paper is general in nature, it serves as a useful foundation for understanding the distinctive characteristics and sensitivities of each Benelux country. Effective communication in this region requires tailored approaches that account for cultural, linguistic, and sector-specific nuances.

If you are looking to set up or streamline your communication efforts in the Benelux, we are ready to assist. Our team of hands-on experts has extensive experience across various industries, target groups, and communication contexts, whether B2B or B2C. We are here to help you craft a strategy that resonates with your audience and achieves your goals.

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