

Dataline is completely ready for Europe

For this Dataline Special, we spoke to Dataline's CEO and founder, Dirk Deroo. We covered topics such as Dataline's growth and the objective to make the company 'ready for Europe.' In addition, we talked about strategy, communication, and how Dataline responds to market needs.

«The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second-best time is now.»

Over the years, Dataline has grown from a local provider into an international company. Dirk Deroo says: "In fact, over the past 20 years, our growth has been entirely organic. With increasing numbers of users, we simply needed more people for development, support, and training. At a certain point, we had to choose whether or not we wanted to keep on growing. Of course, this was a 'no brainer', and that is how we started exploring the European market."

Drupa as the gateway to Europe

From the Benelux, making the step to the rest of Europe is obvious. Dirk told us: "In 2016, we asked ourselves whether there would be any market support for MultiPress outside the Benelux. The best way to find out was to exhibit at Drupa 2016. It was also an opportunity to take a closer look at the business organisation and software applications of our competitors. It turned out that there was indeed a market for MultiPress. What's more, the Benelux — the biotope of languages, business topologies, and scaled growth — had prepared us better for convergent evolution than country-specific local MIS systems."

Dataline has a presence in nineteen countries: Think global, act local

From then on, things went fast. In 2.5 years, Dataline has grown from 22 to 43 employees. Dirk: "Today, Dataline has a presence in 19 countries. Our software is available in no less than eleven languages. Respect for local languages is essential to ensure acceptance of the software. We expect that by the time Drupa 2020 comes along, we will have added five more languages. For organisational reasons, we focus on countries that differ from us by no more than three time zones. We currently have seven vacancies, but we cautiously forecast that we will have recruited a further fifteen employees by 2020."

Failure is not fatal, but success is not final either

Nearly every country in the European market has a local supplier for MIS systems. The features of these systems are usually limited to the offset market. MIS systems that can also serve the market segments of Large-Format & Sign companies are very scarce. That is why we decided to exhibit at all FESPA fairs to boost our European development. A direct consequence of exhibiting at FESPA in Berlin was the installation of MultiPress at PunaMusta, one of Finland's

largest printing companies, producing magazines, newspapers, commercial printing, and large-format applications. Dirk explains: "They had seen MultiPress at FESPA and loved our solution so much that they put us on their shortlist of possible MIS providers. It was a tremendous boost to our team and a great reward for their hard work that we were the ones chosen from several European providers."

Bruges, Paris, Amsterdam, and soon also in Genk and Valencia

Investing in people is essential to the further growth of our branches in Loppem, Limmen, and Paris. According to Dirk, it is also the hardest part of the entire process. "The number of young people following cross-media management courses is not increasing but rather decreasing. This makes it very difficult to find good people with the right training or sufficient experience. To address the geographical barrier of Loppem (near Bruges), we will soon open a Dataline hub in Genk. For Spain, we had already set our sights on a hub in Valencia."

From a horizontal organisation structure to a results-oriented matrix organisation

Growth is also a challenge because from a certain number of employees you will need middle management. "In the past, everything was transparent," says Dirk, "but from a certain point this was no longer the case, and we had to start dividing tasks. We had to take on managers for the various departments, and since we are constantly recruiting and employ a lot of foreign employees, staff administration is not getting any easier. We also grow through cooperation with other parties. For example, in the Scandinavian and Adriatic countries, in South Africa, and also in Spain, we work with 'channel partners' who support our solutions in their countries. We train their employees, who in turn are responsible for first line support and training."

Print is brain-friendly communication

Once you are operating on a European scale, communication is a different story. Dirk explains: "Today, we have an extremely busy, five-strong team in the Marcom department. For example, we publish in the graphic trade journals of the countries where we are active. You can view our website in Dutch, French, English, German, Adriatic, Finnish, and Spanish. We also use all possible modern digital communication channels to disseminate information. There is also our MultiPress magazine, published in six languages, with each issue being fully personalised. We use not only 'classic' personalisation but also personalise images, texts, and URLs based on language, job profile, type of company, location, etc. Omnichannel communication with print as big data catalyst."



Continuity and quality are our clients' greatest concerns

Dirk Deroo says that continuity and the certainty that a developer such as Dataline will continue to exist and grow are without a doubt some of the graphic companies' biggest concerns. "We notice that companies, even more so than in the past, attach a great deal of importance to the health and stability of their suppliers. After all, an MIS system is the backbone of a company, which you cannot just replace overnight. A wrong choice can have far-reaching consequences. Therefore, the fact that we are growing and also operate on a European level is a huge asset for our clients. The connectivity between MIS software and a production workflow has become essential in the efforts to reduce costs. The fact that Dataline works with all manufacturers is a reason for every international organisation to recommend MultiPress, making the integrations even stronger."

Certification programmes

If you have an MIS system, you will want to link it to all the equipment and other software that your company uses. We test all these connections for sustainable operation. Dirk says: "That is why we have started some certification programmes, for example, links to accounting software or shipping systems. We also work with companies such as Agfa, Caldera, Heidelberg, Kodak, Xerox, KBA, HP, Fuji, Manroland, and paper manufacturers who want to link their solutions or data to MultiPress. Moreover, we grant MultiPress licences to 'Certified Non-Production Partners' such as schools and training centres so that students or trainees can work with real MIS systems. We have other programs, but there are too many to list here."

Premium Services

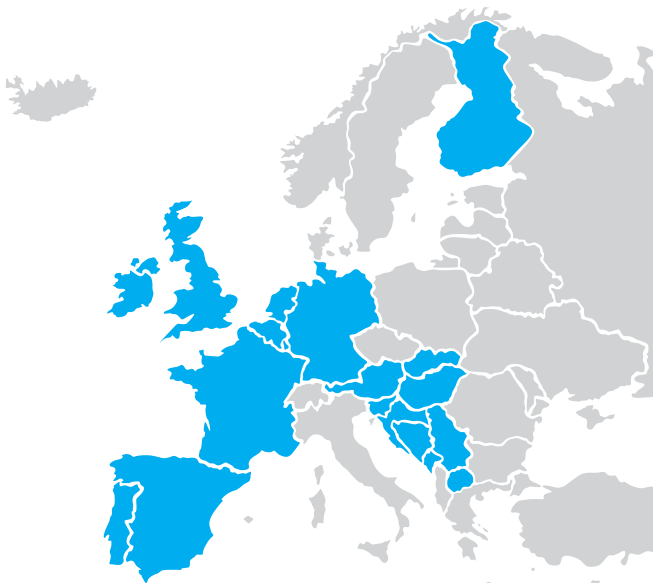
Dataline has set up Premium Services at the request of its clients. Dirk told us: "These are services that offer extra added value for the client. For example, installing upgrades after office hours was a frequent request. Clients can now plan when their upgrades will take place. To guarantee the continuity of MultiPress at companies, we also provide free training for new employees. We also make 'Alfa Releases' available to clients to test compatibility with the modules that they have developed. These are just a few of the various services."



Dirk Deroo, CEO Dataline

Our strategy remains the same: Made-to-Measure Modules & Need for Change

Despite the scaling-up of both the company and the regions in which it operates, Dirk still stands by the strategy that Dataline has been using since the very beginning, namely that a company must have a 'Need for Change.' "You may well have the best solutions, but if the client does not need them, you will not sell your products. If there is sufficient support, we will enter into dialogue with the client and show the possible solutions based on their cases. We only offer the solutions that our clients need. Selling solutions with all the trimmings, while the client only uses a fraction of them, makes no sense at all. It is and remains our mainspring to help companies optimise their processes so that they can work faster and more efficiently. If that comes off, we will have succeeded in our mission."



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