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Welcome to the latest edition of the DistriPress newsletter.

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- WAN-IFRA President Ladina Heimgartner on championing innovation
- New alliance forms to safeguard Germany's distribution
- Meet the member: How Sharemagazines is shaking up digital distribution
- Industry updates: We say farewell to two industry titans



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“Working in this industry is a privilege”



**We talk to Ladina Heimgartner, CEO of Ringier & President of WAN-IFRA and a dynamic force in an “inherently challenging” industry**

Ladina Heimgartner has built her impressive media career from humble beginnings as a regional journalist, transitioning into media management with 13 years at Swiss Public Broadcasting before joining Ringier in 2020. Now CEO of Ringier, she has risen rapidly from board member to President of WAN-IFRA.

Leveraging her extensive industry experience and visionary leadership, she has transformed Ringier into an innovation hub where cutting-edge AI is seamlessly integrated into the newsroom. "Around 40% of content is already generated with the support of AI," she says, "and we are developing chatbots, virtual assistants and working on harmonising core tech for scalability."

Verticalisation is another significant strategic priority, and the company is "deeply invested" in audience engagement and monetisation. "Data-driven insights help us personalise content experiences, and we are constantly refining our subscription and advertising models."

### **Holistic support for publishers**

As President of WAN-IFRA, Ladina is equally passionate about addressing industry-wide challenges, notably the disproportionate flow of digital advertising revenue to Big Tech. "I don't believe this reflects the value of professional media, so I am committed to reclaiming a fair share of these funds," she says.

Beyond this, she states that the organisation aims to help publishers navigate digital transformation. "AI, automation, and new business models are reshaping the industry, and WAN-IFRA is in a unique position to provide guidance, training, and advocacy to ensure our members remain competitive."

A major strategic move during her tenure has been WAN-IFRA's merger with DistriPress. She believes that by merging WAN-IFRA's strengths in editorial, business, and technological support with DistriPress's "deep expertise" in print distribution, this partnership will create a more holistic support system for publishers.

"WAN-IFRA and DistriPress share a fundamental commitment to strengthening the global media ecosystem, and this merger will now allow us to address not just content creation and monetisation, but also the critical challenge of global distribution."

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**"We have transitioned from decades of relatively straightforward newspaper production to an incredibly complex digital ecosystem."**

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### **A unique insight**

Ladina states that her unique dual roles offer her a rich perspective. While she oversees operations and strategic initiatives at Ringier, her presidency at WAN-IFRA allows her to set global media agendas and advocate for industry-wide improvements. "Ringier has been a WAN-IFRA member for years, so I view the organisation both from the perspective of the president and as a member," she says. "It keeps me grounded in both the big picture and the day-to-day realities of running a media company."

Looking to the future, Ladina envisions WAN-IFRA as the preeminent global media organisation. "WAN-IFRA must serve as a compass for media professionals, especially as AI, agents, or fluid content redefine our work," she says.

A key priority for 2025 is the upcoming World News Media Congress in Krakow, themed 'Mastering Media's New Playbook'. "It's a fitting metaphor for the complexity of today's media landscape, where we have transitioned from decades of relatively straightforward newspaper production to an incredibly complex digital ecosystem," she says.

Ladina also believes that addressing challenges in the advertising market remains crucial, as WAN-IFRA works collectively to secure a fair share of ad revenue for professional media. "Our goal is to ensure that independent journalism remains strong, profitable, and relevant in a rapidly changing world," she says.

### **The potential of professional media**

misinformation is a valid concern... plus the shift of digital ad spending to social platforms and the moderate willingness of consumers to pay for digital content both create ongoing obstacles," she says.

However, she sees significant opportunities amid these challenges. "AI also offers immense potential to improve efficiency, enhance user experiences, and develop new content formats... and while social media platforms become more scrutinised for their role in disinformation, trust in professional media could see a resurgence."

She feels that media companies innovating in these areas, as well as subscription-based models, micropayments and direct audience engagement strategies will have a competitive advantage – especially if they position themselves strategically.

"At the end of the day, working in this industry is a privilege," she says. "Every day is different, and it's a true rollercoaster ride!"

*We asked Ladina: What advice would you give to emerging media navigating an industry that is constantly evolving?*

1. Force yourself and your team to understand the industry mechanics in all its complexity and make yourself comfortable with it.
2. Focus on a clear value proposition.
3. Go for partnerships that support your value proposition.
4. Never underestimate the element of convenience.
5. Above all, stay close to your audience, understand their needs and adapt to them.

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## New alliance VMV champions independent publishers in German distribution shake-up



Press distribution in Germany is at a crossroads. A controversial restructuring plan, spearheaded by the 'Fit for Future' (FFF) working group alongside four key wholesalers, has sparked concerns over market control and accessibility. In response, a new alliance – the VMV (Verband der Mittel- und Kleinverlage [association of medium and small publishers]) – has been established to ensure that the interests of small and medium-sized publishers are not sidelined as part of this development.

"We have founded VMV to make sure the interests of small and medium-size publishers are represented and taken into account when the future of the German wholesale system is being discussed and potentially altered," says VMV representative Luciano Stulin. "VMV wants to sit at the table when negotiations take place."

**The battle over press distribution**

distribution model. The FFF plan would consolidate the current network into just four wholesalers ("system partners"), with a central clearing house managing administrative functions. Crucially, three of these wholesalers are independent, but one is publisher-controlled. If implemented, this model would mark a dramatic shift in power – transferring control from wholesalers to the publishers themselves.

While FFF supporters argue that the system will improve efficiency, it has raised fears of a restricted market that favours larger entities over the remaining smaller, independent players. "The previous neutrality of the wholesale system, which also guarantees free market access for every publisher, large or small, would be lost," says Luciano.

### **VMV's mission**

Against this backdrop, VMV has emerged as a unifying force for small and medium-sized publishers. With over 3,000 international titles currently sold in Germany, many of which fall into this category, VMV aims to protect the diverse and vibrant media ecosystem that has long been a hallmark of the German market.

"Consolidating the voices of all these publishers in a dedicated association is imperative – a single small or mid-size publisher would find it difficult to make an impact individually," says Luciano.

### **VMV's key objectives include:**

- **Advocating for independent and international publishers** in negotiations over Germany's press wholesale system
- **Preserving nationwide, non-discriminatory distribution** of small and medium-sized publishers' content
- **Ensuring that regulatory decisions consider the interests of all market participants, not just the major publishing houses.**

### **Regulatory roadblocks for FFF**

The Bundeskartellamt (Federal Cartel Office, FCO) has taken note of the potential market implications of the FFF plan. Following a market survey, the FCO intervened in December, prohibiting FFF publishers and their partners from implementing any part of the plan – including altering business relationships with wholesalers or retailers – until further notice.

This decision signals a significant regulatory hurdle for FFF. "This is not to be understood as a definitive ban on implementation," says Luciano, "but it does mean that the FCO will subject the FFF concept to a detailed review." It remains to be seen how long this review will take.

### **Giving publishers a voice**

This pause, however, presents a critical opportunity for renewed discussions. "In our view, this statement by the FCO gives both groups the opportunity to return to the negotiating table in order to find a solution in the interests of all parties involved – and the industry as a whole," says Luciano.

VMV has extended an open invitation to publishers of all sizes, both domestic and international, to join its efforts. Luciano says: "Our mission is to ensure that the interests, needs, and special features of small and medium-sized publishers – as well as international publications – will be given a voice and heard in the negotiations."

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**MEET THE MEMBER:**  
Götz Spielhagen, sharemagazines



**It all started with some marmalade... Götz Spielhagen, Content Director at sharemagazines, explains how a hotel breakfast inspired the company to shake up the digital magazine industry**

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*What is sharemagazines, and what inspired its creation?*

GS: The idea for sharemagazines came during a hotel breakfast when the founders noticed that available newspapers were either hard to find, incomplete, or even damaged by breakfast condiments. While still at university and without programming experience, they envisioned a digital platform offering current newspapers and magazines simultaneously to all guests. After its hotel debut, the service expanded into health clinics, where digital media was already embraced. Today, sharemagazines works with 90-95% of Germany's leading publishing houses.

*How is sharemagazines different from other digital magazine platforms?*

GS: The platform offers streaming-only access – no downloads – ensuring that content is only available to read on-site. This controlled digital circulation helps maintain publishers' rights. Also, the pricing model is based solely on actual reading time rather than on factors like frequency or cover price.

*How do you ensure transparency and value?*

GS: Every view is recorded in real time, and monthly reports provide publishers and clients with detailed insights into reading times for each title and location. This 'open book' approach builds trust and clearly demonstrates usage and revenue.

*How do you address the undervaluation of digital content?*

GS: I come from a print background, and was frustrated by early digital trends that offered quality journalism for free. I believe that journalism must be fairly compensated, and so sharemagazines has successfully raised prices – sometimes by up to 300% – in sectors such as health clinics.

*Who benefits from sharemagazines?*

GS: Both domestic and foreign publishers, especially newspapers challenged by rising print costs, gain additional market reach and revenue without incurring extra distribution expenses. And I always remind people that it is 'risk free' – the streaming-only model prevents channel cannibalisation, and the split revenue model means publishers incur no service fees.

*Why did sharemagazines join DistriPress/WAN-IFRA?*

GS: It offers us the chance to introduce our unique, transparent model to a global network of publishers and industry peers. We are also looking forward to getting to know and being inspired by industry colleagues from all over the world!

## Industry updates

### Obituaries



#### Dick Morris

Dick Morris, a widely respected figure in press distribution, passed away earlier in January. His career began at WHSmith in Birmingham before moving to Associated Newspapers, where he worked on the Daily Sketch and Daily Mail. In 1969, he joined Newsweek's Atlantic Edition, rising to General Manager and overseeing operations across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

Beyond his professional achievements, Dick was dedicated to industry collaboration and training. He was a founder member of the British Press Christmas Meeting (BPCM) and the DistriPress Training Foundation and served with distinction on the DistriPress Council and Board.

Known for his warmth and generosity, Dick retired in 2002, leaving a lasting impact on the industry and those who had the pleasure of knowing him. He will be greatly missed.

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#### Richard Tan

Richard Tan, founder and owner of Allscript Establishment in Singapore, was a highly respected figure in the press distribution industry and a steadfast supporter of DistriPress. Known for his deep industry knowledge and warm, approachable nature, he was a familiar face at DistriPress Congresses, with his last attendance in Seville in 2023.

Under his leadership, Allscript became a key player in magazine and newspaper distribution, ensuring readers across Singapore and beyond had access to a diverse range of publications. His dedication and expertise helped shape the industry in the region.

Richard's legacy will continue through his eldest son, Dick Tan, who will now lead Allscript.

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