

40 YEARS,

TOWARD ACCESSIBLE ADVERTISING
FOR ALL IN BELGIUM.



A WHITE PAPER

FOR BELGIUM'S ADVERTISING LEADERS.

40 YEARS OF INNOVATION AND COMMITMENT



As RMB celebrates its 40th anniversary, we are taking a step back to reflect on the major transformations that have reshaped our industry. From the very first non-commercial ads broadcast on RTBF in 1985, when advertising spots arrived on bulky videotapes, to today's digital era, the media landscape has been completely reinvented.: fiber optics, high-speed internet, 3G, 4G, and now 5G. Consumers, now equipped with multiple screens, have effortlessly shifted from linear viewing to on-demand, making content and advertising available anywhere, anytime.

Yet when Valérie, our Director of Media, Data & Tech, drew my attention to a lingering blind spot, the lack of accessibility in advertising for people with visual or hearing impairments, I realized the gap that still exists between access to programming and access to advertising messages. Accessibility, too often treated as an afterthought, deserves far greater focus, especially in our industry.

That's why I immediately backed the initiative led by our Media, Data & Tech team, which also drives our CSR strategy: marking this anniversary with concrete progress toward greater inclusion for audiences with sensory disabilities."

YVES GÉRARD - CEO RMB

MEDIA AND ADVERTISING AS DRIVERS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION



As both a mirror of society and a force that shapes it, advertising has a crucial role to play in driving inclusion. For the past three years, RMB has made this a priority through concrete, hands-on initiatives.

When we discovered that Belgian publishers were technically unable to broadcast subtitled or audio-described commercials, one question became unavoidable: how can advertisers, committed to reaching all consumers, overlook a population of 2.2 billion people with visual impairments (including 36 million with complete blindness) and nearly 1 billion people with hearing impairments (numbers from WHO 2023)? The issue isn't a lack of interest; it's a lack of awareness.

And yet, the technological solutions needed to make advertising accessible are minimal compared to the massive impact they could have on a population too often left behind. For our 40th anniversary, we are publishing this White Paper as a practical guide to finally, and nationwide, deliver the level of accessibility that should have existed decades ago."

VALÉRIE JANSSENS – DIRECTOR MEDIA, DATA & TECH RMB

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. STRATEGIC ARGUMENTS & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	4
2. RMB AND RTBF, PIONEERS IN ADVERTISING ACCESSIBILITY	8
2.1. Publisher workload & costs	10
2.2. Sales house workload & costs	12
3. THE CHALLENGE OF ADVERTISING ASSETS	14
3.1. Workload & costs – advertisers / production studios	15
3.2. A scenario for universal audio-described and subtitled assets	17
4. P&G, THE FIRST ADVERTISER TO TAKE THE LEAP	18
5. WHAT ABOUT DIGITAL VIDEO ACCESSIBILITY?	20
6. CONCLUSION	22



Strategic arguments & social responsibility

Why make advertising accessible?

While it's easy to highlight the ethical and socially responsible dimension of improving advertising accessibility for all audiences, it is, above all, a business imperative. These two logics aren't in conflict; they should be inseparable. One of the greatest challenges for companies today is recognizing that environmental, social, and governance realities are essential to ensuring long-term economic sustainability.

1. In our society, universal access to information is considered a fundamental right. Advertising should be no exception. In the name of inclusion, all audiences must be considered when developing a product or service, and when communicating about it.



« Audio description for television advertising is a major step forward for accessibility. We are genuinely delighted that RMB and RTBF have made this possible.

It is essential that blind and visually impaired people have access to all broadcast content, including advertising, just like everyone else.

Accessibility cannot be selective: sighted people should not be the ones deciding whether advertising messages are relevant for people with visual disabilities. Watching—or ignoring—an ad should be a personal choice, and that choice only exists if the message is accessible. As full-fledged consumers, blind and visually impaired individuals must be able to make informed decisions with all the necessary information.

Audio description makes this possible. We sincerely hope that all advertising and media professionals will follow this example, not only for ads but for programming as well. »

NOËLLA JARDIN, GENERAL DIRECTOR



1. STRATEGIC ARGUMENTS & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

2. A brand that acknowledges the diversity of its audience, fosters innovation, and communicates creatively. It generates real value for the people who consume it.



« For Red Bull, inclusion isn't a slogan, it is a concrete value.

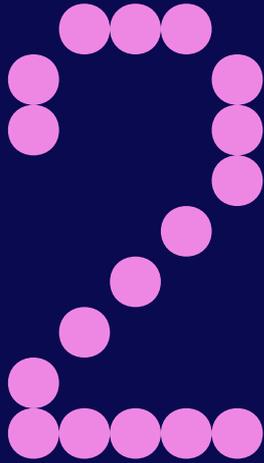
By making its advertising spots accessible through audio description, the brand ensures equal access to information, media, and culture for everyone. This effort supports diversity—an essential source of new ideas and creativity—while strengthening its connection with a wider audience and demonstrating a true commitment to equal opportunity.

We therefore wish to take part in this major step forward led by RMB and RTBF.»

JONATHAN TASSIN, ADVERTISING MARKETING MANAGER JET IMPORT



3. Demonstrating strong commitment to equal opportunity is increasingly a marker of credibility in corporate governance, regulatory compliance, and access to certain markets. It can even become a competitive advantage.



RMB & RTBF, pioneers in advertising accessibility

Implementing accessible advertising isn't inherently complex, but it does require the coordinated mobilization of multiple ecosystem players.



Publishers

- > must adapt their broadcast systems: traffic systems, metadata management (audio/subtitles), subtitle storage and naming protocols, and automation adjustments.
- > must allow viewers to activate audio description and subtitles via their TV remote control during commercial breaks, using the same functionality available for movies and series.



Sales houses

- > must adapt their tools for converting advertising materials.
- > must handle technical support and guidance for advertisers.



Advertisers and production studios

- > must systematically integrate audio description and subtitling into assets.

RMB and RTBF's hands-on experience in implementing advertising accessibility makes it possible to evaluate, concretely, the operational workload and cost of these developments for each stakeholder. Made more tangible, these different steps should trigger awareness and prompt action among the other Belgian stakeholders.

However, every broadcaster has its own automation systems and distribution processes, so there is no single universal approach. The following sections summarize the key steps to consider based on the RMB-RTBF context. Users of this White Paper should ensure they account for these specificities when applying them elsewhere.



2.1 Publisher workload & costs

2.1.1 IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- > Modifying the traffic system
- > Modifying the broadcast automation system
- > Integrating both “standard” and “urgent” on-air procedures
- > Integrating metadata added to advertising assets (*audio tracks and subtitle presence*)
- > Managing subtitle files associated with advertising content within the broadcast workflow (*storage and naming*)

2.1.2 SOLUTION PRINCIPLES

MODIFICATION OF THE SALES HOUSE’S “XML MATERIAL” IMPORT (LOCATOR ENGINE)

- > Integration of new tags in the sales house’s metadata file:
 - audio type
 - audio position
 - audio label
 - audio language

MANAGEMENT OF ADVERTISING SUBTITLES

- > Creation of a new watchfolder in the Locator Engine
- > Creation of a new subtitle storage folder
- > Setup of a new workflow



Constraint on delivery order for files sent by RMB to RTBF:

- > *Delivery of the MXF video file*
- > *Delivery of the XML metadata file*
- > *Delivery of the subtitle file (after the MXF and XML have been ingested and stored)*

IMPORT OF “URGENT” PLAYLISTS FROM THE SALES HOUSE TO THE AUTOMATION SYSTEM

- > Integration of a new metadata tag (subtitle file name)

2.1.3 TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

SALES HOUSE'S METADATA FILE FORMAT: AUDIO

- > Version tag: allowed values: VP, VS, VA, AD
- > Position tag: position of the first channel of the track: 1, 3, 5, 7
- > Language tag: allowed values: fra
- > Type tag: allowed values: stereo

SALES HOUSE'S METADATA FILE FORMAT: SUBTITLES

- > Subtitle is recognized if <numberLanguage> is greater than 0
- > Subtitle status: PAD
- > Subtitle filename: value: video filename + suffix A-FSM.stl
- > Subtitle language: FSM

SALES HOUSE'S METADATA FILE FORMAT: VIDEO

- > New tags to integrate:
 - <framerate>: values : 25 or 5
 - <scanType>: values : Interlaced or Progressive
 - <bitrate> (in Mbit/sec): 50
 - <horizontalResolution> (pixels): 1920
 - <verticalResolution> (pixels): 1080

The RTBF use case

ANALYSIS PHASE	6 mandays
SPECIFICATIONS DOCUMENT	1 manday
AUTOMATION DEVELOPMENTS	≈5.000€ (depending on the automation provider)
TESTING	3 mandays
PRODUCTION LAUNCH	1 manday
TOTAL COST	11 mandays + ≈ 5000€



2.2 Sales house workload & costs

2.2.1 IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- › Development of the advertising material conversion tool
- › Integration of metadata added to advertising assets (audio tracks, video data, and subtitle presence)
- › Management of subtitle files associated with advertising content within the distribution workflow (storage and naming)

2.2.2 SOLUTION PRINCIPLES

TRANSMISSION OF NEW INFORMATION IN THE DMAT FILES RECEIVED FROM PRODUCTION STUDIOS

- › Within the XML file
- › Through an additional subtitle file

STORAGE OF THIS NEW INFORMATION AT THE SALES HOUSE LEVEL

- › Integration of new XML tags into the database
- › Storage of the new subtitle files
- › There are two types of subtitle files, but only one subtitle file per Dmat version:
 - .stl = for television
 - .ttml = for online video

COMMUNICATION OF THIS INFORMATION TO THE SALES HOUSE'S PUBLISHERS

- › Sending a video copy adapted to the publisher's broadcast specifications:
 - Audio channel and audio description channel placement
 - Video format
 - Internal timecode of the video file
 - Black frames before and after the ad
- › Sending the subtitle file with timecode synchronized to the publisher-specific video copy.

The RMB use case

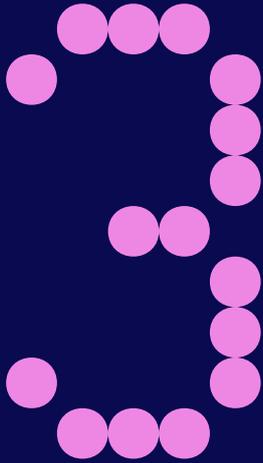
ANALYSIS PHASE	1 manday
SPECIFICATIONS DOCUMENT	1 manday
METADATA/FILE DEVELOPMENTS	10 mandays
CONVERSION TOOL DEVELOPMENT	≈5.000€
TESTING	6 mandays
PRODUCTION LAUNCH	1 manday
TOTAL COST	19 mandays + ≈ 5000€)



For some publishers, development and implementation costs for a new media converter may need to be considered.



AD



The challenge of advertising assets

Implementing accessible advertising naturally begins at the level of the advertising assets themselves, which must include audio description and subtitles.

Audio description and subtitling are not a literal transcription of the textual and contextual elements of a spot. Ideally, they should be created by experts who ensure that the emotion and essence of the spot are conveyed within the allotted time corresponding to the visual content.

Audio description must account for the reality of people with sensory impairments without altering the original intent of the advertisement.

In Belgium, it is theoretically the responsibility of production studios to ensure that assets comply with standards before delivery to sales houses, following the guidelines issued by VIA—namely, the Dmat. Therefore, the Dmat must include the audio description tracks and subtitles where applicable.

3.1 Workload & costs – advertisers / production studios



3.1.1 IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

The task is simply to have an audio-description track and subtitles added to the commercial, whether it already exists or is still being produced, by trained professionals who will also meet all technical standards.

Many advertisers, including P&G, are committed to taking the necessary measures to develop accessible advertising content.

3.1.2 AUDIO DESCRIPTION AND SUBTITLING STANDARDS

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

- › Audio description : 1 WAV audio file – stereo – 48 kHz – 16-bit – audio level at -23 dB LUFS (R128)
- › Subtitles : 1 subtitle file in EBU-STL format
- › Both files are added to the Dmat by a post-production house equipped for this purpose

3.1.3 SOLUTION PRINCIPLES

To ensure that the production of audio description and subtitles does not become a barrier to advancing advertising accessibility—and since this service is still limited in Belgium due to the lack of publishers able to handle these formats—RMB trains its Content teams to produce audio-described and subtitled assets.

In this way, the sales house provides concrete and affordable support, helping clients overcome the inclusion barrier as easily as possible.

Whichever solution is chosen, RMB supports advertisers throughout their production process by providing the necessary guidance to achieve a compliant and accessible outcome.

3.2 A scenario for universal audio-described and subtitled assets

Prior to implementing advertising accessibility at both the publisher and sales house levels, RMB launched a large-scale awareness project in March 2025 with its client La Ligue Braille, highlighting the realities faced by people with visual and hearing impairments.

The Ligue Braille commercial was audio-described and subtitled in its original version, making it accessible to all viewers. This allowed everyone to experience a spot as someone with a sensory impairment would.

The initiative was a resounding success. It highlighted the interest of other advertisers in advancing their approach to accessible advertising. Proximus joined the project, providing audio description and subtitles for its original ad on the same broadcast as the Ligue Braille spot, further amplifying the awareness message.

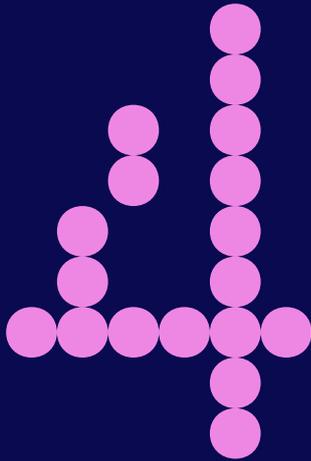
This initiative demonstrated, even before any technical developments, the importance of evolving accessibility standards for advertising content.



« Proximus is part of a 'Content Accessibility' working group whose aim is to align accessibility services and make them easier for the public to use. With that same objective in mind, we joined this initiative on La Une and Tipik to show that making advertising accessible is not only possible, but essential.»

EMMANUELLE PUTTEMANS, COMMUNICATION & PRODUCTION EXPERT PROXIMUS

proximus



P&G, the first advertiser to take the leap

4. P&G, THE FIRST ADVERTISER TO TAKE THE LEAP

Audio-described and subtitled advertising is now available on RTBF television channels La Une, Tipik, and La Trois, and will soon be available on France TV channels: France 2, France 3, and France 5.

Access to audio description and subtitles is activated via the TV decoder remote of the main Belgian operators. The functionality is the same as that used for movies and series, but now applies during commercial breaks.

P&G, already a pioneer in accessibility in other European countries, aims to become the first Belgian advertiser to make its campaigns available with audio description and subtitles. The first brand to complete this step will be Lenor, with a launch planned for early 2026.

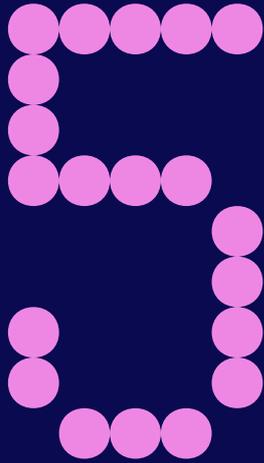


available on:



soon available on:





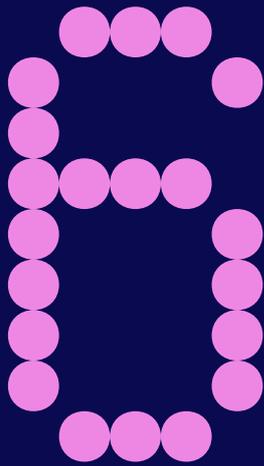
What about digital video accessibility?

5. WHAT ABOUT DIGITAL VIDEO ACCESSIBILITY?



RMB is actively working on making digital video advertising spots accessible. From production standards to distribution and consumption channels, the entire accessibility chain relies on different processes in the digital environment.

The sales house aims to offer this functionality across its full digital video portfolio by the first half of 2026.



Conclusion

The White Paper on audio description and subtitling in advertising, published by RMB to mark its 40th anniversary, aims to engage all players in the media and advertising sector in a proactive approach to inclusion.

The figures speak for themselves: millions of people are currently excluded from understanding advertising messages due to sensory impairments. Making advertising accessible is not just about meeting regulatory or societal expectations, **it gives brands and media operators a unique opportunity to reach a broader, more diverse, and more loyal audience.**

Introducing audio-description and subtitling solutions, now tried and tested, is simple, cost-effective, and delivers significant benefits for both brand image and society as a whole. The partnerships between advertisers, publishers, sales houses, and advocacy groups show that collective commitment leads to fast, meaningful, and measurable progress.

This White Paper is both a practical handbook and a call to action.

Each step is meant to inspire stakeholders to rethink their processes, train their teams, and embed accessibility as a natural standard in every advertising communication.

Together, we can ensure that inclusion becomes second nature rather than an optional extra, and that advertising is, at last, accessible to everyone.

Thank you to all the partners who are already supporting us in our efforts to promote better accessibility in advertising.



**Ad Accessibility
Network**



EGTA



**United Brands
Association**