ARD ①

How a leading European broadcaster is driving radical digital transformation with Contentful

ARD is the association of Germany's public media companies and the largest public media network in Europe. ARD is publicly funded through a media fee paid by every household in Germany, amounting to more than 80 million people.

"OUR CONTENT WAS ALL OVER THE PLACE"

ARD wanted to revolutionize how content is created and delivered to subscribers, and needed a platform to consolidate all of its online offerings and media libraries. Sounds simple, but it wasn't.

ARD comprises nine broadcasters, which cover 11 television channels, 55 radio channels and hundreds of digital product offerings. As a result, massive amounts of content were scattered across dozens of CMSes, making it extremely difficult to manage content to a single front-end layer. Further, it did not provide users with a central and unique video platform holding ARD's high quality content from all channels.

A SINGLE SOURCE OF TRUTH

The solution? Contentful's content hub. The Content Management API (aka the content hub) separates tightly coupled content aggregation from content delivery infrastructure and creates a single, meta layer for content, enabling ARD to centrally curate content in the ARD Medialibrary. "Implementing a content hub for curation liberated ARD from wasting time building and maintaining endless repository structures by collecting all of ARD's content in a central media library", says Malte Blumberg, chief technology officer for ARD online. Before, he says, teams were wasting so much time just managing content that "we couldn't focus on actually going this extra mile to give something great to our users."
"To orchestrate decentralized structures, we needed something that brings together content and services through a great API."

FROM ZERO NEW RELEASES IN A YEAR TO ONE BETA RELEASE EVERY WEEK

Internally, Contentful enabled ARD to experiment and iterate fast, rather than sinking time and effort and taking on unnecessary risk with a large monolithic solution. Blumberg explains that this made the transition to a content hub much smoother for his digital team. "The best way to change culture is to change it by behavior. If people feel secure making a mistake, if people feel secure trying something out, if people feel responsible [...] I think these are the steps where you get people from A to B."

Blumberg has high hopes after seeing the initial successes of a single, centralized content repository. "A year ago, with the old way, we had no releases in a year," he says. "Now we are up to one developer release per day, and one beta release per week. And this is just the first step. In one to two years, I actually want 50 to 60 releases per day in production."

MODERNIZING HOW CONTENT FLOWS

ARD has launched a public beta of their media library at IFA in Berlin with significant positive feedback. Implementing the content hub for curation allowed ARD to improve their core product offerings, focus on delivering what subscribers actually want, and position ARD for a massive market shift, where the average person spends far more time online than they do watching broadcast television.

In other words, consider traditional TV and radio as broadcasting 1.0, and posting those offerings online as broadcasting 2.0. ARD is now pioneering the transition to broadcasting 3.0, where the online format drives a unique, non-linear customer experience, with content and channels independent to the platform.

The new ARD media library is now accessible to everyone at ardmediathek.de. However, the beta version will remain, and will always be a couple of steps ahead of the main version. This empowers ARD to constantly deliver and try new features – and to build a unique video platform that's responsive to the needs of its audience.

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— *Malte Blumberg, CTO, ARD online*