

## A study of how Kontrabande could go digital.



Paul Tyler  
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**Brief:** To explore the issues around Kontrabande delivering more digital communication solutions, including:

What should Kontrabande offer?

What skills does Kontrabande need?

How will Kontrabande be defined?

How should Kontrabande initiate new digital projects?

**Summary:** Kontrabande wants to advance into the digital space whilst retaining a healthy scepticism towards the step change. It's a confident company in what it does now, mainly delivering into the area of print journalism. The need for continuous quick financial return, fuels a client driven strategy, which can sometimes stifle innovation through reinforcing self-discipline and restraint in delivering beyond the scope of what's instructed. Simply adding new skills and resources won't deliver change, but will create greater dependency on quick financial return. For Kontrabande to develop, I recommend it adopts a number of soft steps that don't break this dependency, but improve the chances of the company gaining similar confidence within the digital space. The following seven actions will be discussed in more detail later:

1. **Unlock management potential**
2. **Innovate at the *matching phase***
3. **Innovate whilst working**
4. **Inspire with guidance**
5. **Capture, Share and Display**
6. **Internalise objectives and success criteria**
7. **Don't recruit – just yet**

**The Buzz of the Digital:** It's impossible to breath these days without considering the digital alternatives. When catchphrases such as 'If it doesn't spread, it's dead' and 'consumers as creators' become part of business parlance, you can understand why there's such a flurry to leave the analogue world behind. The turbulence of the financial crisis has whipped up the digital frenzy, with business and commentators alike squabbling over the bench markers defining the new replacement economies: Lo-fi v Hi-fi, free<sup>1</sup> v cost, quality v expedience, access v exclusive. Nobody<sup>2</sup> knows the answers, as the prevailing solutions only bend the model, requiring new solutions. What's clear is that digital spreads. It's contagious as it can transform business, brands, process and product. The power of recommendation and syndication has the power to change habits, attitudes, behaviours and social norms. The world of analogue is changing as so neatly expressed by Eva Berg-Winters at PricewaterhouseCoopers,

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Anderson discusses 'Free! Why \$0.00 Is the Future of Business' [http://www.wired.com/techbiz/it/magazine/16-03/ff\\_free](http://www.wired.com/techbiz/it/magazine/16-03/ff_free)

<sup>2</sup> Strong and contrasting views regarding News Copr's charging model for online news. Hear tech podcast 'Buzz Out Loud ep 1036' [http://www.cnet.com/8301-19709\\_1-10304982-10.html?tag=mncol;title](http://www.cnet.com/8301-19709_1-10304982-10.html?tag=mncol;title)

“Despite the long pit stop, when the country [UK] bounces back from recession, with the support of the Digital Britain campaign and the net generation entering the working world, digital growth will surge once again to the detriment of more traditional mediums such as print.”

**Methodology:** This report fell out of an initial conversation regarding Kontrabande’s digital offering. It prompted an email response (see Appendix) from me questioning Kontrabande’s appetite in delivering to the changing habits of the audience and then two successive meetings with Sune and Søren. A study was commissioned and a guiding brief set. It felt clear from the start, that the answers to enable a first step, lay within an deeper understanding of the company’s work flow. So I set about interviewing nine employees (Stine Bjerre Herdel, Christian Blomgreen, Sune Aagaard, Mattias Wohlert, Søren Schultz Jørgensen, Birgitte Raben, Esben Niklasson, Stine Carsten Kendal & Pernille Ernstved Rype), mapping out the workflow from client to deliverable and understanding each individual’s part within the process. From this, I was able to set out the actions as listed.



**Findings:** How does Kontrabande function? At the centre of the process is a relationship between Kontrabande and the client. Clients are companies/organisations/bodies that need to relate a message to a target audience, whether that be customers of a service e.g. account holders at Danske Bank or internal members within a company, e.g. staff at Novo Nordisk. Generally the platform is print, with messages delivered as magazines, quarterly reports, flyers etc. However e-newsletters and websites can form part of the mix.



At present 80% of the work is created by clients coming to Kontrabande, stating a need and requesting solutions. That used to be 99% of the way business was done, but times have changed and Kontrabande is now hunting the 20% that doesn't come their way. The likelihood is that this 20% will grow as companies continue to feel the pinch. Whether or not the financial crisis is also hiding a market shift away from communication companies that specialize in print, is unclear.

The 80% that comes in, is broken down into two scenarios:

i) The *'Squeaky door'*

*'Squeaky door'* scenarios are easy to recognize. A client identifies a specific problem and a specific need e.g. "we're distributing an internal magazine in four weeks and it needs structure". In these instances, the client is certain of the platform and delivery mechanism, and simply wants a solution to fix the problem. Irrespective of whether this *'Squeaky door'* relates to a broader issue within their own communication strategy, they simply want the problem fixed, now. *Squeaky doors* do not incentivize innovation, they prevent Kontrabande from redefining itself, merely reinforcing the view that it's a company that's good at mending *Squeaky doors* and require a war-like footing in production. But they do unlock funds with seven out of ten good for money. *Squeaky doors* won't go away and so the challenge in the future will be to reflect a broader range of *Squeaky doors*, including digital *Squeaky doors*.



ii) The *'Ongoing editorial'*

*'Ongoing editorial'* scenarios come from two routes. First, where a company requires input into a new or ongoing product, e.g. "we're producing a monthly newsletter and require monthly effort from Kontrabande to realise it". Secondly, they can grow out of a succession of *'Squeaky doors'*, where a successful quick fix solution by Kontrabande prompts the need to fix another, initiating a longer term dependency. Both of these situations create the potential for Kontrabande to innovate, but can sometimes be stifled by the limits imposed by the company,

e.g. not requiring strategic or digital input. One dream scenario expressed more than once, would be for a client to come with an open brief for Kontrabande to define the platform, effectively turning a (ii) into a (iii).

The 20% that comes from Kontrabande actively targeting clients, produces one broad scenario:

iii) 'New Business and R&D'

This scenario by its description allow Kontrabande to define the client's need and innovate around the solution e.g. "Dear Danske Bank, I found a copy of your monthly printed report on a train and there's huge potential to replace it with an electronic news letter." There's no standard way of dealing with these scenarios. Although Kontrabande is most likely to suggest a solution that can be substantiated by its own track record. It can itself define the client's need and solution unencumbered by client directive, a drawback of the scenarios (i) and (ii).

The Big 3Ss: As directors of the company, Sune, Søren and Stine K tend to initiate and own these client-Kontrabande relationships. Although it's possible and actively encouraged for others to drive sales, the Big Three S's hold the experience, vernacular, network and confidence to see these deals up and through the 'Point of sale'. The scenario types, as described above, dictate the flexibility the directors have in exploring the client's needs and potential solutions. How much each focuses specifically on delivering to the designated client directive or how much they challenge it (including time and cost) depends very much on the director. Each director's area of expertise heavily shapes the type of solution offered. During this initial, critical point of sale, the directors tend not to innovate out of their confidence zone. The *point of sale*, tends to take place face to face, the end of which, the needs of the client, the platform and an outline of the solution are set.



Team members, other than the Big 3Ss are encouraged to initiate new deals. Some don't see this as direct selling, but rather engaging with friends/associates/their own network. It's sought by some as a way to bring in projects that may place demands on their own skills. Coupled with this freedom to seek new clients is the responsibility to present the potential deal back into the 3 Big Ss so that one of the directors can handle the *Point of sale*. What's expressed from the team is an eagerness to gain these skills, but from the directors point of view, the challenge to define and shrink-wrap the deal making process.

Directly after the *point of sale*, the director responsible goes back into Kontrabande to gain support and resources to deliver the solution. 'Matching up' describes the phase when the director puts together a small, tight working group. *Matching up* doesn't appear to be directly affected by the type of scenario. *Matching up* can involve a director working directly with either Stine BH, Christian BG, Birgitte or Pernille, whilst bringing in additional expertise from the graphical team. Sometimes the director may simply work alone with Esben and Mattias. When specialist journalism is required, then Christian MB can be called upon to add more tailored content.

Pernille devotes one fifth of her time to managing resources i.e. supporting the director by helping match the skill-set of internal people to their solution, availability of people's time being a key factor. Whilst everyone is conscious of this process, it's mixed as to whether people understand how all decisions are made.

What is common to all of these *matching up* combinations, is that they occur after the '*point of sale*', after the client's needs, platform and an outline of the solution have been set. From this point, it's difficult to retract from what's been agreed at the *point of sale*, especially to change the target platform. Once briefed, the Kontrabande working group meets with the client through a succession of face to face meetings, with time back at base pulling together effort so as to deliver the solution. Working face to face with the client is crucial, especially as it's one place and time when part of the solution can be delivered.

The graphics team see the value of being brought into a project early within the project lifecycle, as they can add to the creative process. Clearly Kontrabande has gained hugely by integrating the graphics team into the conceptual phase of solution development. They have found a way to wed journalism and graphics, taking them from producing good writing to delivering good content and form; potentially signalling a method for integrating a third digital arm. Current projects don't require dynamic graphics, i.e. graphics that work like applications, changing according to user input and choices. The focus is on producing 'baked' output; good, quality graphics that enhance and integrate with the content, but don't change as a function of user interaction. Like producing a beautiful cake, the work goes into the ingredients, but once it's put into the oven, there's no going back. To deliver dynamic output for a digital platform, would require other skills, such as those of a Flash developer.

A Kontrabande's client solution tends to fall into one of three categories:

- i) The workshop – something to inspire, instruct and guide.
- ii) The frame onto which the client can add content – layout, content structure, style etc.
- iii) The complete package, where frame and full content are delivered as one.

**Actions:** These seven actions are recommendations for how Kontrabande could move towards and be seen to be providing a greater number of digital solutions:

**1. Unlock management's potential:** Kontrabande has been hugely successful at attracting talented staff and making sounds business decisions. By delivering within the competencies of those making the decisions, namely the directors, it has served the company well. If the company is to broaden its offering, then it has to unlock the potential of the group by unlocking the creative wisdom of the directors. A case study by the Harvard Business Review<sup>3</sup> into 'How Pixar Fosters Collective Creativity' focused in on the way that senior management at Pixar recognised the need to separate senior management's role of providing approval from that of giving advice (wisdom). They created 'surgery time' when anyone within the company could come to them for advice whilst removing the potential for the worker having their idea/project rejected. It did not replace decision making, but simply added a creative phase before it. It was crucial that both manager and worker acknowledged and respected when either wisdom or approval was being sought, to protect the worker's hunger to innovate and to protect the manager from fearing that tacit approval had been assumed by virtue of them now knowing the idea. This unlocked the potential of management to provide even greater creative support, whilst enabling the workers to become more innovative under guidance. This approach has the potential to broaden the knowledge of the Kontrabande directors. It could enable them to become more creative within the advice they give yet retain the prerogative of decision making based within their comfort zones. It reduces any creative censorship and distributes wisdom - it's a win win solution for all.



Creative organisations, by their nature often bounce between vertical and flat hierarchies. There are points within the creative process that require almost complete openness to ideas, where anyone can add comment and there are other times when hard decisions need to be taken by senior management. There's also a third way, one where the skills of an individual are recognised as being the best at a particular point within the creative process. We see this when incorporating graphics into the work. Irrespective of a common ability for us all to say what we like and don't like, we'll often defer to designers, illustrators, artists etc. to gain their input because it's what they're good at. This doesn't detract from the decision making role of the boss, but does emphasize the specialism that makes them valuable. What's interesting is how the formality and expression of this process can sometimes help workers understand how and why they fit in. One good example for me was watching a documentary showing the emergency services saving the life of a attempted suicide victim from under a train. With so many factors involved, it was fascinating to watch how seniority constantly changed from one service (ambulance man, fireman, underground operator) to another as a function of what stage they were at within the operation. Before the train was lifted, the electricity had to be cut and the state of the man's health assessed requiring a constantly changing 'man in charge'. This ever changing hierarchy was audibly expressed so clearly that there could

<sup>3</sup> Paul can provide a copy as online version is limited to one page - <http://hbr.harvardbusiness.org/2008/09/how-pixar-fosters-collective-creativity/ar/1>

be no room for doubt and the 'players' automatically self-organised themselves according to who was currently in charge. Clearly this example is an amplification of what could happen at Kontrabande and shouldn't suggest that this third way replace current practice, but it does highlight how useful it can be to indicate when and why certain individuals add value at specific points within the creative process.

**2. Innovate at the *matching phase*:** Innovation won't be happen because of the client. So focus innovation at the *matching phase*. Whilst still respecting what's been agreed with the client, it should be possible to open up some, it not all of the projects to the whole team even after the *point of sale*. This doesn't replace the need to identify a tight team for delivery, and may not even influence it, but within a forty five minute group brainstorming session, it could elicit a broader range of solutions that might also work. The teams clearly respect the need for good leadership and decision making within Kontrabande and so it's possible to stick to the agreement made at the *Point of sale* whilst still exploring, in parallel, other options back at base. It allows Kontrabande to tap into the passions of the company at no loss to the client. But it does require additional investment of people's time and motivation from management. Kontrabande needs to gain confidence in its ability to generate and deliver a broader range of solutions on a broader range of platforms. To do that, it must first embrace the notion of productive waste<sup>4</sup>, it must generate more solutions than are necessary, thereby enabling it to experiment whilst still delivering against client need.

**3. Innovate whilst working:** Kontrabande is an ambitious company, but ambitious only within the competencies it's confident in. If it pushes a client, it pushes it within the platform and rarely on the choice of platform. In the past, creative companies have separated development from core day to day work, seeing the 'blue skies' thinking as incompatible with the daily grind to deliver. However Kontrabande should apply the opposite. It requires a strategy where Kontrabande 'innovates whilst working', i.e. parallel develops solutions beyond the client's directive whilst still delivering to client's needs. Whether or not the additional mock solutions are expressed to the client will depend on the type of client and the quality of the mock solution. Innovation should come from the journalists, particularly if the company wants to be a platform agnostic, communication strategy company. These non-client driven ideas won't simply disappear but will be captured and expressed (see **Capture, Share and display**), building up the company's portfolio along the way.



**4. Inspire with guidance:** Ironically it might be Kontrabande's self confidence that's preventing it from innovating. Innovation requires the willingness to make mistakes. An easy mantra to repeat, but all too often a unacceptable risk to

<sup>4</sup> Clive Anderson's 'Tech Is Too Cheap to Meter: It's Time to Manage for Abundance, Not Scarcity' [http://www.wired.com/techbiz/it/magazine/17-07/mf\\_freer?currentPage=1](http://www.wired.com/techbiz/it/magazine/17-07/mf_freer?currentPage=1)

implement. In Josh Lacey's Guardian review of Alison Gopnik's 'The Philosophical Baby'<sup>5</sup> he explains how as adults we limit our ability to innovate and that through the dependency we experience throughout childhood, we develop our imaginations. *"As we grow older, we acquire self-discipline and restraint; we learn to ignore our surroundings, edit out distractions and focus our attention on a particular task."* Gopnik describes children as the research and development department of the human species, spilling wild visions and unexpected inspirations. Adults are production and marketing, focusing on a particular project and following it through to its logical conclusion.' So how best to rekindle this imaginative drive within the adult? Travel. '...visiting a strange country overwhelms our senses with experience'. However poetic Gopnik's claims are, there's clearly some truth in the sense that travel fuels the imagination, a feeling most of us as adults have experienced. Likewise Kontrabande can 'travel' by hosting sessions where both people from within the company and beyond can share ideas, concepts, products, services and innovations that lie within unfamiliar territory, outside the company's current remit. To inspire new production methods, team members must gain deeper insight into how audiences are changing. What's crucial is to facilitate these sessions so that ideas aren't simply absorbed, but they are analysed, deconstructed, reassembled with respects to the company's broader digital remit. New technology, for example often signals new phenomena which in turn generate the new social norms. To see the relevance of new technology to a target audience, one must understand these steps.

**5. Capture, Share and Display:** There's a vicious circle that must be broken: Kontrabande's expertise is defined by the '*Squeaky door*'. The company needs tools<sup>6</sup> to innovate. Capturing personal group development is all too often seen as a luxury of development, rather than a gift. Internal blogs<sup>7</sup>, wall spaces, collaborative/social websites etc. can allow team members to capture the work and design processes, including those not intended for the client. The fact that it's captured also makes it sharable. Not only does capturing development support future projects, but the use of these digital tools also stimulates confidence in their application, even if it's simply to link, embed or cross-integrate. The raft of client driven projects doesn't currently exploit all of the skills within the company and so by 'opening up the brain', Kontrabande can benefit hugely from more collaborative creativity. For instance, the graphics team is confident that it can support those mock solutions that wouldn't ordinarily be realised and visualised. These mustn't rot in a drawer, but should be expressed, either physically or digitally in order to express and share the creative brain of the company beyond that of the portfolio of jobs done.

The action of capturing, expressing and sharing these mock solutions must form part of the objectives set by the directors within the internal appraisal system. (see **Internalise objectives and success criteria**). The focus on this process will eventually allow Kontrabande to sell process as much as product<sup>8</sup>. One of Kontrabande's strengths is that team members have a firm grasp of what skills they bring to the party. When clients

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<sup>5</sup> A review of Alison Gopnik's 'The Philosophical Baby' where Josh Lacey is charmed by the theory that babies are free-thinking visionaries with plenty to teach us <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/aug/08/philosophical-baby-alison-gopnik-review>

<sup>6</sup> Examples of free applications that allow individuals and teams to capture, share and express development: Tumblr, Squarespace, Ning, BuddyPress, Google docs, Prezi, Lila.

<sup>7</sup> Examples of blogs created by participants on the media course where I'm the Interactive mentor - <http://evelynsofar.tumblr.com/page/11> <http://throughthickandthin.tumblr.com/page/28> <http://maikecoelle.tumblr.com/page/8>

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.flow-interactive.com/> as an example of a company that is much about process as it is product.

value the companies 'process' they may well be more open to having their problem exposed to the full Kontrabande brain, rather than insisting on nailing the solution at the *'point of sale'*.

**6. Internalise objectives and success criteria:** Kontrabande clearly prides itself on a job well done, and so it should. However value shouldn't just be driven by the client. Kontrabande does congratulate itself at times when the client doesn't. For example if a strong bid for work is rejected, then the company still highlights the value of the work. It needs to add an additional success criteria; to innovate on non-client related tasks.

Kontrabande has previously spent effort on a non-client task. The need for a company website, enabled Birgitte to gain further web development experience, learning the basics of web linking and CMS. Such an overview gave her the confidence to apply her skills in this unfamiliar area, registering the need for a deeper understanding of digital media and in particular web strategy.

It is assumed that Kontrabande currently sets each employee objectives with attainable and measurable success criteria. These objectives should then be extended to express the new values of the company, i.e. to innovate whilst delivering product. This will rubber stamp and authenticate the value the company puts on innovation, from the top down. Team members say they can accommodate additional development within their daily roles. Their motivation is maintained by understanding why and where the objective originate.

**7. Don't recruit – just yet:** Any additional skills, such as Flash Developers, can be brought in on a project by project basis. You don't need to engage with large web companies to procure these services, rather use the network of skilled freelance developers who are available both in DK and beyond. Esben already has good contacts that could be pulled in to realise both client driven and mock solutions. Growth in this area should be more organic, much in the same way the graphics team has grown and become integrated into the heart of concept production.

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## **Appendix**

Correspondence leading up to commission of this study.

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**From:** Paul Tyler [mailto:paul.tyler@gamewaremedia.com]  
**Sent:** 3. juni 2009 10:08  
**To:** 'Sune Aagaard'  
**Subject:** RE: Media transference and planes circling Heathrow....

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Sune, did you see Clive Thompson's 'The Future of Reading' in this month's Wired. Made me think if you guys.

[http://www.wired.com/techbiz/people/magazine/17-06/st\\_thompson](http://www.wired.com/techbiz/people/magazine/17-06/st_thompson)

Not hugely revealing, although it doesn't take the standard mantra of replacement, but rather promotes enhancement.

As I also ranted on below, I do think that although our lives are being crammed with more and more messages, what's clear is that the winners will be those that can successfully contextualize the different messages around the users, through the linking and mashing of content and that required digitization....

Hope to bump into you soon...

Paul

PS did you get the clips from the mail(s) below....they were big and sometimes don't make it across the creaky internet...

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**From:** Paul Tyler [mailto:paul.tyler@gamewaremedia.com]

**Sent:** 5. maj 2009 11:36

**To:** 'Sune Aagaard'

**Subject:** Media transference and planes circling Heathrow....

Sune, our chat from the other day has been circling around my head like planes waiting to land at Heathrow.

I've got a couple of BBC audio clips which you might find amusing, a comedian reinforcing the view that when we want news, we want it from a news reader and not some idiot blogging in 148 characters or less.

The second clip, coming in the next mail, is a review on 'State of Play' which touches on the sustainability of print journalism – in a round about kinda way.

Although it's easy to gather voices in support of the traditional form of media consumption, and the limits which you believe constrain the appetite and ability for users to consume more, I still believe it's important to consider just how much 'media transference' has occurred in the last 5 years. You know better than me that media is like a series of icebergs, where the active part of consumption is a tiny proportion of what filters in through the passive ingestion of stuff below the surface. I agree with you that maybe the 50 year old guy reading his Nordea brochure isn't going to suddenly fire up his laptop and start blogging whilst sipping his skinny latte in Starbucks, however I do believe that it won't be too long before the leap from print to other forms of audio visual / interactive content won't require that much of a leap.

The Wired article on your desk, the one citing D. J. Stout 'You're looking at a box' contains some interesting 'yet's "We can't animate the infographics (yet). We can't embed video or voice-over (yet). We can't add sound effects or music (yet)." We're probably a long way off from delivering such futuristic print effects, however I now consider there's an important first step, which you might want to consider before even assessing the digital resource gap at Kontrabande, as discussed the other day; to question how the Nordea magazine reader daily routine has changed as a result of the digitisation of our world. What kind and how

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many new messages are seeping through. How have their traditional forms of media consumption been augmented by newer forms of availability and presence. What is that 50 year old guy doing now which we never imagined 5 years ago and can you feed into that?

I totally accept that the people still like to get certain forms of messages in much the same way they have always done. However I'm also convinced that they receiving far more input (and sometimes giving output) through parallel media tracks, on parallel platforms.

So, could one place to start be to analyse just how the traditional users/readers are supplementing their lives. It's not about media replacement, but more media enhancement. Then you might feel more comfortable considering whether Kontrabande really wants or even needs to consider its resourcing set-up.

Hope NY was good...lucky bastard.

Paul

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