



**OLIVER POTT**

with JAN BARGFREDE

# **VISIBLE!**

**ATTRACTING  
CUSTOMERS**

**IN A  
DISTRACTED  
WORLD**

**campus**

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Oliver Pott

with Jan Bargfrede

# VISIBLE!

Attracting Customers  
in a Distracted World

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by Britta Fietzke

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# Content

<b>Invisibility equals nonexistence</b> .....	7
The high value of smart visibility .....	8
The first impression counts – and can seldomly be corrected .....	8
Do not let your visibility roam freely! .....	9
 <b>Be visible – and find the best customers and make more sales</b> .....	11
Visibility by itself is useless .....	12
The inflation of visibility .....	14
“Loud” visibility obliterates the market’s appreciation for you .....	16
The era of visibility empires is at an end .....	18
“Snack Content” – attention span of a goldfish .....	28
Establish visibility for that which is being sought after – and make sure that you are being found .....	31
Visibility is the first step to actual sales .....	40
Marketing has become more honest .....	41
The easiest form of visibility: a combination of orientation and entertainment .....	51
 <b>The three dimensions of valuable visibility</b> .....	55
Visibility needs relevance .....	56
Visibility is upgraded by authority .....	71
Visibility can be retained through storytelling over long periods of time – while coincidentally building a brand .....	83

<b>The six levels of smart visibility</b> .....	125
Level 1: Interruption marketing .....	126
Level 2: Situational marketing .....	130
Level 3: Brand trust marketing .....	132
Level 4: Personal relationship marketing .....	137
Level 5: Loyalty marketing .....	141
Level 6: Intravenous marketing .....	145
Different steps of visibility need different levels of consent by customers .....	153
<b>Directed visibility equals turnover</b> .....	155
A deal as the basis for business .....	155
Catalog of criteria for valuable visibility .....	174
Retention or buying impulse? .....	182
ROI of visibility is rarely ascertainable .....	186
<b>Channels of smart visibility</b> .....	195
Which of the hundreds of channels make the most sense? ...	195
Start with the most valuable channels .....	196
Instagram: visibility is an easily accessed resource .....	200
Your YouTube channel .....	201
Your own podcast .....	202
Email marketing has the highest added value .....	203
Webinars qualify the lead and lead to sales .....	205
Your own website automates sales .....	206
Your own sales funnel made of system modules .....	207
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	208
<b>Endnotes</b> .....	210

# Invisibility equals nonexistence

We live in a visibility economy – your product or service does not exist on the market if it is invisible there. Businesses fail mostly because they do not stage their offer properly, and, thus, stay invisible to the market.

It used to be that large and expensive budgets for TV campaigns and full-page newspaper adverts were needed to gain visibility. In order to gain attention, visibility needed to be expensive, loud and shrill.

There is good news: nowadays, valuable visibility can be planned and bought with a low budget. This particularly valuable visibility is readily available as raw material, like flour for a baker.

It is smart visibility that is oftentimes quiet yet highly relevant to customers and, therefore, the basis for more customers and great success.

Businesses who have created smart visibility for their target group find new customers more easily and have a higher turnover. They are more crisis-proof and have an unbeatable edge over their competitors. Furthermore, they can scale their turnover and grow both quickly and sustainably, while building their own “brand” at the same time.

Thus, smart visibility is the solution to an urgent problem most businesses face: their own product, in which they put a lot of trust and hope, does not seem to attract the necessary attention from customers. The creation of visibility and finding of new customers is also a great challenge for companies or entrepreneurs still planning their own product manufacturing process.

## The high value of smart visibility

Digitization has led to a change of perspective: it no longer depends on the range of your visibility, i.e. the number of eyes seeing you, rather, quality, value-added visibility for your defined target group has become of utter importance. And that is regardless of whether you are a doctor, lawyer, therapist or coach offering your knowledge or whether you want to market a physical product.

You are a highly specialized accountant or knee surgeon? Well, of course you could join *I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here!* if you so choose, and it would give you visibility toward an audience of millions of viewers. Yet, that is obviously not a good, value-added form of visibility – might even be toxic visibility that does more harm than good. It would not lead to more customers and a higher turnover, that is for sure, and such an appearance would not pay into your brand.

## The first impression counts – and can seldomly be corrected

Visibility of your person, your brand, your product or your service stands at the beginning of any turnover. It is the first step of your marketing – as long as marketing outlines everything that motivates your customers to buy. Be it on a booth at a fair, an ad in a periodical, on the television or online, your visibility is always your earliest contact point with your customers.

These are, without fail, people who decide on what to buy or not to buy, so keep in mind: your first impression is the most important one – and there is no redoing of this first impression! Research on marketing has recognized for quite a while now that this first impression is especially embedded in people's heads, thus, they coined this magical moment the “primacy effect.”<sup>1</sup>

You might know this yourself: you judge within seconds whether you find someone agreeable or disagreeable. To counteract this first impression takes massive amounts of effort and relationship work.

Unfortunately, this can lead to errors of judgment – maybe the other person just had a bad day, a headache or had just heard bad news? These biases of early visibility have been researched a lot and are called “halo effect”<sup>2</sup>: for instance, Alexander, an attractive well-spoken young man with good manners, will get better grades for the same performance than someone called Kevin, who talks with a heavy accent. The examiner is prone to transfer visible signs to the actual performance – which is, of course, objectionable.

People with glasses are considered more intelligent and literate – also a fallacy. French perfume or Italian shoes are automatically considered more exclusive, even when they were produced in a massive factory. And products in expensive and especially luxurious packaging can be sold with higher prices. The customer automatically transfers the first impression of expensive packaging on the shelf to the product itself.

Yes, that is unfair and, with a closer look, also objectionable. Customers, though, judge just as simply and reduce you and your product to the first impression of your visibility.

Companies who keep their first impression in check and build it up with much quality can control the first and most important impression on the customer. The best tool for this is visibility, which should be controlled with the mentioned three dimensions – a major part of this book.

A company with smart visibility and an immaculate first impression has a large lead in the selling process to their competitors.

## **Do not let your visibility roam freely!**

Be aware: you are still visible to your customers on the market, whether you have or you have not actively dealt with your visibility.

You are never invisible, you just do not control your visibility.

Take large hotel review sites, for instance. They list pretty much every single hotel on the globe, and guests can review their experiences there – whether owners like this or not. There are also Internet platforms with lists of doctors, while patients write reviews and critique – even if the doctors have not added a profile themselves. On Amazon,

customers will review your product and discuss it on online message boards.

And someone googling your business will find Google's star rating of one to five. A product can, if it has received a two-star rating on Amazon or Google, end up as an absolute nonstarter only days after its initial launch.

Online, employees rate their employers, so if someone looks for a certain company, these job-rating portals, due to their search engine algorithm, will be quite high on the list of results and, thanks to the halo effect, guide people's first impressions.

All of this is uncontrolled visibility with a large impact on your turnover and also, in the context of shortage of skilled workers, on the quality of your staff.

Without a proper strategy on how to control it, you hand over your visibility and with it a powerful tool to the market which will then take over the reigns. This can lead to utter chaos and to serious economic problems. Worst case scenario, this leads to a spiral of negativity through customer reviews, a "shit storm," that you will never be able to reel back in.

The main goal of smart visibility is to gain better customers and reach better turnovers. Yet, there is also a hidden, pleasant side effect, a built-in "insurance," so to speak: smart visibility prevents a bad reputation as it builds up a solid and positive image of your impression during the good days. This saves you and your company's reputation from possible crises in rougher times.

# **Be visible – and find the best customers and make more sales**

All service providers and sellers of products want to introduce their business models to customers. And this is also where the problems start: it costs a lot of energy and has the potential for much frustration to sell a product or, even worse, develop a product to then sell to customers, and to find functioning distribution channels. There are forms of visibility with more and with less added value – yet, worse than being badly visible is being invisible.

For entrepreneurs, it is also not helpful that product development often cannot take place with the secure knowledge of having a lucrative market for it later. Finally, and maybe today more than ever, the feeling that one's own offer meets too many competitors in the struggle for the attention of potential customers, a struggle enhanced by digitalization and the fragmentation of many markets, combined with a fear that one's own piece of the cake of visibility, thus of the market, can hardly be won.

Customers are confronted with so much simultaneous information and offers that the visibility for single offers is reduced to nearly nought here as well. It seems almost impossible to become visible because too many fight over the same piece of cake.

For instance, you have worked hard on acquiring a good expertise in one special field. You can now solve problems for customers fast and with remarkable efficiency. Your are completely wrapped up in this part of your actual scope of duties, this is your true core skill. Now, you are considering leaving your employer or specializing in this area of interest with your own business.

Yet, the thought that it might not be quite easy to find yourself customers creeps up on you as there are too many competitors in your

niche or market who have something similar to offer already. You might feel it in your gut that your competitors are not better than you, you might even be much better than them – still, no one sees it but you. Furthermore, your competitors have already established themselves in the market, made themselves visible.

Companies quickly and often feel like they are trying to paint the lily, like they will never be visible and will never stand a chance against all the competitors – even though they might have the better product or the better service. This inspires a feeling of hopelessness. Yet, if you want to sell something, you need to find your own visibility niche that you can use to your advantage. And it is this target conflict that can be solved with smart visibility: achieving visibility by itself is not the actual problem.

## **Visibility by itself is useless**

Visibility just by itself is useless most times. This goes for the digital realm as well.

Take Arianna Renée for instance: she is highly visible and has gotten herself a large piece of the cake in her niche. Known as @Arii on Instagram, her account has over 2.6 million followers. All these people follow her because they want to be entertained quickly, want to be distracted or get information from her. This might lead one to the intuitive conclusion that it should be fairly easy for @Arii to get information on certain products across to her followers, in order to then use her guidance function to encourage them to buy said product. Yet, Renée is also known for the fact that she has not been able to use her fame and visibility for this exact purpose.

Certainly to commercialize her visibility with her target audience, she tried selling off-the-shelf shirts of a brand that was created for this. Yet, the production company had one single, seemingly negligible condition before starting the production process: Renée needed to sell 36 shirts in a presale. These would cover the initial costs of production and the Internet star could prove her realistic chances on the market. With over two million followers, this sounded like a doable task to even Ari-

anna Renée. Albeit, the unimaginable happened: she did *not* manage to sell those 36 shirts in a presale. Production never began and Renée declared later, quite ruefully, that she learned one thing from this experience: she needed to work harder.<sup>1</sup>

She is visible – yet, uselessly visible.

However, the reasons for her failure can be described, indeed, even seen from a positive side and are to a large extent due to an inflation of visibility in this medium: Instagram inflates visibility – just like any other successful channel with high growth rates and a lot of corporate advertisement.

While the early Internet, after leaving the first research labs, was a unidirectional medium for a long time, like the so-called “old media” (newspaper, books, television, cinema and radio), where institutionalized senders always delivered information to many receivers. Over the years, however, it changed into a new model that became part of the reason for today’s Internet: it made former receivers into senders, and everyone could spread their information via the web. And everyone has been sending ever since.

It all began with blogs and the growing chances of publishing one’s own contents through the first website programming to the public at large. This way, the Internet became constantly more communicative. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube (or rather their several predecessors) made it possible for pretty much anyone to find more visibility (and more easily, too) for their own topics and about their own person. Even just the name of one of Facebook’s predecessors in networks, “MySpace,” makes it very clear, what everything was now all about: one’s own little garden in the wide variety of visibility.

One of the direct consequences of these new possibilities can be found in the now 1.2 billion active Instagram users, trying to make their own content visible. Almost all of these users spend nearly an hour a day on it to scroll through the contents. Due to the feed, the stories and IGTV, the “discover” page and hashtags, this quickly adds up to a mass of information and content – to as much as 1.2 billion hours of sending and receiving and striving for visibility and attention, mind you, that is only Instagram. Additionally, over a billion hours of video content is being watched on YouTube on a daily basis,<sup>2</sup> roughly 5.8 billion

searches on Google are being done daily,<sup>3</sup> and 1.8 billion people use Facebook on a daily basis.<sup>4</sup>

In short, a lot is being sent and many channels put their emphasis on one KPI (key performance indicator), “Views,” on visibility. By the way, all channels count these views and make them continuously accessible to the producers of these public contents – itemized for every single post, to motivate users to generate even more views and reach. This illustrates the most important aspect: visibility. Furthermore, all users of this medium are conditioned to a sort of dependence on views, number of followers and reach: “This user has many followers, logically, they must have a very successful business. This other user gets 100,000 clicks per video, they must make a ton of money with their reach.”

In regards to economic aspects, visibility succumbs to a runaway inflation. Just as currencies have a problem with banks printing too much money at times without depositing a value, visibility has a problem when there is too much of it. In terms of money, it has not been deposited in its physical sense (with gold reserves in the same amount as bills and coins). The same goes for the immense and growing amount of visibility, there might not be a deposit of sufficient attention from potential viewers.

Especially with social media and as seen from the outside, people assume visibility and business success to be synonyms, just because the users have been conditioned to a greater attention to numbers of followers and clicks by the medium, and because the true correlation between the two is incomprehensible. Users do not have access to economic evaluations of the ROI for the followers of channels they are also following. Thus, it is tempting to assume that someone with many followers has an equally successful business.

Yet, this assumption based on the numbers of a large company’s or successful knowledge worker’s Instagram account is nothing more than idle speculation.

## **The inflation of visibility**

So, visibility is excessively available. This is true not only for Instagram but also for other medial channels and contexts, where visibility is now

more easily available and with greater capacity. When we talk of a visibility economy, it is one of the easiest economic correlations that also turned into a problem for Arianna Renée: the correlation between supply and value as a result of demand. The easier a product like visibility can be procured, the lower its value is – especially with ever more suppliers involved. This correlation is called inflation.

A large supply also has a direct influence on demand. With mobile Facebook feeds, for instance, 1.7 seconds of attention were recorded per post per user. This means that a product on offer, like the shirt offered by Arianna Renée, gets exactly this on average from every single user.<sup>5</sup> However, this is an insufficient amount of time to generate in the viewer an impulse to buy.

Yet, it is an advantage that visibility is so easily found nowadays. This simple access makes it more pleasant, more predictable and thus also more profitable for companies to procure this raw material. About 30 years ago, only picture editors, TV hosts and bestselling authors could attract the attention of millions of people, whereas nowadays, visibility can be bought on a schedule from Instagram, Google and Facebook.

On the downside, it has become more difficult to turn the usage of visibility as a raw material into direct profits, which was obviously part of the problem for Arianna Renée. Falling prices are more pleasant for consumers and buyers than for sellers and suppliers.

For example, a processing of gold as an expensive raw material into jewelry allows for a high value, also in the marketing of the resulting products. Yet, gold must also be bought at a high price – one of the reasons for high prices of processed gold: even the simplest and plainest processed piece of jewelry still has its gold value in resale, just because gold as a raw material is rare and correspondingly valuable.

If, however, someone were to start selling a cheap machine tomorrow with which every household could extract a few kilos of gold per day from tap water, then that would devalue all already available gold. Neither the gold nor, for that matter, the machine filtering it would be worth anything after a while, at least not after the commodity gold had flooded the market. To the same extent, visibility and its filtering machines have been devalued by the Internet. As a direct consequence, the

use of visibility as a raw material can no longer generate any immediate value if it is kept unrefined.

The large amount of visibility that is available to successful Instagrammers is also (at least theoretically) available to all others, which many use in their favor already. Furthermore, now it is not just one single individual or institution producing content while the rest of the world consumes: every consumer is now also a producer, thus a mix of producer and consumer, of sender and receiver. All users are also senders, while receiving from many other senders. Every single message is now part of a white noise of billions and billions of messages – and is in danger of disappearing.

Arianna Renée really needs to think on what she wants to “work harder” on, as the production of even more worthless visibility will not help her much.

## **“Loud” visibility obliterates the market’s appreciation for you**

By the way, the “old media” are also familiar with this phenomenon. A product being shown in a popular evening program reached millions of viewers – with nearly no other competing products nearby, thus it had extraordinary visibility.

With the occurrence of private channels and broadcasts, which also had far more lax regulations on their advertisements, visibility of television advertisement became inflationary. TV ads and single products met with more and more competition on the same channels. For instance, detergent now vied for consumers on television, not just on the shelves. Previously, customers used to decide in the shop on which product to buy – however, television advertisement changed all that, as the decision to buy was now mostly made in the living room based on television coverage. This turned visibility into the first and foremost piece of marketing.

Adverts became more creative, colorful and, ultimately, insistent. Ads for detergent previously praised its “good quality,” while they now promised the “whitest of white.” And just a few years later, consumers

were being shouted at from television ads with “Tight is right!” or “I’m not that stupid!”<sup>6</sup> This is loud visibility, not smart visibility.

Even though, an escalation of this was driven further, it now feels like this concept is petering out slowly. First of all, this form of advertisement on television has taken a backseat. Besides, television advertisements – just like ads on the radio, in newspapers and cinemas, just generally in the old media – have apparently passed their prime. Ad revenue has been declining for years, a trend that coincided with the emergence of the social web.

Nowadays, simple visibility has long transgressed its peak of intrinsic value as the basis for lucrative business models. It has been proven more often than not that the idea of making revenue just from visibility is a fallacy. And even frantic tries to attain even more visibility or become even louder have failed. That is a phenomenon we are all too familiar with in our own private lives: there is always someone at a party trying to tell a story, speaking loudly and gesticulating wildly. They literally fight for attention – while it becomes more and more arduous and unsatisfying to listen to them.

Yet, there are also charismatic people everyone likes to listen to, even when they are being quiet. They have relevant topics to talk about, they seem to be on the same wavelength as us and we could literally hear a pin drop because everyone is hanging onto their every word. Other people seem to be drawn to these people – *because* they are not loud. They reach an interesting form of visibility and build a special connection with other people, who then strive to absorb their contents. Suddenly, a sender does not impose their visibility onto others, rather, potential receivers look for it.

This sort of visibility is what we are striving for because it is quieter and not imposed on others through sheer quantity and noise. This we call smart visibility – it is sought-after, unobtrusive, lives off its own charisma and its connection to the sender. This is by far the more intelligent way for most companies to reach their customers and visibility that sticks out on all levels. And it also, once again, is valuable.

## The era of visibility empires is at an end

Not too long ago, visibility was concentrated on a few handful of beacons of bright light. In his book *White*,<sup>7</sup> the bestselling author Bret Easton Ellis describes the spirit of our time, our *zeitgeist*, as an era in which the visibility empires have perished. There used to be rock bands whose newest albums were awaited eagerly and who got massive attention from the media, thus, visibility. They were invited to large chat shows to talk about their newest album and received the highest visibility possible.

Films used to have the same effect: every new *James Bond* still gets this sort of media attention before and after publication. The same empires are still discernible in the market of fiction – certain authors, like the French Michel Houellebecq or the US-American Ken Follett, still receive a lot of attention from media, with book reviews being published in large newspapers. For instance, each of the former's last six books have reached bestselling status right after publication in German-speaking countries.

These “empires” still live on their momentum, which they bring with them from their own history and strong brand. Take Abba's new album *Voyage*, for instance, which has only received the greatest possible media attention because Abba still feeds off the nimbus of their own empire – despite the fact they broke up in 1982 (more than 40 years ago), and have hardly been visible as a band with new projects since.

The Beatles' album *Let it be* also dates back half a century and again received the greatest media attention on the occasion of its anniversary. In a multi-part Disney series, Paul McCartney talked about the album's genesis, while also publishing a biography of his own favorite songs. The album also appeared in a new edition and was massively marketed – it received all this attention even though it is already 50 years old. Thus, *Let it be* has retained its visibility over the course of many years, and has resurrected said visibility like the anniversary's crystallization seed which, seemingly, had never faded.

Later on, we will show how good storytelling can help preserve this visibility over longer periods of time.

Even the new *James Bond* is always highly anticipated by the public because the film series has become something of an institution. And take Michel Houellebecq again, who has been fancied as a candidate for the Nobel Prize of Literature for decades. Moreover, he claimed after the publishing of his latest novel, *Anéantir* (French for “destroy”), that it would also be his last – once again leading to large publicity and visibility, which will probably have been quite advantageous for its sales numbers.

These monuments of visibility have become rare in numbers and are done by now: do you remember a similarly large staging for a new film hitting the cinemas? (Apart from the *Marvel* franchise?) Yes, they still exist, these long-awaited cinema films, take *Matrix 4 Resurrections*, for instance – but they have become rare, and when they are highly anticipated, than that is due to their history. As with the *Matrix* series, whose first epic and genre-defining part came out in 1999, the last century, nonetheless. Only based on this foundation of a decades-old visibility did the sequel receive so much attention.

Yet, most of the new cinema films receive little to no attention, even if they are especially expensive blockbusters with famous actors and actresses.

Such a visibility erosion is also discernible in the music business and is most probably the reason why nearly all musicians cannot live off their music alone anymore. Not too long ago, a musician’s performance on a large TV show would lead to a large visibility of millions of viewers, which would then without a doubt translate directly into record sales. Visibility was directly linked to revenue, which then led to a faithful fan base for musicians. Out of self-interest, the major labels would arrange for more coverage and visibility.

“Be visible first, earn money later,” was the official rule of thumb.

Nowadays, it is the other way around: only the visible ones can build up on this success, will be invited to TV shows – and can earn money.

“To get a truly profitable record deal with a major label, bands or solo artists need an already existent fan base,” explains Hubert Wandjo, head of Music and Creative Industries Department at the German Pop Academy in Mannheim.<sup>8</sup> He now advises young artists who have not yet been able to generate their own visibility to rather set up their own label, thus following a DIY approach.

The basic idea is obvious: previously, the product itself was sufficiently attention-grabbing and there were attractive public channels for the presentation of a product to a large audience, thus, creating visibility. The product more or less sold itself, and quite effortlessly, too. Today, visibility toward a target group needs to be built up first – and only then can it be turned into sales.

## **Visibility does not disappear – it is split up**

What happened to the audience? One could assume that the viewers' attention has disappeared and faded. A fallacy.

Reasons for visibility erosion are numerous and different, yet, they are all based on the breaking apart of previously great names, products and institutions into much smaller elements. Now, the associated niche visibility is accessible to everyone, as the high entry barriers have fallen. This makes visibility more easily available and turns it into a more democratic process – that is the first very good news for you because now you no longer need an empire to draw attention to your cause.

In the past, a feature film could only be produced by one of the large studios, like Warner Brothers, Universal or Disney, partly because the necessary production technology was unaffordable, while channels to reach consumers were equally guarded and expensive: airtime on big TV stations for commercials, for example, or the huge expense of getting a film into cinemas. Additionally, big Hollywood stars tried getting the focus on their own visibility and, since they could juice up any film with their charisma, demanded exorbitant fees. Therefore, only the big film companies could afford blockbuster productions.

Today, a simple film can be recorded with just an iPhone camera, and it can also be edited directly on the same device – certainly, the final product's quality cannot be compared to a cinema production, but it has a much better price-result ratio, by a long shot. Later parts of this book will show in particular that just the technical quality is no longer a success factor if the content's quality is good enough,

and if the viewer is extensively linked to the new visibility channels. Also, the low-tech video can be made directly accessible to millions of viewers without guarded access, making it up-to-the-minute, direct and fast.

YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok have now more reach than any of the large television channels, and they are not guarded by expensive access hurdles like these channels or cinemas.

Yet, why did this fragmentation happen in the first place, and why do we find ourselves amidst a zeitgeist that merges sender and receiver into a “prosumer”? The reasons are essentially rooted in the so-called “Long-Tail theory,” which has been dealing with this matter since the Internet’s early days.<sup>9</sup>

This approach claims that big stars, shows and products were accepted simply because there was no alternative. Take Germany for instance, until the mid-1980s – well before the advent of commercial Internet usage –, three TV stations were available in each German federal state: ARD, ZDF and the respective regional program, the so-called “Dritte” (literally, the “third”). Viewers could only choose one of these programs at a time, and for lack of an alternative, certain programs like *Wetten, dass ...*?<sup>10</sup> became popular. They covered as wide an audience as possible, thus, these shows were just as compatible with 10-year-old schoolchildren as with people over 75.

At the same time, they had to be a compromise. Special interests or narrowcasts were not envisaged and also impossible due to the tailoring to such a wide audience. Those were then either fringe programs or later niche channels. This meant that television to a large extent had a relevance problem as a medium: if one part of a program on a Saturday night was uninteresting, like a bet on *Wetten dass ...*? or a music gig, the audience had to endure this part, hoping that the next part with another emphasis or topic might be more interesting.

This changed with the emergence of private television channels. Now, with double the number of channels, there was a larger broadcasting variety and the number of viewers spread across twice as many channels. This led to lower viewing figures for each channel – thus, directly impacting on each channel’s visibility. For the first time, viewers had more alternatives; with cable and satellite connections, hundreds

of niche channels were now available. With each new niche channel, reach was further reduced, while, at the same time, each channel's relevance increased.

Then the Internet, as for instance YouTube, overhauled the landscape of moving images, mainly for the following reasons:

- The number of (YouTube) channels was now nearly endless, which made them highly relevant. Those interested in polo or orchids would generally not find anything of relevance to them on standard channels. With YouTube, viewers can put together their own program with different contents.
- Moving images broke away from broadcast synchronicity: when a program on TV was on at an inopportune time, for example during working hours, or if two programs overlapped, viewers had to choose. This rather important disadvantage just does not exist for asynchronous broadcasting forms like YouTube channels.
- At the same time, visibility became mobile – whereas previously, TV channels could only be watched in the living room or bedroom at home, YouTube channels can be watched anywhere and everywhere, as long as a smartphone is available.
- There is more interactive engagement with users with Internet visibility: they can comment, ask questions or forward a video to friends who might be interested.
- Concurrently – and this is sometimes overlooked or at least undervalued – the purchase chain was streamlined by the convergence of e-commerce with the visibility channel. For the first time, visibility could directly, and measurably, be linked to sales. Previously, only the viewing rate could be measured, thus, only the reach of visibility generated for one product in an ad. The customer was expected to make a media break for the purchase; they had to buy a product later on in a shop, or, more rarely (but better), a product could be ordered directly via phone. With Internet, the situation changed: direct purchase links can be included in video clips, thus, the purchase is made immediately on the same device on which the video is running – visibility can convert into purchase impulses and into sales right away.