THE BELGIAN TOBACCONISTS

Prodipresse
Plus *forts* ensemble

Xavier Deville

Originally, from Liège, Xavier Deville is a printer by training. Since he had not found his ideal printing house, aged 24 he decided to take over the bookstore-newsagent in his neighborhood in 1995. He joined the Professional Union of Liège in 1997 and trained himself to defend the interests of his profession with his colleagues. In 2004, he responded positively to the request of Walter Agosti to merge the various French-speaking Professional Unions of Belgium under a single Professional Organization. Following this decision, he became the Vice-President of Prodipresse. He held the position until June 2017 before succeeding Walter Agosti as President of Prodipresse, the organization of independent French-speaking Belgian booksellers-newsagents.

PRESENTATION OF THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION: PRODIPRESSE

Organization, missions and objectives

As a professional organization, our goals and objectives are to defend, promote, support and carry out projects for the economic development of the independent booksellers/newsagents (newspaper, tobacco, gambling) network.

Prodipresse is recognized by institutional stakeholders and those present on the market (the gambling community, the political world, the tobacco industry, press publishers, distributors, etc.).

With people from our trade in control, we have a close look at the profession, its changes, constraints and developments, in order to anticipate them and find remedy if necessary.

We also provide the network with a team of four people who help them and who respond to their needs, questions and issues.

We also offer essential communication tools such as a magazine, a website, and for our members a weekly Newsletter as well as a Facebook group which are exclusively reserved for them.

Beyond these goals and objectives, benefits for our members are negotiated with partners.

Tobacco retailing system

Who are the tobacco retailers? Tobacco retailers in Belgium are any sales outlet that received the authorization to sell tobacco from the General Customs and Excise Administration. The country currently has 13,207 tobacco outlets.

Organization of POS. Historically, the bookseller-newsagent was the reference person for tobacco sales after the War. Later, vending machines, supermarkets, gas stations and night shops came into sight. However, this profession has stood the test of time and with its 2,378 booksellers-newsagents, it accounts for 18% of the entire network today.

Retailers' income. Tobacco represents a third of the net income of the bookseller-newsagent. It is part of one of the three historic pillars of sale that are tobacco, the press and gambling.

Tobacco taxation

The Belgian State collects an average of 78% tax on public sales of tobacco products. Tobacco tax revenue brought in more than 3 billion euros in 2018. More than 8 billion cigarettes sold, an increase compared with the other years, largely thanks to cross-border purchases by made the French.

Variety of products and services

Although newspaper and tobacco products and gambling have been our trade's historical "three pillars", they are no longer as lucrative and the future of our profession lies in diversifying our offer. The arrival of alternative products on our shelves but also new services provided for the citizens can guarantee a higher turnover.

Belgian booksellers-newsagents are responding to this situation and want to develop their profession. Following the announcement of the introduction of plain packaging cigarettes, Prodipresse presented to the Minister of SMEs and the Minister of Health in June 2018, a plan to assert our desire to fully participate in the smoking prevention. For this, we support certain proposals in the text of the law presented to the Health Commission, such as the exclusive marketing rights of tobacco products by bookseller-newsagents. In absolute terms, booksellers-newsagents want to become the referral network to help customers quit smoking. However, the implementation of structural support measures to help the booksellers-newsagents network is essential to compensate for income losses caused by health policies put into action to fight smoking.

National laws applying to the profession

- The ban on smoking in closed public areas has been in effect since 2009.
- The ban on the sale of tobacco products to those under 18 entered into force on November 1, 2019.
  Since the sale of alcohol and gambling opportunities for minors is also prohibited, Prodipresse launched a major information campaign among its booksellers-newsagents but also among the population, in order to raise consumer awareness of these three products. The message of the slogan displayed in all our members' outlet is the following: "If you want to buy it, you must be of legal age". The idea put forward is above all to make the consumer aware of the fact that he or she is the one who must know whether he or she can buy such a product or not, and must respect the law. In addition, Prodipresse has supported merchants to enable them to better understand their duties but also their rights, such as the right to request the presentation of an identity card in case of doubt concerning the age of the customer.
- The introduction of the plain packaging of all tobacco products since January 1, 2020. To allow merchants to adapt to this new regulation, Prodipresse organized a series of information sessions since September 2019. As a reminder, tobacco products in Belgium include cigarettes and tobacco which are affected by the plain packaging, but also water pipes (the chicha), cigarillos, cigars, pipe tobacco and electronic cigarettes which are not included in the new legislation. Tobacco manufacturers and wholesalers will be required to distribute tobacco products in plain packaging to retailers from January 1, 2020. And retailers will have one year to liquidate and bring their inventory into compliance.

Key data

- Tobacco turnover: more than 8 billion euros;
- Tobacco tax revenue: just over 3 billion;
- Smokers in Belgium: 22% (including 17% daily smokers);
- Tobacco sales outlets: 13,200;
- Bookstores / Press / Tobacco: 2,378.

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