

Vakgenoten Podcast Episode #12: Retail Media

Complete English Translation

Intro (0:05)

Marc van Venrooij:

Welcome to the Vakgenoten podcast, where we discuss digital innovation and transformation.

Marc van Venrooij (0:11):

Hello, Gijsbert!

Gijsbert van der Sleen (0:25):

Hi, Marc.

Marc van Venrooij (0:36):

Here we are again with Vakgenoten.

Marc van Venrooij (0:41):

And in the meantime, a lot has happened, hasn't it?

Gijsbert van der Sleen (0:43):

Certainly, quite a lot. You've even started your own business.

Marc van Venrooij (0:46):

That's right. I've launched my own company, Pathio, where I help brands and retailers with the digitalization of sales and marketing. You can check it out online at www.pathio.nl. That's P-A-T-H-I-O dot NL.

Gijsbert van der Sleen (1:04):

Luckily, we're continuing Vakgenoten together, so there are still many great podcasts to come this year.

Marc van Venrooij (1:11):

Absolutely! Maybe even more than ever before.

Marc van Venrooij (1:19):

Recently, we hosted another amazing colleague from the industry.

Introduction to the Guest (2:42)

Marc van Venrooij:

Today, we have a very special guest. We'll be diving into Retail Media with Sarah Reintjes. Welcome, Sarah, and thank you for joining us.

Sarah Reintjes:

Thank you for having me. Hello!

Marc van Venrooij:

Retail Media is undoubtedly the hottest topic in the FMCG (Fast-Moving Consumer Goods) industry, where I work. Honestly, when I open LinkedIn, it's all anyone is talking about. Do you notice this as well, Sarah?

Sarah Reintjes:

Yes, absolutely!

Marc van Venrooij:

Of course, I've followed your career for a while. What stands out to me is that back in 2015, you pioneered Retail Media at Albert Heijn.

Sarah Reintjes:

That's correct.

Marc van Venrooij:

Albert Heijn is often seen as the benchmark for Retail Media in the Netherlands. How did you get started in this field?

Sarah's Journey (3:39)**Sarah Reintjes:**

Thank you for the warm introduction. I'm honored to be here. Let me take you on a journey through my career.

It all started with my studies in Communication Science at the University of Amsterdam. I graduated just as the internet was emerging. I remember creating my first email address in 1996—probably on Yahoo! I was fascinated by this new medium.

During my studies, I specialized in marketing and sales, which led me to one of the first internet companies in the Netherlands: 24/7 Media. It was a global organization helping businesses monetize their websites, which was a novel concept back then.

At 24/7, I encountered the intersection of marketing, sales, technology, and data. It was a revelation for me—I didn't realize I had such a knack for understanding technology and how it could be applied creatively. This mix became the foundation of my career.

Sarah Reintjes (5:23):

I loved working at 24/7, but unfortunately, after three years, the dot-com bubble burst, and the company went bankrupt.

That was a tough moment, but it led me to start as an independent consultant. I wanted to explore different organizations—big and small—to discover where I truly fit.

Becoming a freelancer was one of the best decisions I ever made. I started creating online strategies for major media agencies and then transitioned to working with publishers. My role was often to establish online advertising and data departments from scratch.

One of my first major projects was with Sanoma Publishers. They had a strong online presence with lifestyle and home-focused content but struggled with profitability. Maintaining these titles cost a lot of money.

I was hired to set up a robust advertising department to monetize their websites. I worked on this for about two and a half years, and it turned out to be a highly successful formula.

After that, I replicated this approach for other major publishers, including G+J Publishers, ANWB, and even Microsoft. I also worked with Marktplaats (eBay) and became deeply involved in the rise of Programmatic advertising.

These projects taught me a lot about integrating programmatic technologies into large publishing environments. Toward the end of this period, I collaborated with the owner of Bon, helping to reposition the company.

Entering Retail Media at Albert Heijn (7:50)**Sarah Reintjes:**

It was during this time that I crossed paths with Albert Heijn. They were working on several innovative ideas, including Retail Media. My background in digital made it a natural fit, so I joined a small team in 2015 to develop the Retail Media proposition.

Marc van Venrooij:

That's fascinating! But, Gijsbert, do you know what Retail Media actually entails?

Gijsbert van der Sleen:

I had it written down as my first question: Sarah, what exactly is Retail Media to you? Where does it come from, and where is it heading?

Defining Retail Media (8:00)**Sarah Reintjes:**

That's a great question. Many consumers enjoy the convenience of e-commerce—ordering online and having products delivered to their doorstep. This includes groceries, which can be logistically challenging for retailers due to high costs, especially for perishables that require cooling during transport.

Consumers want these services without additional costs and as quickly as possible, often within 24 hours. Retailers have had to become more creative to meet these demands, leading to the emergence of Retail Media as a new revenue stream.

On the other hand, the marketing and media landscape is evolving rapidly. Traditional channels like television are losing audiences, and online advertising is becoming more difficult with the decline of cookies and privacy concerns.

Retailers, however, offer a unique channel to reach consumers. With loyalty programs and rich data, they can target customers at the “Zero Moment of Truth”—when they're deciding between products in-store or online. This combination of e-commerce challenges and marketing shifts has driven the rise of Retail Media.

Retail Media's Appeal to Brands (10:04)**Marc van Venrooij:**

From the perspective of brands, it seems like Retail Media provides a direct way to reach shoppers, blending branding with transactional media. It's especially appealing in a retail environment where shoppers are already making purchasing decisions.

Albert Heijn, for instance, was one of the first to integrate Retail Media on both digital and in-store platforms. How did they start this journey?

Sarah Reintjes:

Albert Heijn gave us the freedom to innovate and develop this concept. We began with the Dutch brands within their group—Albert Heijn, Etos, Gall & Gall, and Bol.com. Bol.com was fully digital, while the others combined online and offline channels. This dual approach allowed us to experiment with in-store opportunities and online targeting, creating a holistic Retail Media offering.

Challenges in Launching Retail Media (12:31)**Gijsbert van der Sleen:**

What I find interesting is the organizational side of it. Was it a case of putting four people in a room on Monday and saying, “Go build this”? How did you get started, and what were the hurdles?

Sarah Reintjes:

Great question! It starts with leadership support. Whether it's Albert Heijn or another company, having executive buy-in is crucial. Once you have that, you can assemble a small team to develop the concept.

However, you will face resistance within the organization. People often don't fully understand what you're doing, and change can feel threatening. Executive support helps overcome these barriers and creates room for innovation.

The next step is to show quick wins. Launch a small campaign to demonstrate that the idea works and generates revenue. It doesn't have to be perfect but should act as a starting point for bigger initiatives.

Brands' Reception to Retail Media (16:07)

Marc van Venrooij:

When you started, were brands immediately eager to advertise through Retail Media, or did you encounter resistance?

Sarah Reintjes:

That's a good question. Retail Media is fundamentally a collaborative effort between retailers and brands, sometimes with media agencies as part of the equation. The goal is to reach and serve consumers effectively, which benefits both parties.

In the early days, advertisers were quite enthusiastic about the ability to reach consumers closer to the purchase decision. The shopping environment—whether in-store or online—provides a natural context for advertising.

Additionally, the United States was already ahead in Retail Media development.

Companies like Amazon, Walmart, and Target were showing how successful it could be, which helped build trust and enthusiasm among brands.

Measurement and Technology Challenges (18:19)

Marc van Venrooij:

One of the successes in the U.S. was the ability to measure the effectiveness of Retail Media campaigns. Early on, did you face challenges in providing brands with meaningful data and insights?

Sarah Reintjes:

Absolutely. When we started, there were limited tools for measuring campaign performance. We relied on existing ad-serving technologies from the publishing world, which needed to be adapted for e-commerce.

Retail websites are fundamentally different from publisher sites, with unique challenges like firewalls and transactional flows. Over time, these technologies have evolved to become more tailored to Retail Media, enabling better measurement and optimization.

The Shift to Self-Service (20:36)

Marc van Venrooij:

Retail Media has become increasingly automated. Did Albert Heijn or other retailers face challenges transitioning from managed services to self-service platforms?

Sarah Reintjes:

Yes, the journey to self-service is part of the broader digital transformation. Initially, everything was manual—ad placements, campaign management, and reporting.

With the advent of programmatic advertising, automation became a game-changer. Brands and agencies could book and manage their campaigns independently, making processes faster and more efficient. This transition required significant technological development but ultimately benefited all parties.

Retail Media Beyond Supermarkets (27:02)

Marc van Venrooij:

While supermarkets like Albert Heijn and Jumbo are leading the way in Retail Media, could smaller retailers or non-food sectors also adopt this model?

Sarah Reintjes:

Absolutely. Retail Media is relevant for any retailer with significant traffic. However, for smaller retailers, it may be more practical to collaborate within networks or platforms. This approach allows them to pool resources and attract brands with niche audiences. For example, specialized retailers like outdoor stores or home improvement chains could offer unique value to specific brands.

Building the Right Team (30:21)

Gijsbert van der Sleen:

What advice would you give to someone starting a Retail Media initiative today?

Sarah Reintjes:

The most important step is to get your team and stakeholders on board. Educate them on what Retail Media is, its potential, and how you plan to implement it. I also recommend hiring someone with technical expertise early on to ensure seamless integration with existing IT systems. Retail Media often requires adapting to the existing infrastructure, which can be challenging but also rewarding.

B2B Applications of Retail Media (32:10)

Gijsbert van der Sleen:

Is Retail Media equally applicable to B2B environments, such as wholesale platforms like Sligro or Bidfood?

Sarah Reintjes:

In principle, yes. The concepts are similar, but the execution differs due to the nature of B2B relationships. For instance, many B2B customers already have accounts with wholesalers, making it easier to target them directly.

The biggest challenge is adapting the Retail Media model to fit the B2B context, which often requires a tailored approach.

Gijsbert van der Sleen:

That's interesting. Do you see significant differences between Retail Media in consumer-focused environments versus wholesale?

Sarah Reintjes:

Yes, there are clear differences. In wholesale, campaigns often target existing customers with accounts, so the focus is less on new customer acquisition and more on deepening relationships. In retail, it's often about influencing immediate purchasing decisions.

Future of Retail Media (37:21)

Gijsbert van der Sleen:

What do you see as the future of Retail Media?

Sarah Reintjes:

I believe networks and partnerships will become increasingly important. Smaller retailers might collaborate more, while larger players could consolidate their efforts for greater efficiency.

There's also enormous potential for AI integration. AI can help optimize campaigns, improve targeting, and create new propositions for both retailers and brands.

Gijsbert van der Sleen:

Do you foresee any radical changes, like the rise of entirely AI-driven shopping experiences?

Sarah Reintjes:

That's an exciting prospect, but I think we're still a long way from fully AI-driven retail. However, I do believe we'll see incremental advancements, such as better data analysis and personalized recommendations powered by AI.

Retail Media's Impact on Media Agencies (40:31)**Marc van Venrooij:**

What about media agencies? With the rise of self-service platforms, are they being cut out of the process, or is their role evolving?

Sarah Reintjes:

When Retail Media first emerged, media agencies were skeptical, often seeing it as a direct relationship between retailers and brands. However, over the past five years, agencies have embraced Retail Media as a valuable channel. Agencies now play a crucial role in campaign strategy, implementation, and even managing self-service platforms for their clients. This has created new opportunities for them to add value and stay relevant.

Closing Thoughts (48:12)**Marc van Venrooij:**

Sarah, thank you for sharing your insights. Do you have any final advice for our listeners who want to start with Retail Media?

Sarah Reintjes:

Start small, show quick wins, and educate your stakeholders. And, of course, feel free to reach out to me if you need guidance!

Marc van Venrooij:

Thank you, Sarah. That was a fantastic discussion.

Gijsbert van der Sleen:

It's been a pleasure. Thank you so much for joining us!

Sarah Reintjes:

Thank you for having me.