

Bruges, 1441: Lottery emerges from Bruges to conquer the world

An Interview with host Jannie Haek, Chief Executive Officer, Belgium Lottery

Paul Jason: What a fabulous way to celebrate the modern lottery which does so much to help society and good causes all around the world. Has the history of the lottery's origins in Bruges always been a big part of the cultural heritage of Belgium, or did something inspire you to bring everyone's attention to it at this particular time?

Jannie Haek: Honestly, we even surprised most Belgians with this news. The 'rediscovery' of the seemingly uninspiring content of the common ledger of 1441 formed the foundation for our further investigations and ultimately the celebration of the origins of Lotteries in medieval Bruges. The factual mention of a considerable city revenue thanks to a lottery, but more importantly the mention of the 'expenses' being the secondary prizes which could be won, revealed the innovative medieval idea of 'crowdfunding'. Making it attractive for the 'crowd' to participate in a lottery by giving more prizes than just one main prize, significantly changed the concept and turned it into a very lucrative one. The people appreciated the equal chances for every-one, the transparency of the draw, the fact that it was affordable but also the excitement and eager anticipation the draw brought.

This historical context reminds me of the philosophical context you highlighted a couple years ago with the theme "Success of Chance" at the EL Congress in Antwerp. Why is it important to think of our mission in these broader contexts? Like, how does it help us sell more tickets?

J. Haek: Going back to the origins of something helps one reflect on where you stand now and distill what is important for the future. Tracing lotteries back to their origins showed that the concept of Lotteries was born out of a willingness to improve the collective wellbeing of people. This noble reason of existence is still the core assignment of modern lotteries. The



more the broader audience is aware of this essence the deeper the connection with our organization. Even though people play for the possible individual reward, the benefit for society is increasingly important in the lives of consumers. Lotteries have a unique business model based on a lot of people contributing for a modest stake in a game of chance. By doing so they hope to win, but they are aware that chances are small and are prepared to lose their stake. The individual desire finances the collective need. We know we benefit from players who are aware of the unique way of redistribution of Lottery income. They are more loyal, feel more content about spending money on a game and have an overall stronger engagement toward Lotteries and their brands.

I am thinking we don't need to wait another 580 years to celebrate the role of Lottery in Society. What do you think we'll be able to commemorate in ten years, in 2032?

J. Haek: The basics of a game such as a lottery will without a doubt remain the long-lasting elements of its success. The way we run, operate, and govern our companies might be completely different. In volatile times like ours, with quick changing consumer behavior, regulatory changes, exponential innovation in technology, predicting 2032 is like predicting 2021 in the year 1441. I would personally like to plead for more diversity and tolerance for divergence. More diversity in technology, more open architecture, less procedures and less compliance, more channels, and a broader portfolio of brands. If we really mean what we say about agile companies and "out of the box" innovation or even disruptive changes, we ought to avoid losing time trying to predict our evolution or listening to modern prophets. Maybe we can toss a coin from time to time? Diversity and innovation often come by giving chance a chance. ■