

A woman with blonde hair is looking upwards and to the left, holding a book. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. A white circle with a thin black outline is positioned in the center-right, containing the word "AFTER" in bold, black, uppercase letters.

AFTER

I take off

I TAKE OFF

I invite my family and my 432 friends to join *View from my window* (VFMW). My photo gets 7 likes, and the group has 80 members.

The next day, everything speeds up. My friends invite their friends, who, in turn, invite their own to join the community. Posts start flooding into the group, and now 2,675 people are connected! It's fun and exciting!

On the third day, I call my sister Catherine for backup. It's not enough, so I enlist my friends Sonja and Virginie. Together, we create the WhatsApp group *Les Girls de VFMW*. We share our favorite photos, our laughs, and our frustrations, talking about our nights, our meals, and the routine that has become very strange.

[30/03/2020, 15:52:14] Les Girls de VFMW 🍷❤️

[30/03/2020, 15:52:17] Barbara: Here it is!

[30/03/2020, 15:53:31] Virginie: I already have you on my case all day, and now a group??? 😂😂

[30/03/2020, 15:53: 51] Barbara: ahahaha

[30/03/2020, 15:53: 53] Sonja: 🍷 Hello

[30/03/2020, 15:57:25] Virginie: 🍷

[30/03/2020, 15:57:34] Sister : Hello from Tervuren 😊

Not only are we the administrators of the group, we're also its caretakers, cleaners, moderators, and hosts. Everything to keep the community active, clean, and welcoming.

In practice, being an administrator means managing members—suspending or banning them when necessary—moderating content, infusing positive energy, enforcing the rules, and most importantly, handling the posts submitted. Behind the scenes, we have access to a dashboard, a real engine room filled with all kinds of tools. There we find everything: the number of posts pending, the group's "Insights"—real-time statistics on growth, member origins, interactions—and so much other almost confidential data. It's fascinating, incredibly informative, and dives directly and deeply into the heart of the community.

A week has passed. 50,000 members have now joined the community. The group has gone viral, and the pace is frantic. Dozens of photos from all over the world arrive every second, thousands of posts that we handle daily, one by one, accepting or rejecting them based on the strict rules I've established. Rules that I am uncompromising about, even if that means being seen as the bad guy.

- #1 The post must indicate the city and country.
- #2 One photo per member.
- #3 The photo must be taken from where you live.
- #4 The view must be the main subject.
- #5 No recognizable people.
- #6 No advertising, hashtags, or spam.
- #7 Do not repost a rejected photo.
- #8 Be kind and courteous.
- #9 Do not contact administrators privately.
- #10 Posting in this group grants permission to use the image without copyright.

These rules are essential to maintaining a friendly space, aligned with the group's objective. But we know, people don't like to read, and even less to follow rules. Barely a third of members read and respect them, which makes our task harder.

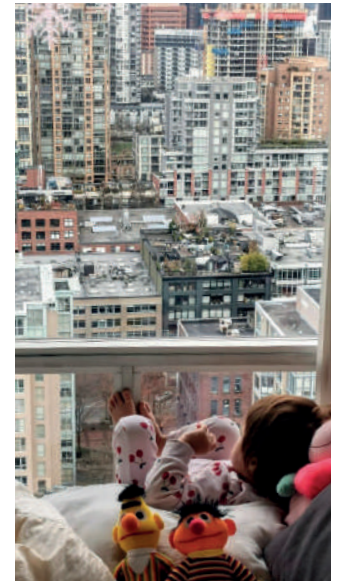
"One photo per member." In reality, between the moment a post is submitted and when it's approved, it inevitably lands in the queue. And there, members, impatient, repost again and again. As a result, our workload doubles or even triples, and our Messenger inboxes are flooded with "Where's my photo?"

One morning, one of the few spaces left open on my personal profile is taken over. I had never really thought about privacy before, but suddenly, it feels as though someone's breaking into my home, invading my intimate space. I have no choice but to barricade everything to regain a sense of security.

Choosing the right and fair decision, whether to accept or reject a photo, can sometimes be disconcerting, even a real headache when faced with certain images, which we examine from every angle. Like the photo sent from India: a window with a curtain, simply looking at a wall. We accept it – that's the view...

Or the one taken from a porthole by a sailor. Due to the closure of many ports, he got stuck and had to make his sailboat his temporary residence, with the only view being the infinite expanse of the sea.

Or this one, which we would love to accept, but reject with a heavy heart. Rule #4.



Our eye has become keen, focused, and quick. Three seconds are enough to scan a photo, accept or reject it, and move on to the next. It has become mechanical, and often time-consuming.

I am both the on-call doctor, the watchdog, and the police officer on duty. I take care of the group as much as I ensure its security. Although we have several administrators, it's up to me to make the final decisions. And even though, usually, I like to have the last word, here, I would gladly do without it.

My new daily routine is becoming established: I work more than 15 hours a day voluntarily, just like all others in the team.

Every morning, as soon as I wake up, still in bed, I open the toolbox. I start by checking the photos flagged by attentive members or informants. Then, I tackle the accumulated posts. Finally, I change the cover photo to highlight a new country every day.

Sometimes, I cheat. On this 1st of April, I receive a photo from Roeselare, Belgium. I stop dead in my tracks, it's incredible, with a powerful symbolism. All the neighbors have hung white sheets on their windows, tagged with a heart and the message "BEDANKT AAN ALLE ZORGVERLENERS" ("Thank you to all the healthcare workers"). The only problem: you can see a person on the balcony. I contact Tom, the author, and ask him to take the exact same photo, but at 7 pm, when everyone is supposed to be in front of the TV news.

YES! Mission accomplished; It will be the cover tomorrow.

My showers are quick, my meals—if they can even be called that—are fast and eaten in front of the computer. I bless the inventor of freeze-dried noodles in the process.

In the evening, I place a candle on my desk. It has become a ritual, almost like the flame is watching over me.





Deep down, I know that *View from my window* is becoming a precious treasure that I must immortalize. I dream of turning it into a book and a traveling exhibition with which I could travel the world.

[02/04/2020, 09:34:57] Sister: How many photos are waiting? I see more than 5,000, is there a glitch?

[02/04/2020, 09:35:25] Barbara: Yes, there must be a bug.

[02/04/2020, 10:34:15] Sonja: OK, but 7,000 new members in one night, I guess that affects the number of posts, right?

[02/04/2020, 10:36:25] Barbara: You're right, it's not a bug!!!

[02/04/2020, 12:53:18] Barbara: Here comes Japan 🇯🇵 🍣 🥰

The group now covers all time zones and requires 24-hour attention. While Australia is starting its day, it's evening in Mexico. The posts go on wildly while we sleep. So, I call on Christina, Sonja's sister-in-law, who lives in Texas, to take over and maintain the rhythm while night falls on our side of the world.

The group is going global. It's completely exhilarating! The magnolias in small Belgian gardens are replaced by the expansive American landscapes and the private pools in Florida that get people talking. These photos eclipse the more modest views, which are the authentic reflections of the reality I'm looking for, and give the group a reputation that doesn't suit me. But the algorithms have different tastes.

When the photos of *Christ the Redeemer* flood in, it's a sign that Brazil has joined us. And kangaroos jumping on a terrace are accompanied by moose appearing at the window.

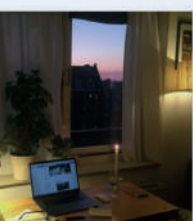
Seeing animals so close to humans is absolutely fascinating. Yet, what hits me the hardest are the deserted streets, from Milan to Wall Street, that capture the scale of chaos and fear, the usually bustling places now silent, the images of ghost towns that are more powerful than the numbers that are flooding in.

All over the world, the media picks up the story, which is handed to them on a silver platter, bringing a little light in these dark times.

TV5 Monde airs the very first TV report, while my first live interview is broadcast on *Vivacité*, a Belgian radio station, where Sylvie Honoré describes VFMW as "a group that does good." That touches me. Then, everything happens quickly. I accept every interview, whether for a blog article or media outlets like *RTBF*, *CBS*, *Le Soir*, *Le Figaro*, *RTL*, *Forbes*, *CNN*, *the Huffingpost*, *ItaliaOggi*, even *NBC Vietnam*. They all refer to *View from my window* as a success story and a social phenomenon. I also receive requests from students, like Laurel, who is studying social media journalism at Chapman University. In quarantine at home in Hawaii, she is working on a documentary for her class, inspired by the group and the sense of unity it conveys. Since most interviews are for foreign media, my work becomes more complicated. I first respond in French, then I run them through DeepL, my new friend. My perfectionism kicks in, I write, re-read, and rephrase. When I see how much time I've invested in a text reduced to two paragraphs, even though I've written two pages, I promise myself never to fall into that trap again. But still, I keep falling for it.

I've become a public figure, with no experience, no media training, and no agent. I lack self-confidence. But most of the time, it goes unnoticed, sailing through without a hitch.

The pressure increases when I'm scheduled for a Zoom interview, live on national TV in South Africa. My English, which is still quite basic, does nothing for my confidence. I dread their accent, a fusion of several cultural and linguistic influences. And it goes even worse than I'd imagined: I don't receive the video feed, my screen is stubborn and stays black. Meanwhile, I'm being projected in large format behind the journalist. What a nightmare.



Een blik uit miljoenen vensters

NBCUniversal

People around the world
share the view from their
window

FB PREND L'AIR

Vue de ma fenêtre

Au moment d'écrire ces lignes, le 21 avril, View From My Window comptabilisait 1.572.568 membres: pas mal pour une page Facebook créée par une inconnue de 47 ans, Barbara Duriau, il y a un mois à peine. Graphiste ayant travaillé pour Moulinsart - la firme tintinnesque -, cette Bruxelloise résidant à Amsterdam et qui « aime beaucoup le visuel, la photo, le voyage, surtout depuis un tour du monde



To ciekawe doświadczenie - obserwować, jakie emocje się we mnie budzą, kiedy patrzę na zdjęcia z Petersburga, Moskwy, czy Niżnego Nowogrodu

WOLNA SOBOTA 18.02.2023, 06:29



View from my window: Facebook Group, όπου κόσμος μοιράζεται φωτογραφίες εν μέσω καραντίνας

20 Απριλίου 2020 Από: Startup Team



BINCHE

Barbara cartonne sur Facebook

Le succès de View from my window en plein lockdown est phénoménal grâce à une Binchoise

Il fenomeno «View from my window»: una foto per viaggiare ai tempi del Covid

DI FRANCESCA SOTTILARO

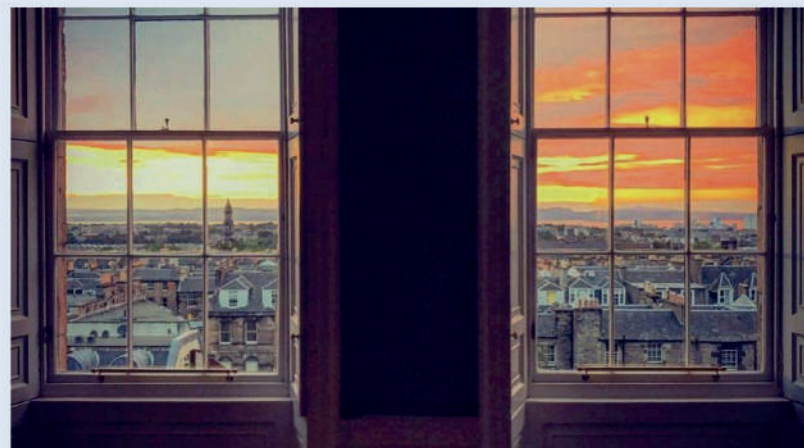
«Costretta nelle proprie case, come viaggia almeno con la fantasia e cosa pensa la popolazione mondiale in tempi di lockdown?». Se lo è chiesto Barbara Duriau, per 15 anni creativa belga all'Editions Moulinsart, la casa editrice di Tin Tin, con una passione per il travel che l'ha portata a brandizzare con l'eroe dei fumetti perfino un aereo della Brussels Airlines. Il 22 marzo scorso Duriau ha lanciato dal suo mini appartamento di Amsterdam un gruppo su Face-

o di lusso), poi in poche settimane è esploso un piccolo fenomeno social che supera ora il milione di utenti. «In un momento in cui i viaggi sono congelati ho cominciato a vedere la gente che si scambiava insieme alle foto messaggi di affetto, rassicurazioni, e perfino inviti, c'è chi programma una volta finito



In fondo ognuno ha una finestra», questo è lo spunto di un messaggio che Duriau raccoglie dal momento storico: «C'è voglia di autenticità, c'è chi fotografa gli animali che arrivano fin sotto casa, chi la vista dei bidoni della spazzatura ma dice: «sono grato di essere dai miei figli! Poi la mia idea è che queste finestre non restino virtuali un giorno, magari facendo una mostra». Insieme a Duriau ora è cresciuto un team di volontari: «Siamo una dozzina, da Texas all'Africa, per coprire tutti i fusi orari». E l'idea del viaggio o

"View from my window", le groupe Facebook qui fait du bien !

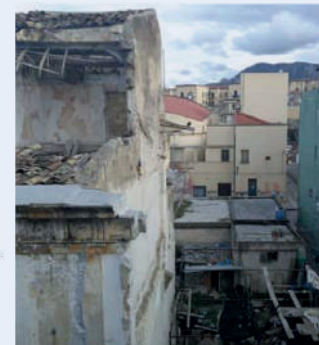


The Sydney Morning Herald

'View From My Window' is a reminder of how beautiful our world really is

LE SOIR

«View from my window», reflet mondial des confinés



Le 23 mars, la graphiste

Forbes

'View From My Window' Celebrates 1 Million Members
Sharing Views From Around The World

LE FIGARO

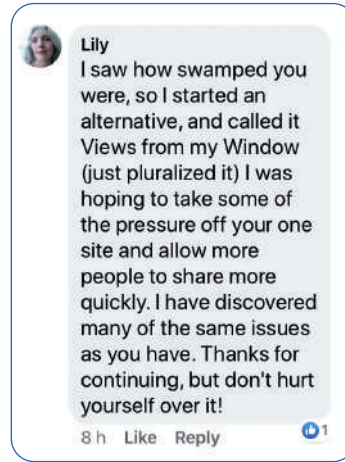


QUE DE FENÊTRES
OUVERTES
SUR LE MONDE

ENVOYER UNE PHOTO DE L'EXTÉRIEUR VU DE CHEZ SOI. AVEC CETTE SIMPLE IDÉE, LA GRAPHISTE BELGE BARBARA DURIU A LANCÉ UN SITE FACEBOOK. ELLE A RÉCOLTÉ PLUS DE 2 MILLIONS DE LIKES EN SEULES

[03/04/2020, 6:59:58] Barbara: What on earth is this? It's a disaster, she's copied everything! 🤪

COPYCAT. To me, Copycat was a Nineties movie with Sigourney Weaver. But on Facebook, a "copycat" refers to another group or project that imitates or reproduces the concept or ideas of an existing group in an unoriginal way, without permission, often with the intent of profiting from the initial success without adding any value.



[03/04/2020, 08:08:18] Sonja: I can imagine the awful shock. We're feeling it too! Just remember that with the 16,000 new members you gained in one day (60,000 yesterday, and this morning 76,000), no one will ever manage to match this community or the idea you created. And no one can dispute it because the page creation date provides proof. There's no need to justify yourself, you shouldn't even bother. Hang in there, Babs, what you've created is insane, and it always will be. ❤️

Sonja tries to reassure me, but her message hardly alleviates what I'm feeling. I get up and call my mom. On the phone, I hear her pride, but her feet are firmly on the ground. More than mine, that's for sure. A mother's instinct?

"My darling, won't you stop at 100,000?"

"I don't know yet, mom. We'll see."

Deep down, it's already decided. I know perfectly well I'll keep going. By lying to her, I reassure her and myself as well. At this point, nothing can stop me. I'm overwhelmed, yet excited and enthusiastic. And above all, I'm committed.

After all, who would stop in full flow? I boarded the train 10 days ago, and to get off now would mean getting left behind and losing all my luggage. One success leads to another, gathering energy. It's a virtuous circle that lifts you up and pushes you on and on.

[04/04/2020, 10:13:26] Sonja: 100,463 members !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The numbers double every day, growing exponentially. Tomorrow, we'll hit 200,000! I learn that the connections go way beyond the group, that members chat privately on Messenger until late into the night. I'm over the moon!

[05/04/2020, 20:58:46] Barbara: CRISIS CENTER! Girls, there are 23,000 posts waiting. With the news tomorrow, it'll be even worse! We need to find more moderators. Anyway, we'll talk about it later. I'm done for today, everything's a blur now.

A few days later, the team has grown. We're up to 20. A completely female brigade, and that means the world to me. I'm proud of this 100% *Girl Power* team, of the energy and strength we all radiate!

We synchronize to ensure consistent and quick moderation. We've formed a close-knit community within the vastness of the larger one. I train each recruit, found through various means. Once they're up to speed, they join in, absorbed by this game as fascinating as it is addictive. Even though I haven't forced them, and they assure me it's rewarding and fulfilling, I sometimes feel uneasy seeing them invest so much.

[09/04/2020, 08:35:49] Sonja: A guy who posted a decent photo and finished his post with "also, Fuck You," well, I blocked him.

[09/04/2020, 09:01:27] Sister: Ugh, there's one who respects the rules, but writes: "view from one of my many windows." Just for that, I'm keen to kick her out. What do you think?

[09/04/2020, 09:01:50] Barbara: The same. I'd love to add one rule: "Don't be such a show-off."