

VG WORT

Dr Constanze Semmelmann becomes New Managing Director as of 1 July 2026

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On 1 July 2026, Dr Constanze Semmelmann will take up the position of the Managing Director at VG WORT. She is a lawyer by education. In May 2026, Ronald Schild, who brings expertise and experience in data management, data infrastructure and general management, took up his post as the new Director of Finances and Operations.

We asked Dr Constanze Semmelmann at the start of her tenure: Where is VG WORT heading?

Dr Semmelmann, on 1 July 2026 you will take over the role of the Managing Director from your predecessor, Dr Robert Staats, who successfully led VG WORT for almost 20 years. What can we expect from VG WORT in the future?

Since the 1990s, the internet and digitalisation have already brought about fundamental changes in the way content is interconnected and communicated. Since the end of 2022, we have seen how generative artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the creation and use of content. At VG WORT, we have to address these technological changes both on the revenue side and in terms of internal processes and data management. Some of these developments raise existential questions for the individuals and industries affected. However, it is also essential that we seize the opportunities they present.

We are convinced of the value of human-created content. Its use must be fairly remunerated. Using AI as a tool under the creative control of humans can certainly be helpful and is, of course, not prohibited, provided these tools are trained with due respect for 'intellectual property'.

Where do you see opportunities for new forms of remuneration?

We see a range of uses that underline the long-term relevance of collecting societies.

- Alongside paper copies, digital copies of high-quality, curated content are widely used in businesses, public authorities and the education sector. Sustainable decisions in business, politics and public administration must be widely supported and evidence-based. No organisation can manage without an appropriate document management system or intranet, which must be organised in a legally compliant manner.
- At the level of devices and storage media, the storage of audio, video, text and images in the cloud has increased significantly. Furthermore, many devices used for copying or storage today do not just have a single lifespan, but are refurbished and re-enter the second-hand market.
- Broadcasters are increasingly supplementing their linear offerings with on-demand content in audio and video formats on platforms or in their own media libraries. Furthermore, platforms host countless pieces of content from various providers, which are virtually impossible to cover via individual licensing agreements.
- If we examine AI models more closely, it becomes clear that every upload of third-party texts protected by copyright into ChatGPT or Perplexity AI constitutes a reproduction. Even

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though AI training, fine-tuning and RAG models are still partly perceived as black boxes, it is undisputed that copyright-protected material is being used in various ways.

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Dr Constanze Semmelmann

In order to ensure that all these uses are appropriately remunerated, technology-neutral legal frameworks are sufficient in some cases. In others, however, new licensing structures or legislation are required. Our aim is to help shape the fundamental changes in technologies and business models – including generative AI – through political and legal channels, rather than simply being at the mercy of these developments.

How can we achieve fair solutions with regard to large platforms and providers of generative AI services when it comes to the use of copyright-protected articles, books, audio recordings or videos?

We are all aware that we are up against globally active, strong negotiating partners and economically powerful players. In many cases, the relevant contacts are based abroad, and jurisdictional issues and the applicable law in situations involving use or infringement are complex.

It is important that rights holders present a united front, backed by consolidated rights, high-quality data and robust data infrastructure, as well as clear arguments for copyright protection and the necessity of remuneration. We will work towards this. We will seek to forge partnerships to increase our impact. In some areas, pioneering work will not pay off financially tomorrow, but only the day after tomorrow – and possibly only after very arduous and costly legal proceedings.

Within VG WORT, we will hold discussions on the situations in which VG WORT rights holders can and wish to assign their rights. No one will be obliged by VG WORT to assign rights for AI uses. However, we will provide models in which our authors and publishers can participate from the outset or following an observation phase.

VG WORT's procedures are sometimes regarded as complicated and too cumbersome – what can VG WORT do to ensure the satisfaction of rights holders?

We currently represent around 360,000 authors and some 9,000 publishers, the vast majority of whom are satisfied with VG WORT's work. Nevertheless, we examine complaints closely and analyse the reasons behind them.

We are working to simplify the rules and optimise our website, information and communication channels. Another aim is that, in the medium term, rights holders will be able to manage their relationship with VG WORT largely independently, regardless of location or time. Of course, communication channels with 'real-life' staff will remain available.