Knud Wassermann

Online Printing Needs to be Rethought!

The latest Online Print Symposium in Munich showed how the current situation can create opportunities for new business or ideally even for more business, and what is important here. Key words included: Cooperation instead of competition, cooperation instead of coexistence, value instead of mass, mass customization instead of interchangeability, segmentation instead of the watering can principle.

Last year, the Online Print Symposium had to take a forced break due to a pandemic. The online print community was therefore all the more delighted to be able to meet, exchange ideas and network again over two days at a face-to-face event in Munich.

The location was also well chosen. After all, the Science Congress Center on the campus of the Technical University of Munich stands for innovation and also matched the motto of this year's event „Start Up and Print Online!" The mood among the 250 participants from Europe and overseas was almost euphoric – the joy of being able to exchange ideas directly was written all over the faces of the visitors. This was ensured, among other things, by twelve renowned speakers and six start-ups, who inspired the visitors with their ideas.

The Corona crisis also acted as a catalyst
The keynote speech on the first day was given by Roland Keppler, CEO of Onlineprinters, who gave an insight into the internationalization of the group of companies. The experience of the last two years showed that the Corona crisis had not only caused problems for the online print industry, but had also acted as a catalyst and accelerated upcoming changes. For the coming

years, Keppler identified the following influencing factors as essential:
• the shift in channels,
• the consolidation of the market driven by industrialization,
• the consumerization (one could also say consumer orientation),
• the increased expectations of customers,
• the issue of sustainability at all levels.

Despite the high volatility and lack of predictability, the CEO of the Muller Martini customer sees opportunities for the industry to continue to drive growth. In the three German-speaking countries of Germany/Austria/Switzerland (DACH region) alone, B2B online printing sales have risen to 2.5 billion euros in the last five years, according to Keppler. This currently represents around 20 percent of the total market volume – although Keppler can envisage an increase to 50 percent in the medium term.

However, he said, the industry needs to work on improving delivery and ordering processes and providing easy-to-use design tools. Keppler also had a tip in store for newcomers: „Existing processes cannot be converted one-to-one into the digital world. To be successful here, you have to redesign and redesign the processes."

The 08/15 print shop has had its day

After this keynote, Bernd Zipper, CEO of zipcon consulting, analyzed the developments and trends in the online print industry in the DACH region. The forecasts for online printers were promising in 2020, but then came the pandemic. To survive a crisis of this dimension, courage and resilience were needed, he said. Resilience in particular, with all the associated qualities, could ultimately release important impetus for the company's further development.

Zipper's conclusion was that online printing needs to be rethought – and this is more true today than ever before. Customers understand online mechanisms, „mass customization" and print on demand. As a result, online has become the „new normal" for people, which means that demands and expectations have also risen significantly. In his view, the era of 08/15 print shops is coming to an end, and at the same time print will become more valuable and more valuable in the future.

The path to a successful online printer

For many print shops that have not yet moved into online printing, the question is whether this is even possible. Thomas Völcker, Managing Director of the Munich-based online print shop Topp Digital, described the challenges faced by „self-taught and lateral entrants". A good printer is not automatically a successful online printer. Rather, you need comprehensive know-how in e-commerce with all its facets, such as search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEA), and that takes time.

The road there is bumpy and also paved with errors. These include the assumption that everything works with plug-and-play software tools without any adaptation effort, that IT experts can solve any problem, or that the store's popularity can be achieved without online marketing. But, according to Völcker, the opportunities offered by social media were also often underestimated. In this respect, the learning curve for the entire Topp Digital team was definitely challenging, but after four years, the online store is very successful on the road and has found its niche in the label and advertising materials sector.

For success it needs today more than ever courage – and money, entrepreneurship (will say perseverance, diligence, hard work and patience) and target (i.e. goals, confidence and vision). In my opinion, this does not only apply to online printing. In this respect, even conven-

tional printers can take a lot away from the Online Print Symposium, understand what makes the online printing market tick, and gather ideas for getting started.

By the way, the date for the next Online Print Symposium has already been set: March 23/24, 2023 – again at the Science Congress Center Munich.

In the next Online Print Symposium blog, we'll take a closer look at the startups that pitched for the visitors' favor in Munich.

Yours
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