



Knud Wassermann

## Onlineprint is a Driving Force in the Printing Industry

**300 participants from all over the world came to Munich for the [Online Print Symposium \(OPS\) 2023](#). Six start-ups presented innovative business ideas in the insight pitches. Valuable impulses were given on the topics of sustainability, artificial intelligence and metaverse. „We still have many chapters to write“, Robert Keane, founder and CEO of [Cimpress](#), concluded his keynote.**

The spirit of optimism described by Robert Keane could be felt everywhere at the 10th Online Print Symposium: the anniversary edition of the online print industry's leading event set valuable impulses for the successful future of the online print industry with a mix of topics ranging from current trends to sustainability, mass customization vs. mass production and the metaverse to artificial intelligence.

### **What are the lessons learned from almost 40 years of online print?**

Ordering print products over the Internet: What is taken for granted today was a utopia more than 30 years ago. And yet there was someone who recognized the possibilities of technological developments early on and thought them through further. Robert Keane, founder of Cimpress, now the world's leading online printer, took the 300 or so participants at the anniversary OPS on a personal journey through the history of online printing, from the first points of contact with print, the breakthrough of desktop publishing, through to the dotcom bubble and the current revolution brought about by artificial intelligence. From Keane's perspective, the PDF format was the key technology for web-to-print.

Particularly valuable were his frank descriptions of his personal experiences: he emphasized the great importance of family, friends and colleagues in building a successful business, through the goal of always wanting to serve customers better to digital, extensively automated production and mass customization. More topical than ever was his fourth insight, which describes a formula for success in the future: „The innovations that have made online print shops successful for decades are far from over. There are still enormous opportunities ahead. I believe that as obvious and simple as these lessons may sound. They are applicable to anyone who wants to build a great online printing business.“ Cimpres’s success can also be seen in its revenue figures, which have grown from \$90 million in 2005 to \$3 billion by 2022.

### **Customer dialog is particularly important**

In his presentation, Bernd Zipper, CEO of [zipcon consulting](#), also referred to the opportunities outlined for online printing in the future. For despite the current challenges, there is no reason to panic, he said. At least not for those companies that consistently transform themselves digitally and use current developments to their advantage. He was referring not only to the topic of artificial intelligence, but also to the way in which potential customers are reached: social commerce instead of social selling and, above all, conversational commerce are the trends of the hour, he said. Zipper emphasized that in the future it will be particularly important to enter into a genuine dialog with customers – and to do so on all channels.

### **Operational excellence and sustainability in online printing**

Mark Young, Managing Director Print of the [Bluetree Group](#) from the UK, used his own example to show how printing companies can operate successfully on the market. His presentation focused on „Operational Excellence“ and used various issues and corporate values to underline how continuous improvement of the company’s own performance and corporate culture can be promoted.



### **„Innovation instead of ban!“**

The presentation by Dr. Ralph Dittmann, Managing Director of the [WKS Group](#), attracted particular interest. With an impressive and fact-based presentation, he showed how sustainable print products are. In doing so, he made it clear that many of the widespread prejudices about the printing industry’s supposedly poor environmental and climate footprint are unfounded. As one of Europe’s largest insert printers, he provided up-to-date insights into the usage behavior of print and digital brochures and drew a realistic picture of the carbon footprint of print products, thus correctly classifying the current discussion about the advertising brochure.

And he made a strong case for the „Innovation instead of prohibition!“ approach, as this promotes ecological and economic action. In the subsequent panel discussion entitled „Mass Customization vs. Mass Production“, in which Dr. Ralph Dittmann and Dr. Michael Fries (Vista) took part, it became clear that both high-volume and personalized print products have a successful future ahead of them.

### **Artificial intelligence**

This year, the OPS stage also provided the setting for the topic of artificial intelligence. With Dominik Haacke and Tobias Kaase from [mediaprint solutions GmbH](#), two experts provided insight into the implementation of their own AI project. The AI they have developed makes it possible to plan and optimize emerging order volumes in advance. This makes it possible to manage processes and production in advance and increase efficiency. Since the start of the project in 2018, they have achieved a 35 percent increase in sales.

### **Insight pitches in concentrated form**

Speaking of innovation, the Insight Pitches were also full of it. This year, six exciting start-ups presented their business ideas. This year at the Online Print Symposium 2023, the start-ups were:

- Martin Ridder [from Ayke](#) on the topic „Unique pieces for everyone! Mass Customization with Generative Art“.
- Axel Lilienblum from [grow.photos](#) on „Growing photo books in a subscription model“.
- Andrei Andreescu of [twoworlds](#) on „Create and sell your own personalized books with twoworlds“.
- Phillip Bock from [Prinnit](#) on the topic of „Simple and direct: thanks to AI, orders find manufacturers“.
- Leon Lemcke from [Boxsys](#) on the topic of „Boxsys, the fully comprehensive Web2Pack and Web2POS store solution developed from CAD packaging design“.
- Markus Morawe and Stephan Uder from [Tessutura GmbH](#), who spoke on the topic of „From sneaker workflow to automated processes“.

### **From the metaverse, online print marketplaces and artificial intelligence**

On the second day, Björn Ognibeni, Strategic Director XRLab-MCM at the University of Münster, took Tag on a journey into the [metaverse](#) and talked about the extent to which the metaverse has now become a reality and where it is already being used. Peter Bottenberg, Managing Director of [Moss GmbH](#), on the other hand, focused on mass customization in large format printing and what role the „human“ factor plays in the change management process, while Patrik Knutsson, founder and platform architect of [Print.Page](#), addressed the question of whether marketplaces and print brokers have a future.

### **Meta digital flyers or printed flyers? Not „or“, but „and“!**

The future in the form of „Offer Communication 3.0“ was the topic of Kim Koszuszeck, Client Partner Retail at Meta. He spoke about Meta’s current experiences with digital brochures in retail and why this will not at all mean the death knell for printed brochures. On the contrary, he had results from five different GfK studies in his luggage, which showed, among other things, that the top performer in terms of net reach is still the physical advertising brochure (55 vs. 41.8 percent), even if in the 20 to 59 age group the digital flyer has a slim lead (53 vs. 48.1 percent).

Another exciting parameter was the potential for sales increases, which for the physical flyer was between 9 and 38 percent, and for the meta digital flyer between 5 percent and 15 percent. Nevertheless, because Meta is naturally closer to the digital flyer and many retailers are currently jumping on the trend, Koszuszeck’s conclusion was that the greatest power lies in

the combination of physical advertising brochures and digital offers and that the best strategy is therefore not the „or“ but the „and“.



### **ChatGPT: The greatest revolution after Gutenberg's printing press?**

„At the very least,“ was the answer given by Jörg Schieb, digital expert at ARD and specialist book author, in his closing keynote at the Online Print Symposium 2023. He helped to classify the current developments surrounding ChatGPT-4, language models and image generators and explained the innovative power that lies in these technologies and why they are of enormous importance for the future. Because one thing is quite certain: „Artificial intelligence is here to stay!“, Schieb is convinced.

### **The countdown to OPS 2024 has started**

The date for the next OPS has already been set: on March 14 and 15, 2024, the online print community will once again meet at the Science Congress Center in Munich-Garching. Everyone should mark this date in his calendar now!

Yours

Knud Wassermann,

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