



Bernhard Grob

From Typesetter to Entrepreneur to Author

The Swiss-British dual citizen Bernhard Grob spent almost five decades in the printing industry. He describes his experiences – especially on trips abroad – in detail in a self-published book that was produced in the Muller Martini Print Finishing Center, as well as in a condensed form in the following blog.

As a Bütschwiler, Toggenburger, St. Galler and Swiss citizen, I moved to England with my English wife and two small children in 1986, which laid the unexpected foundation for a 30-year career in the English and international printing industry – but more of that later.

Entry into the printing industry as a 16-year-old

My career began in [Bütschwil](#), where I grew up, attended school and participated in many sports. As a 16-year-old I began the typesetter apprenticeship in Wil with weekly attendance at the print college in St. Gallen, with the legendary lecturer Noldi (Arnold) Hartmann, who later founded the [Typorama](#) Museum in Bischofszell. Lead type was still the trump card back then, and who still remembers the „lead lice“ that a beginner had to look for with great laughter?

Noldi taught us a lot and encouraged us to become determined professionals – with the doors wide open to career opportunities and the big world. This became clear a few years later on the occasion of one of his regular former „apprentices“ get-together, when only a few were still active in their original profession. His handwritten calligraphy saying “There is nothing good unless you do it” still has a prominent place in my home office today.

Continuous learning for professional advancement

The passing-out celebration was followed by the obligatory army school training as a transmission recruit in Payerne and then my first job as a film setter in Frauenfeld. The four years of lead typesetting and letterpress printing were already „old hat“ and I learned the new technology with enthusiasm and joy, which at the same time was the start of the prepress revolution.

I had my next job in Zurich as manager of the pre-press department and proofreader, which brought me into contact with clients such as advertising agencies. Continuous learning was important for professional advancement, and I went to school in the evenings and on Saturdays for many years to earn my national degrees in commerce, advertising and marketing.

With the newly filled Rucksack (backpack) I got my first job in an advertising agency, moving to Aarau and a few years later in the advertising department of an industrial company that exports worldwide, also in Aarau. This job enabled me to spend several months in Paris – my favorite city, where I didn't meet the French girlfriend I had hoped for, but my future English wife. The next and last professional stop in Switzerland was in an international company in Herisau, where I was able to implement my newly acquired marketing knowledge and move up the management ladder.

Fascinated by label printing

Newly married with two children and my wife, who wanted to go back, we decided to move to England as the next professional challenge. Drupa 1986 was a good opportunity to visit British exhibiting companies to look for job opportunities. During the following summer vacation in England, I visited several companies that I had met at Drupa. This resulted in some job offers and thus the question of which company I should choose.

I was particularly enthusiastic about the label industry, which was new to me, especially since it was a young industrial branch with enormous growth potential. The decision fell on [Edale Ltd.](#) – a small machine factory that made flexographic printing machines. As a St. Galler, I quickly found out that Gallus was the market leader, but I saw no direct competition, especially since Edale was producing small flexographic printing machines for newcomers to labels at the time.

The export share increased from 5 to 90 percent

At the beginning of 1987 I started my job in southern England as European sales and marketing manager, to promote the company and its flexopresses in export markets by participating in national and international exhibitions and to look for suitable representatives. The only five percent export share meant practically an increase in exports of almost zero, which, however, was not a major handicap due to the strong growth of the label industry.

The bigger handicap was the company's financial situation. This meant that the company was close to collapse in the same year. Fortunately, however, it was saved by a venture capital investor who gave me the opportunity to become co-owner and managing director. I would not have dared to dream of that a year earlier – as well as of the subsequent sharp rise in exports, which was 90 percent at the time of my retirement!

30 years in flexo and label / packaging printing

My book "DESTINATION – Traveling the World for the Printing Industry", which is published in English, is based on the travel journals I wrote during my 30 years of travel and covers 60 countries. My new life as an entrepreneur was interesting, challenging, satisfying and gave me a lot of joy and fun. My job was also my hobby, and according to my wife, it was often in „competition“ with family life and home. Despite everything, we will celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary in 2021.

The development of the book

A business friend who knew about my travel journals encouraged me to write a book about it. A good idea, I thought – especially since I should soon have time because of my imminent retirement; and tackling something new should be good. But I quickly realized that there was more to it than I initially thought. However, this didn't stop me – especially since other friends I asked for contributions from their business life also responded positively.

Because it deals with the printing industry, I had the idea to print the book live on the booth of a printing machine manufacturer during a major event such as Drupa 2020/21 and also to produce it at the booth of a finishing machine manufacturer. I contacted Xeikon and Muller Martini, who both responded positively to my request. But what everyone could not have suspected: The corona pandemic prevented this project.

Collaboration with Reading University

In my professional life I have always tried to engage young people and give them opportunities to develop and advance – just as I have been able to experience this again and again in my professional life and have been able to benefit from it. So the idea arose to find a university with a typography faculty for the design of the book. The contact with the Head of Typography and Graphic Communication at [Reading University](#) was also positive. He was very interested in his students being able to work creatively on a live project.

A university-internal advertisement led to several interested parties, and the director recruited a third-year student for the complete design of the book. This collaboration brought the student and me a lot of joy and fun, which you can certainly see from the book. That was why I decided not to sell the book, but to donate the proceeds to the next generation in the graphic arts industry – with the typography faculty at Reading University as the main beneficiary.

Xeikon for printing, Muller Martini for production

Because Drupa was canceled twice, the live production fell through. However, Xeikon and Muller Martini were so enthusiastic about the idea that they decided to carry out the production in their showrooms. At the same time, it gave both companies the opportunity to combine the new printing and finishing machines that they wanted to present at Drupa with this book production and then by means of a webinar in the [Xeikon Café](#) to introduce customers worldwide. The book production thus extended to three countries: Belgium, France and Switzerland. This required meticulous planning by everyone involved. Unfortunately, personal visits with the student to witness the production were not possible due to the pandemic travel restrictions, which I very much regretted.

A great digital print

With great joy, pride and satisfaction from everyone who worked on this project, the 355-page book landed on my desk at the end of April 2021. A great digital print that can do more than just compete with offset, and an equally perfect production on the [SigmaLine III](#) digital book production system with perfect binder [Vareo PRO](#) and three-knife trimmer [InfiniTrim](#) for the end product. A long way from Gutenberg's time and my apprenticeship: Electronic transfer of the approximately 150,000-word document to the student with online selection of fonts, page layout, make-up, integration of photos, images and much more into the final document.

The electronic transfer of the completely designed book content and book cover was sent from the student to Xeikon by means of a file, whose experts initiated the next step with the implementation for digital printing. The exact layout of the pages took place in consultation between Xeikon and Muller Martini in order to guarantee the correct page sequence after the various folding processes.

Complex imposition of pages

The digital printing was done in roll form with a paper web width of 500 mm – with two pages across the web and continuously in a linear direction. For further processing from the roll, the imposition of the pages was therefore much more complex than with traditional sheet-fed printing – especially since the folding into several blocks was carried out before these were then collected, provided with the book cover and bound. An InfiniTrim three-knife trimmer took care of the fully automatically controlled three-sided trimming of the finished book.

As a former typesetter, it was very important to me to get a printed length of a book in roll form in order to document the various work processes and, above all, to understand the imposition of pages.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Muller Martini, Xeikon and the University of Reading for their generous support. Carrying out such a project was a great challenge and required a lot of effort – especially since this was not done in a commercial printing and finishing company, but in-house, where improvisation and coordination played an important role in the success of the book.

Yours,
Bernhard Grob