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A digitalization hotspot

The [Hunkeler Innovationdays](#) are always worth a visit - as they are again in 2019. In recent years, the event has developed into an international hotspot for digital printing and everything it takes to map end-to-end workflows. The extremely compact event format provides an excellent overview of current developments.

To begin: there was nothing revolutionary to be seen in Lucerne. But the event showed once again how inkjet printing has conquered ever more applications over the years. All but one manufacturer was represented in Lucerne with a toner-based system.

Thinking about where inkjet printing in color started in 1995 and where we are today, that is more than impressive. Many, in particular manufacturers, assumed that market penetration would be faster. However, even disruptive technologies take time. Now, it seems, inkjet printing will really pick up speed in the next few years.

Promising patterns

Originally in pure transformation printing, inkjet printing is now even advancing into the domains of offset printing. The development of inks, on the one hand, and the expansion of the paper spectrum, on the other, are making many things possible. The declared aim is to also print coated papers in inkjet over the short or long term. The samples of this presented to the audience in Lucerne are indeed quite promising. The fact that the systems are becoming increasingly faster does not need any special emphasis.

It is interesting to note that ink-jet printing is advancing into the sheetfed sector. Sheet-fed printing systems do not have quite such an appetite in terms of print volume, which



should sooner or later help the process achieve a breakthrough in smaller markets as well. Sheetfed printing systems, especially in conjunction with inline finishing solutions, have a certain charm in producing typical digital printing applications such as short runs in an extremely efficient and flexible manner. [Canon](#), for example, is positioning itself with its solution between toner-based digital printing and offset printing and guarantees that inkjet printing is economically viable for runs between 300 and 1,300 copies.

„Mass customization“ is feasible

Printing is one thing, but to benefit from the individualization and customization of digital printing, suitable finishing solutions are needed. And there was quite a lot of that to see in Lucerne. A total of 40 production lines were in operation, most of them in combination with inline finishing modules.

It is fascinating how softcover or hardcover books can be produced entirely in runs of 1 in an industrial digital printing environment. Every book can look completely different in terms of content, size and format. Comprehensive integration and networking of all modules ensure the necessary efficiency despite all the individual features. Thanks to the degree of automation, mass customization, which is the adaptation of a series product to the needs of a customer, is no longer a dream of the future.

It was also exciting to see how finishing solutions such as laser modules can be integrated into production lines. In the production of mailings or security printing, in particular, there are interesting opportunities to increase the attractiveness of printed matter.

As the Hunkeler Innovationdays have once again demonstrated, a lot is technically feasible today with integrated digital printing systems and finishing modules. However, far more important than technology is the development of corresponding business models. The shift from offset to inkjet printing means that the inherent benefits of digital printing are lost. In order to make printed communication in the omnichannel world heard, we need personalization and individualization in hard copy.

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