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Digital transformation is also progressing rapidly in the conventional sector

Some 90 percent of global printing volume still comes from conventional printing processes. However, printers and bookbinders making offset products are also increasingly facing digital transformation. Because digital does not automatically simply mean digital printing.

It's almost exactly one year ago that the editor of our Panorama customer magazine visited an industrial bookbindery specializing in the saddle stitching of conventionally printed magazines, catalogs and brochures. He was received by the owner with the words: "Nice of you to drop by. When I look at the various graphical arts trade journals, I sometimes get the feeling that there are only digital printers left."

Digital is not (merely) equal to digital printing

While I understand where this impression comes from, I don't see the danger that we as machine manufacturers would forget conventional printers and bookbinders against the background of the increasing challenges associated with digital printing – quite the contrary. A good 90 percent of global printing volume still comes from offset. However, when we talk about digital in the graphical arts industry today in terms of production processes, we are not automatically referring to digital printing alone.

Quite the opposite, digital transformation is also progressing rapidly in the conventional sector. As a result, ever fewer companies today use routing slips that have been manually filled out, but instead rely on digitized job sheets. More and more machines are directly linked to the Management Information System (MIS) – just like job preparation and pre-press – which has several benefits (for example, real-time reporting). The long-term goal would be – and initial trends in this direction are already apparent – the so-called “lights-out” printing plant: the third shift at night runs practically without personnel (“lights out in the factory”). This already exists in parts production as the CNC machines have sufficient work supply and run independently. Of course, this is still a future scenario for us. But our considerations and innovations are moving in this direction.

Knowing at the touch of a button whether you have earned money with an order

Muller Martini is therefore investing equally in both areas. This will be impressively demonstrated at our booth at this year’s drupa. On the one hand, we are presenting innovations for individualized print products with runs of 1, on the other hand, we are underlining our commitment to conventional bookbinding by presenting two new types of saddle stitcher and a new perfect binder in the high-performance range.

And we will be showing the central role the [Connex workflow system](#), developed by Muller Martini, plays for an optimized production process. In view of the low margins for classic products such as magazines or catalogs, optimizations are also required in conventional production. Therefore, in addition to fast setup times, easy operation of systems and perfect quality from the very first product manufactured with a view to shorter throughput times, a high level of automation and digitalized processes are of particular importance.

The reliable production figures provided by [Connex.Info 4.0](#) enable a quick evaluation and facilitate post-calculation. This allows you to measure whether you have achieved your targets. You can optimize production in a targeted manner and thereby increase efficiency (especially for repeat jobs). In short: automated evaluations save time and therefore costs. And you know at the push of a button whether you have actually earned money with an order.

A digital recipe for each machine

[Digital finishing 4.0 solutions](#) from Muller Martini with contact-free transitions from one job to the next are therefore closely linked to Connex – and also bring our conventionally producing customers great benefits on a broad range of levels. For example, order data only needs to be entered once, which results in less redundancy and errors and higher production reliability. Digitizing know-how has an additional important advantage: machine operators have the knowledge of machine pre-adjustments and process engineering in their heads.

But what happens when a machine operator changes jobs or retires? The company faces a significant loss of know-how. That’s why Muller Martini offers something like a digital recipe for each machine, which promotes automated processes and not only supports the operator in his day-to-day work but also provides tips and tricks.

MMServices – for efficient life cycle management

However, workflow functions for process automation or data evaluation are not the only means of optimizing production and thereby increasing profitability. Machine performance can also be increased by integrating additional peripheral systems (such as stream feeders for automatic sheet feeding and [compensating stackers/book stackers](#) or by replacing older machines.

Speaking of older machines: if your saddle stitcher, perfect binder or bookline has been ope-

rating for a number of years now, regular and professional maintenance is highly recommended. This allows you to increase the availability of your equipment and ensure that it continues to produce economically for a long time to come – which ultimately pays off for you. An individually tailored service contract allows you to select the elements you need from our [MM Services packages](#) in order to guarantee your productivity and keep service costs predictable and low in the interest of efficient life cycle management.

Increasingly, our customers are also making „turn-one-into-two“ or „two-for-three“ investments – and achieving higher output even though they are using one machine less. For example, [Stephens & George in Wales](#) replaced three old saddle stitchers with two new Primera MCs, but still increased productivity by 20 percent and significantly reduced personnel costs because two shifts per week can now be saved.

Increasing value added and reducing personnel costs can also be achieved using systems flexibly as hybrid systems. Buzzwords here are combined digital offset application or producing hardcover and softcover products in the same machine. Six weeks ago, my American colleague Eric Olsen impressively demonstrated in his blog how Muller Martini's customer Core Publishing Solutions, which belongs to the Thomson Reuters Group, is doing this with its new [Alegro Digital](#) perfect binder.

The inclusion of digitally printed signatures enables “mass customization” – in other words: every single product is thus customized, which, in turn, has a positive effect on your operating result. This is because customized products fetch a much higher price on the market than the classic volume business, which is under margin pressure.

See you in Düsseldorf!

If you have any questions about our Finishing 4.0 solutions, digital transformation, our Connex workflow system, optimizing your production, increasing your machine performance, our ^{MM}Services packages or combined digital offset applications: your local Muller Martini contact will be happy to help you at any time.

True to our drupa motto “Get connected”, our sales staff are also very well networked with each other thanks to the experience gained in our globally active company. They regularly exchange experiences and thereby ensure a verbal transformation of successfully applied business models of print products from Australia to South Africa and from Denmark to Venezuela.

I'm already looking forward to talking to you in three months' time at our drupa booth in Düsseldorf about your experiences and ideas.

Your

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