



Marina Bucher

## „Our Company is an Excellent Example of a Harmonious Generation Change“

**The generational change in a family business is often a tricky thing. Schär Druckverarbeitung AG in Wikon in the Swiss canton of Lucerne proves how to do it right. Father Paul Bucher handed over the management to his daughter Marina and his son Yannick in an orderly fashion. In the following blog, 30-year old Marina Bucher, who became a mother for the first time a few months ago, explains how she intends to keep the company on the road to success, what negative effects the Corona crisis has had and why she nevertheless looks positively to the future for the graphic arts industry.**

Actually, I wanted to become a professional footballer. But I always knew that this would be difficult. Nevertheless, soccer still plays an important role in my life today. After 20 years of playing for SC Nebikon as a winger and libero, I am now an actuary on the club board and responsible for two women's teams.

Regarding soccer, my childhood dreams have unfortunately not come true, and it was only enough for a lower league. But now I play in the top league of Swiss print finishing companies. However, the fact that I would one day join our family business was anything but predetermined. Because my way into the management of [Schär Druckverarbeitung AG](#) did not follow a fixed career plan, but took a detour.

### **Inspiration in Australia**

Because the graphic arts industry was not an issue for me, I completed an apprenticeship as a retail specialist in sports. However, after that I did not really know how to go on. I did not really like the profession I had learned. In 2007, in the middle of my apprenticeship, my father took over the company from Kurt Schär and I gained an insight into a completely new professional world.

In order to think about my further professional career, I went to Australia for almost seven months after my apprenticeship. There I learned the English language. On the other hand, I became more independent and more conscious in my actions on this long and far journey. While I was still on my trip to Australia, I decided to do a kind of internship in my father's company after my return. I gained an insight into all departments and became more and more enthusiastic about office work.

After half a year, I decided to join the company after consulting my family. But before I was allowed to learn the office work, I had to work in the production hall for about two years. I was assigned to all machines and thus got to know the wide range of our company.

### **The father as a role model**

From then on, it was clear that one day I would follow in my father's footsteps, and I consistently geared my further training as a marketing and sales manager and as a management expert towards this. My father was and is always a role model for me. His goals have always been very ambitious. From an early age, I have been inspired by his willpower to get through something and prove it to himself and others, while at the same time accepting support without losing face.

He never urged us to join the company, and in the end the decision to join the company came from me as well. But with his courage to make the impossible possible, my father has motivated me for many years. A clear proof of his belief in the future of our company and in the graphic arts industry is also the fact that three years ago we opened a completely new production plant.

### **At eye level with the machine operators**

In 2015 the time had come. Even before my brother Yannick, who soon followed me, I became a member of the management. Yannick is production manager, I am responsible for sales, marketing and administration. Currently, my focus is on customer acquisition and customer retention. Because I know our machines inside out from my two-year „internship“ and also have a great deal of production know-how, I can discuss even the most unusual customer requests with the machine operators at eye level. This is doubly important because we manufacture many [special products](#).

The fact that the management of our company consists of a pair of siblings has many advantages. The biggest one is clearly the division of labor. Yannick and I are responsible for different areas. But we don't have to make difficult decisions alone and we always have a trustworthy person behind us who supports us. As siblings, we naturally have a good basis of trust and usually find a common denominator quickly.

### **Short decision-making processes are a great advantage**

As a print finishing company, we often have to react to our customers' wishes at very short notice, so short decision-making processes are of course a great advantage. But it is just as important to have conscientious and flexible employees – including my father! – can count on. After all, it is they who make such short-term decisions possible.

On the subject of my father: he continues to play a very large and important role in his work as Chairman of the Board of Directors. Although he has retired from the operational business, he lets us do what we want, and we feel his trust. But with his extensive experience of many years – I am thinking, for example, of the important issue of pricing – he still gives us a great deal of useful advice and supports us in every situation. So, it's no shame for him to roll up his sleeves and work on the machines himself when we have a large volume of orders. I think our company is an excellent example of a harmonious generational change.

Together with my brother, my father still has the technical lead in investments. However, the final decision on the purchase of new machines is always made by the three of us. This was also the case with the new Muller Martini [Primera PRO saddle stitcher](#), in which we invested this fall as one of the world's first graphic arts industry companies. In addition to the new Primera PRO, we have three other Muller Martini saddle stitchers in operation. The universal machine park is one of our greatest strengths. This has enabled us to make a name for ourselves in the industry with our core competence of finding a solution even for unusual requests.

### **When advertising agencies are amazed**

My declared goal is to maintain the existing and to create new incentives for our customers. I am thinking, for example, of print finishing, for which we have designed our large and varied machine park. Good advice is important to me. That's where I can bring my strengths to bear: exchanging ideas with people and building a network. For example, we have put together an attractive sample box for our customers. We show this primarily to print shops, but increasingly also to advertising agencies. They are often amazed when they see what's possible and above all what can be processed by machine – because we only manufacture a product manually in an emergency.

I find the exchange with people, whether with employees or customers, particularly exciting. Especially in the current difficult times, it's exciting to exchange ideas – even if this is unfortunately often only possible by telephone at the moment – and to make new acquaintances. Over the past few years, I have learned how important and relevant a large and well-maintained network can be – in business as well as in private life. Because I reduced my workload from 100 to 50 percent after the birth of our son last summer, I now have to organize myself even better. Thanks to a good deputy, this works out very well. And with the modern means of communication I can be reached at any time.

### **The employees are our capital**

As far as my management principles regarding our employees are concerned, I have a clear motto: qualified and committed employees are our capital! Of course, I am also demanding. But in our company, we cultivate a collegial atmosphere. Everyone is on a first-name basis, and everyone can – and should – contribute to the company. With their ambition, like my father's, to make the impossible possible, our employees contribute a lot to the success of our company and bring a young, modern and fresh wind into our industry. We additionally promote the good corporate culture with a company championship, which consists of various events throughout the year.

Because innovation is the driving force behind the company's development, we also attach great importance to the training and further education of our staff. In this way, we achieve a permanent improvement in order to meet the demands of the market in the future. By offering first-class quality – i.e. the four-eye principle from the quotation to the finished product – at prices in line with the market, we secure the long-term existence of our company and our jobs. And we must all be aware of one thing at all times: The customer is always at the center of our activities. Because without him everything is nothing.

**Women, believe in your abilities!**

I think it is a pity that our industry in particular is considered a male bastion and that few women hold management positions. However, I myself have never had the feeling of being treated differently because I am a woman. However, I believe that as a woman I bring a little more empathy and emotion into the sales team. Creativity has a lot to do with emotions, which in turn is important for the attractive products of our company. I like to create something creative and not just stick to the numbers.

But with many women I feel a lack of self-confidence. They feel too little perceived by their male environment. I am motivated to prove the opposite. Hence my appeal: Women, believe in your abilities! With a healthy self-confidence and a lot of self-discipline, even a woman in a leading position is perceived and taken seriously. In recent times, the proportion of women in our industry has been increasing. But I'd love to see even more women – even part-time – taking on management tasks. However, this would require many companies to rethink their outdated structures and become more modern.

**There are also corona-related new orders**

Unfortunately, the corona pandemic has also had a negative impact on our operations. Since the lockdown last March, we, like many graphic arts companies worldwide, have been struggling with lost sales. Orders were down very sharply in spring/summer. Many orders were scrapped or not produced at all. The order situation has stabilized somewhat since August. The volume of orders has increased but is still below the standard of previous years. However, we are also receiving corona-related new orders.

In organizational terms, there is a certain amount of extra work, especially in the personnel department. For example, we have prescribed various protective measures, work with masks and had to register short-time work for the first time in our company history. I myself even had to spend ten days in quarantine because I attended an event where someone was positive.

It is difficult to say at the moment what effects the corona crisis will have in the medium and long term on our company in particular and on the graphic arts industry in general. Of course, we remain optimistic and do everything we can to keep our company and our production going and to secure our jobs. In the longer term, I see no reason for fewer orders. That makes customer contacts and the acquisition of orders all the more important now. And investments such as the new saddle stitcher mentioned above can also help us now to strengthen our market position with a view to the future. It is clear that our industry will become smaller regardless of the Corona crisis. But it will certainly not die out.

**Customers want to attract attention with something haptic**

After all, the graphic arts industry is very versatile and can be perfectly integrated into the modern world of digitization. I am convinced that digitization has a positive impact on our industry. I'm thinking here of the combination of electronic media and print products such as augmented reality or QR codes, but also of the many finishing options that can be used to design personalized mailings. Many of our customers want to attract attention with something haptic. Especially during the Corona period, people have more time to look at such products at home. I exchange a lot of information on this subject with my colleagues and ask them how they react to the advertising in their mailboxes.

I myself prefer personalized print products – personalized mailings of all kinds. I also enjoy creative and unusual print marketing again and again. Books and magazines – how could I solve a crossword puzzle on the tablet? – I only read from print. For newspapers and news, I prefer electronic devices.

**Versatile print products have a future**

I am convinced that print products will continue to play a very important role in the future - be it a handwritten card, a personally signed invitation or a personalized mailing with the latest fashion trends. Print products are versatile and impressive. However, they must contain modern elements – the keyword again is haptics.

But this requires a graphic arts industry that is very versatile and can be integrated very well in the modern world of digitalization. With today's finishing options and the ingenious and creative ideas of many young professionals, graphic products will continue to create many positive impressions in the future - true to our company motto: „The best way to predict the future is to design it.“

Sincerely,

Marina Bucher,

Managing Director Schär Druckverarbeitung AG, Wikon (Switzerland)