



“We’re Not Like Other Companies”

With its creative hardcover and softcover solutions, Kösel, Germany’s leading book producer, has made a name for itself as an innovation leader well beyond Germany’s borders. “Panorama” spoke with Managing Director Erik Kurtz about the 425-year-old company’s recipe for success.

“Panorama”: In 2016, you were named Germany’s printing plant manager of the year and your company was crowned German print finishing plant of the year. The year before that, Kösel was named Germany’s book printing plant of the year for the fifth time. In addition, it has been a regular winner of book-of-the-year awards in other countries for years now. **What is your company’s recipe for success?**

Erik Kurtz (Managing Director of Kösel GmbH & Co. KG): A special feature of our company is that everyone really enjoys taking care of special jobs. We’re not like other companies, where a special request or a unique solution makes everyone say: “Oh no, don’t come to me with that. It’s much too complicated and will only disrupt our processes and our rigid procedures.” We think the exact opposite. When someone comes to us with a new idea, our manag-

ers, machine operators and sales reps enjoy doing something that’s a bit unusual. First, we often do a test on the machine. We take the material, the machine operator plays around with it and then says: “We could try to do it this way. That would be another idea.” Allowing employees to play around like this has been our recipe for success.

The hallmarks of many of your books are exclusive finishing, such as shiny, matte or soft-touch foils, digital spot lacquering, one-color or multicolor hot foil embossing, rounded corners on the book block and cover, laser die cutting, and personalized printing of the trimmed edges of books using Kösel edge coloring. How important are such added values, especially in view of the need to compete with digital media for readers?

The question is always: how and where do customers make a decision to purchase? If the purchase decision is driven solely by content, then I’ll download an e-book or enter what I’m looking for on Amazon – in this case, spot lacquering or foils are not important. But added values do have an impact on the purchase decision at the point of sale. So Kösel really shines when it comes to special bookbinding processing. Such processing includes, for example, a flexible cover, special layflat behavior, a unique book shape, or special materials that are not usually used and are not so

simple to process using standard equipment. Such products attract a lot of attention in a bookstore and can lead to customers making an impulse purchase.

Have you noticed a trend toward high-quality and more sophisticated features, especially for hardcover books?

The trend applies to both softcover and hardcover books, but the options are much greater for hardcover books. In the softcover area, we have also come up with our own developments, such as book-in-book, where one brochure is placed in another. This offers very specific benefits for business reports in particular. But the variability is much higher in the hardcover area because it is possible to play with different materials.

Kösel is known in the industry for constantly coming up with innovative ideas. Do you have an in-house team of developers?

None who are specially tasked with this role. I’m often asked how large our development department is. I usually say it has 180 people in it. This is because everyone who works for us enjoys developing ideas. I get personally involved in this work, too, contributing a number of ideas and designs. But the important thing is that everyone at our company abides by this philosophy and contributes to it.



Added values do have an impact on the purchase decision at the point of sale.





How many books do you publish each year?

13 million.

How has this figure changed over the last ten years?

It has remained relatively constant.

How many titles do these 13 million books represent?

Around 3,500.



We enjoy doing something that's a bit unusual.



What percentage is hardcover and what percentage softcover?

These two areas are about the same, and the ratio hasn't changed much over the past few years.

How have print runs changed over the last ten years?

They've fallen by about 10% – much less than the book market as a whole.

What do you think the next ten years will bring with respect to print runs?

I believe they will continue to fall. But this is due in part to the fact that – driven by investments in digital printing – we will be able to take on orders in the future that we previously wouldn't have.

Worldwide, the e-book share of the overall market has been stagnant over the past three years and in some countries – including the US – it has even fallen, with printed books benefiting from the decline. What do you think are the reasons behind this retro trend?

The trend appears to have stopped. But the more interesting question for me is: will future generations still want to read a text all at once? The way people absorb information is changing. I think the traditional book has been transformed somewhat into a luxury item. It will no longer be a medium for mass entertainment.

Is this why additional features are increasingly being added to your books in line with your company philosophy?

Precisely. This is the conclusion we have come to.

425 Years of Kösel

Kösel's history dates back to 1593, when Prince-Abbot Johann Erhard Blarer von Wartensee founded a royal book printer in Kempten. The name of the publishing house comes from Joseph Kösel, who purchased the royal printer from the Imperial Abbey of Kempten in 1805. At its highly modern operation in Altusried-Krugzell near Kempten, which employs 180 people, Kösel produces 13 million books annually – hardcover products on a Diamant MC 60 bookline, thread sewing on two Ventura machines, and softcover products on a Muller Martini Bolero (see also Panorama 2/18).



Please see our website for an extended version of the interview with Erik Kurtz: www.mullermartini.com/ Kurtz/E

Three Kösel Specialties



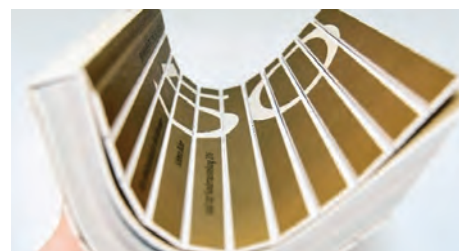
Edge coloring

Its digital edge coloring machine, which the company developed together with a partner in the mechanical engineering industry, enables Kösel to finish the trimmed edges of books with four-color motifs. This innovation allows customers to make full use of the advantages of digital printing in their designs. Products with individualized and personalized motifs can be produced industrially in large quantities using this process.



Book-in-Book

A sophisticated book-in-book production process enables Kösel to include one or more components in such a way that they can be easily removed and then placed back in the product. The design, material and type of binding may vary from the rest of the product, giving the interior a unique character. Die cutting and the use of different types of paper allows the book to be divided in a way that makes it easy to recognize and distinguishable by the way it feels.



Lamella Cover

The unique feature of the lamella cover is that it makes rigid hardcover books flexible in places where this is important for the way the book is laid flat and read: The covers are soft like the interior pages, yet they retain their vertical stability. This is based on an old concept that was supposed to involve the use of real wood, which however proved to be too expensive. But thanks to technology developed in other industrial sectors, it was eventually carried out using paper materials.