



Adrian Mayr

„We need to find an intelligent mix between presence and online events“

Due to the corona pandemic, several graphic arts trade fairs worldwide were postponed or cancelled completely this year. In recent months, they were increasingly replaced by webinars, which were and still are offered by both machine manufacturers and trade magazines and their online platforms. A particularly attractive event this fall was [print.de's](#) Print Innovation Week, where I had the great pleasure of speaking to a large audience on the subject of „Smart Factory in Postpress: Examples of Successful Digital Transformation“.

The digital transformation – and this development was undoubtedly accelerated by the corona crisis – does not stop at the graphics industry. In addition to many challenges, it also opens up new opportunities for us. For example, because of travel restrictions, Muller Martini offers customers online demos from its showrooms – and we sold a machine in this way after only a short time. Or a few weeks ago – because our technicians were not allowed to enter – we helped a Slovakian customer to repair his BF 530 bookline himself with online video and telephone support from our factory in Rahden.

We also took part in the [Inkjet Summit](#) in the USA in August – a trade fair for digital printers which, under the motto „All from the Comfort of Your Home or Office“, was held virtually for the first time in its nine-year history. You may have read the [blog](#) published a few weeks ago by my American colleague Andy Fetherman. The Inkjet Summit, like Print Innovation Week, which guaranteed a high-caliber audience thanks to the professional platform [print.de](#),

enabled us to use an additional channel to show visibility, convey our messages and thus at least partially compensate for the absence of trade shows.

### **A premiere for me**

As an internationally active company with sales companies on all continents, we have been using webinars for several years now – for example to instruct our employees about new machines. In this respect, I have already been able to gain some experience internally as a webinar presenter. As far as a public appearance is concerned, the Print Innovation Week was a premiere for me, but I was able to benefit from my internal experience.

I tried to imagine the audience mentally and not to read off the paper. I never create a finished manuscript in advance of live presentations in front of people, but write down keywords and then talk freely. As far as the pure presentation is concerned, it doesn't make much difference to me whether I give a lecture in front of a live audience or in an online seminar.

### **Little slips of the tongue are among them**

However, there are striking differences in two respects. On the one hand, the organizer provides the entire technical infrastructure such as laptop, beamer and microphone at a live event. This is something you have to take care of yourself in a webinar, and that adds an extra layer of complexity – especially if you're giving a presentation while on vacation, but I'll come back to that later. On the other hand, an online presence lacks spontaneous reactions, you can't play with the audience.

Is it easier to perform in front of an audience or in the quasi anonymous Internet? It's difficult to say. But the fact is that I prefer performing in front of a live audience. Regardless of the format, I'm always a bit tense at the beginning before the nervousness subsides.

Sure, there is the saying: „The Internet never forgets.“ And I was also well-aware that my online webinar will be put on YouTube and is thus de facto destined for all eternity. But that did not put me under pressure. Little slip-ups are just as much a part of an Internet presence as they are in front of a live audience – after all, I am not a professional speaker. Besides, not only the language, but also the graphics and pictures remain. In this respect, I regarded the Print Innovation Week as a good example of the interaction between presentation and visualization.

### **With a view of Lake Maggiore**

The fact that I already knew in advance about the high number of webinar participants made me happy. But that didn't make me particularly nervous, because my own demands on the quality of a presentation don't depend on the number of listeners.

The location from which I addressed the audience was admittedly quite unusual. I was on vacation in a vacation apartment in the canton of Ticino. When I looked out the window of my laptop, I had a wonderful view of Lake Maggiore. I don't know whether the relaxed atmosphere had a particularly calming effect on me. What is certain, however, is that I had a huge amount of respect for whether the online connection would last. Because there was no WLAN in the vacation apartment, I was connected to the Internet via my cell phone. And I was not allowed to forget to pack a business shirt before my departure...

Of course, I was particularly pleased that Muller Martini had the second highest audience rating of the entire Print Innovation Week with 117 participants. The high response was certainly also the result of our efforts to publicise the event in advance through our own channels such as the [Muller Martini website](#) or via LinkedIn. Of course, there were also a few

Muller Martini employees among the live audience – to which many more were added in the wake of the event and more will certainly be added after the webinar goes live on YouTube. But for me, this is a positive signal, as it shows the interest of our employees – and maybe one or two of them have learned something from it...

### **Advantages...**

I found Print Innovation Week an excellent format and an interesting approach to fill a vacuum created by the cancelled attendance events due to the Corona pandemic. The Print Innovation Week was particularly attractive, not least because there was a low entry hurdle for participants.

One major advantage of a webinar is undoubtedly the fact that there is no need for travel. Normally, it takes at least a whole day to appear before an audience. As far as the preparation is concerned, however, I don't see a big difference between a webinar and a classic presentation.

I see the added value of online events especially in the fact that - especially with such an attractive format as Print Innovation Week – you can reach a broad audience with relatively little effort, that the webinars are available on the Internet for an unlimited period of time and can therefore be viewed later, regardless of time and location, and that – as I mentioned earlier –they can also have a refreshing effect on our employees.

### **...and disadvantages**

On the other hand, a webinar also has several disadvantages compared to the traditional format in front of a live audience. One does not see any immediate (facial) reactions of the audience. There are no personal contacts and thus no informal discussions and no exchange of know-how possible.

If you ask me whether the advantages and disadvantages outweigh the disadvantages, my answer is clear: With regard to online/presence events, there is no either/or, but an both/also. We have to find an intelligent mix between presence and online. But if you ask me which form I prefer as a speaker, my answer is in favor of a presence event.

### **„Hybrid“ format for the future**

I draw the same conclusion as Andy Fetherman: a virtual event like the Inkjet Summit or Print Innovation Week cannot replace a presence event one-to-one. Public events are always a great opportunity to make informal contacts with key decision-makers, enabling us to get to know our customers better and build closer relationships for future sales activities. Of course, we received the contact details of the audience from the organizer, were able to categorize them and have the opportunity to get in direct contact with (potential) customers. But this does not replace direct contact at a trade event or trade fair. What's more, because the Print Innovation Week was held in German, the customer base was naturally limited primarily to Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

There is no doubt that virtual events have their very own advantages. That's why I expect a more „hybrid“ format for future trade shows and conferences. This could consist of real events supplemented by virtual activities so that more participants on the customer side can benefit from the seminars, machine demonstrations, etc.

You missed my live presentation in October, but would like to have a look at it in peace and quiet? As I said: no problem. You can find it on the Muller Martini [YouTube channel](#).

Sincerely,  
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