

Intergraf sat down with Bernd Zipper, writer, consultant, lecturer, founder of zipcon consulting GmbH and speaker at Print Matters for the Future, to pick his brain about online print, the wider industry, future trends and more.

Bernd Zipper is an expert in mass customization, eBusiness print, web-to-print, online print stores and interdisciplinary media projects. As he will be speaking about online print markets and their development at Intergraf's upcoming Print Matters for the Future conference in London on 24 May, we took the opportunity to interview Mr. Zipper. [REGISTER NOW](#) for our conference to hear more from Bernd Zipper and our other expert speakers.

About you

What is your background?

Back at the tender age of 13 my ambition was to print my school newspaper myself. As a sideline I also temped at a printing company and at some point, I was permitted not just to clean the presses but also to do my own printing. Admittedly that wasn't really high-end stuff; above all the final result was only good enough for a school newspaper. I was simply excited and fascinated by printing, even back then. In 1998, when I was still a CEO of a production agency, I realized that the Internet was the future and that it would change everything as soon as a couple of masterminds had recognized

PRINTING INDUSTRY INSIGHTS WITH BERND ZIPPER



and exploited its potential. Back then I advised companies as a sideline – and so when I finally became self-employed in 1999 I was able to concentrate fully on consultancy and on my clients. This is what I still have a passion for now – trying to understand my clients' problems and generating solutions. In the 1990s and early 2000s I established a reputation as a PDF expert and published plenty of articles in Europe and in the US Seybold Report. Sometimes I am amazed when I look at my archive. But I firmly believe that had I not been receptive to this new technology back then and been prepared to help to make it accessible to the print market, then the foundations for zipcon consulting would probably not have been laid.

What do you do at zipcon

consulting GmbH?

We regard ourselves as an independent and integrated strategy and technology consultancy and we do business all over the world. Our credo is very simply "Analyze, Advise, Action" – that means that we advise our clients on how they can solve their problem or challenge once we have analyzed their initial situation. We are prime market innovation movers in the areas of mass customization, digital print, web-to-print, e-business print, functional print, color management, quality assurance, management information systems (MIS), print, workflows and automation. As part of our consultancy projects we offer packages that take different forms and provide different types of coverage. The client decides whether they require feedback on the status-quo of their current project or a sparring partner for long-term consultancy. At the end of the process we provide them with a comprehensive technical white paper with specific implementation measures for their IT as well as relevant action recommendations to optimize their website from both search engine and user perspectives.

Tell us about the books you have authored.

My first book was "PDF+Print" in 1999. It was published all over the world in English, German, Danish, Japanese and Russia. After that I wrote several books about PDF

and PDF-Workflow. In 2007, I published the first “Web-to-Print-Study” – with more than 600 Pages, followed by the “Web-to-Print”-Book in 2014. Since then I have concentrated on my own blog www.beyond-print.net and now, since February 2019, the Print-Paper “beyond-print.unplugged”. So not that much...

About online print

How do you define the online print industry?

For many people the “online print industry” is just a Printer with a Shop or a Vendor like Vistaprint. To me it’s more. It’s the market of “online driven turnover for print” – and this means, if nothing else, that everyone can become an “online printer” – in B2B or even B2C. However: The foundation is always a transforming company. Companies that still think in an analogue manner and only try their luck with an online shop will have no success.

What is the share of online sales of print in Europe? Worldwide?

In Asia, online print as a proportion of the total print market is set to increase to around 35 percent in the next three years, i.e. by 2022, meaning that it will come in at just under the figure of around 40 percent that zipcon has forecast for Western Europe. Online print’s share of the overall D/A/CH print market is growing every year and in 2017 amounted to between 25 and 28 %. In 2016 sales of more than 28 billion Euros were generated just in Europe – according to Statista the

annual increase is 10 % and the garment segment therefore provides massive potential for print applications.

What is your expectation on the forecasted share in the coming years?

The online print market is one of the fastest growing markets in the print and media industry and is gaining increasing importance. The billion-Euro online print market is a lucrative business. In 2017 average growth in the D/A/CH region was 12 %.

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Which printing markets are most subject to move to online printing?

There are many areas moving to the online printing world. Let’s take the clothing industry, of which large portions have been outsourced to Asia. You buy these products off the peg. But if you want an expensive, tailor-made suit, you have to go to a tailor, and have it made to measure. Or you can go to an Internet tailor, who ascertains your requirements using a

configurator and produces your suit for an affordable price. Similar services are also provided for furniture and other items, which we believed had migrated to low-wage countries never to return. Entrepreneurs that go down the customized production route are demonstrating that it is also possible in Europe to manufacture inexpensively and close to where customers are.

Such offerings even exist in the food segment. At MyMüsli the customer can create their own granola mix on the Internet, factoring in their personal tastes and preferences and any allergies. The granola mix created this way is mixed exactly in line with customer specifications and delivered in a can. And MyMüsli even goes one better. The customer can personalize not only their granola mix but the can as well. The customer selects images, texts and colors – and the can is printed direct-to-can and customized.

What advice would you give to printers willing to enter the online printing market?

Print entrepreneurs often lack patience. While a print provider’s “normal” innovation process, i.e. the selection, purchase and commissioning of a printing press, includes a clear timetable, that’s only feasible to a limited extent where “uncharted-territory” eBusiness or eCommerce projects are involved. Some traditional print entrepreneurs or publishers often can’t grasp the fact that eCommerce and the necessary software solutions a) cost money and b) are very complex entities. They first of all prefer to tinker with a supposedly

inexpensive store, until they realize that this business model is unfortunately not specific enough to ensure long-chain success and has also swallowed a huge six-figure sum of money.

About the graphical sector in general

What challenges do you see for the printing industry in 2019 and beyond? And for online printing specifically?

Firstly, digitalization and product diversity require modern standards of service and smart logistics! Online print providers sometimes underestimate – the number of linked-in shipping service providers or logistics partners. Without naming any consigners here – every reader has heard of cases of delay, damage and other negative sorts of things that happen to shipments on the way to customers. It is

“Digitalization and product diversity require modern standards of service and smart logistics!”

then all the more annoying if the print provider has done a great production job only for the consigner that it trusts to virtually destroy that customer relationship. Giving customers a choice of shipping companies

can help in such situations.

Secondly, “print product marketers” usually don’t do any printing themselves, but instead utilize a network of different, what you could term contract print providers and then sell the products of these unnamed companies under their own brands. However, the stigma of dictating prices to their suppliers is often attached to these platforms as well. Squeezing would be the less diplomatic albeit often the more accurate term. That’s because oddly enough many of the platforms are cheaper than online print providers with their own machinery assets. Supply bottlenecks, late deliveries, a reduction in available offerings etc. could be the consequences – and cause a collapse.

What are the opportunities?

Premium print is slowly increasing in price, because many customers are rediscovering its value. More and more print-specific and print-related products are making inroads into the premium segment. Quality is expressed not just in the look and feel of the product. Rising aspirations can be met by incorporating electronic aids like sensors etc. There are plenty of print options available for this purpose – and there is plenty of development work being undertaken in this field. I was once again able to see this for myself on my last visit to Luxepack. It doesn’t even have to be premium-finish packaging to make an impact. The opportunity of delivering customization at familiarly high quality is much more important here – irrespective of whether packaging, mailshots, job printing or gift items are involved. There are plenty of

ideas and production options about in the wider printing industry, and that’s what the future of print will be based on as well.

Next, if you consider the sales potential in the lucrative photo eCommerce software market

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and every kind of Internet-based photo product finishing solution, then you soon realize why software and hardware providers from this segment are all evolving in the direction of these two aspects. According to the Photoindustrie-Verband, sales of value-added photo products (e.g. calendars, gift items and posters – not prints) in 2017 amounted to around 220 million Euros just in Germany alone, which represents an increase of 7 million Euros compared to the previous year. Sales of photobooks in Germany increased even more sharply

to 303 million Euros – which represents a rise of more than 12 percent compared to 2016. This is a lucrative field of business activity, particularly because further growth can be assumed.

How would you assess the current pace of change in the industry? How can companies keep up with this?

Online ERP. I regard this as the top topic in the next few years. Why? Because I am fed up of having to explain to my clients why this or that MIS can't or can only partially be docked on to their stores. Why don't the many providers of MIS (oddly enough, this is what ERP systems are called in the print industry) understand that they are shooting themselves in the foot if they are not receptive to or even switch to a cloud environment and browser-based applications? Companies that work with "online ERP" systems have an advantage over all the others – they are maybe not 100% perfect, but this is likely to be just a matter of time. Switching from classic client server-based systems to browser-based ones is certainly no walk in the park, but it is a key feature of digital transformation and a "must have" for all companies that wish to transform their businesses.

What are the most crucial future trends and technologies?

So, at the end of the day you already know it because it's all about mass customization which means, really, this is turning in to a big trend. However, the current rapid growth is finite. Studies assume that the market potential for

mass customization will settle at around 30% of the overall market, even in countries where custom products are in demand. If you consider this in its own right, this is just gigantic and commercially speaking very appealing as well, since the products provide customers with an additional benefit, which results in a willingness to pay a

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higher price. Products from this segment are on average 20% to 50% more expensive than mass-produced goods.

Another business trend taking place is in the direction of localization. An example of this can be seen in Cimpress, who two years ago had a centralized company organization but

switched back to its roots so that their local organizations could then decide everything. This is necessary because e-commerce always has a flavor of localization, a voice, a mentality of a people so that e-commerce is not soulless.

Big data is also used for something we call predicted production. This is a trend that although is not yet finished. This means for example, if it's Christmas and there is a special kind of book that is better sold at this time or before Christmas than it would be during the summer. Or for example if summer is coming up and you know there will be a lot of thrillers that you can read on the beach then at this time you won't be reading a Christmas book. And so you can see that over the course of the year Christmas book sales are going down in the summer but coming up once again in the winter. This creates a sort of wave of the demand of books and a machine behind all of it that calculates these trends by things such as region or season. And if you want to produce or set up a predictive production you need to know what kind of paper, what kind of production you need, what kind of production speed is needed, how many machines are needed, how to postpone items or to give customers a special price if they wait a little bit longer. With all of that you need technologies such as big data and AI.

What advice do you have for printers?

Speed up! I keep on noticing that the print industry in particular is extremely slow at actioning new ideas or business approaches. Odd,

after all the print industry still regards itself as very innovative – but compared to some start-ups, most print providers are in “tortoise mode”. OK, a new printing press can be installed in an instant, but the relevant software can take a while. Why? Because still too many print providers believe they don’t need any form of digital business intelligence (i.e. a proper IT team with its own development resources)– and everything that they want to implement quickly turns into a dramatic series of time overruns. Incidentally the major online print providers are no exception – although they (usually) have more financial resources available, their decision-making channels often resemble those of a government agency or local authority as soon as their sales exceed 100 million Euros.

Print will remain a key component of the communications mix, but the know-how required to produce that mix will be less and less a set of design or marketing skills and going to a conventional print provider will become the exception. Advertisers will instead switch to online print platforms, where processing is standardized, and the best price is guaranteed. Consequently, print companies need to network much more with potential clients and enhance their eBusiness print offerings, expand or search for niche partners for certain applications.

About Intergraf’s Print Matters for the Future conference

What will you be speaking

about at our Print Matters conference?

Of course I will go into online print and the current market development. But also, how online print is changing our industry - to the positive as well as to the negative. For me it is important to show: Print,

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whether sold online or offline, is an important part of the media canon of our society and thus a central building block for present and future communication. ■



[REGISTER NOW](#) for Intergraf’s Print Matters for the Future conference in London on 24 May to hear more insights from Bernd Zipper and our other expert speakers:

- **Charles Jarrold**, BPIF (UK): The UK Printing Industry
- **Katherine Punch**, Communications Expert (UK): The Power of Print in Multi-Platform Content Strategies
- **Professor Adriaan van der Weel**, University of Stavanger (NO): Evolution of Reading in the Age of Digitisation
- **Alejandro Mata Lopez**, RISI (EU): The Influences on and Development of Paper and Pulp Prices
- **Professor R. Martins**, University of Lisbon (PT): Paper Electronics
- **Intergraf Student Award Winner** (to be announced): Award-Winning Research in Print Media
- **Luke Lloyd**, International Post Corporation (UK): Advertising, E-Commerce and how Direct Mail affects Consumers
- **Bernd Zipper**, zipcon consulting GmbH (DE): Online Print Markets and their Development