

Future tendencies of package printing industry

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How will print develop in the future?

2021 is the year of change. The investigation of future related tendencies or assumed changes in print industry has a special feature as these changes are strongly influenced by customer behaviour shifts. While the pandemic is having a devastating effect on economies, businesses and people, a cultural shift is occurring in the way we live and work. The future of print industry lies in how it responds to the changes as with every crisis comes opportunity and industry players will be forced to capitalise on opportunities. Print industry players must adopt a future forward mindset to address the rapidly evolving cloud and hybrid solutions as well as new demands from workplaces as COVID-19 has accelerated digital transformation.

In order to predict tendencies or assume changes about the broad topic of print and packaging industry, the topic must be segmented. The paper further focuses on and discusses the state of package printing industry, which is even more complex as it is directly connected to two-third of the waste generated worldwide.

In 2021, the need for beautifully executed and protective packaging is increased as there is a growing demand for packaging from e-commerce due to COVID-19 as well. The package printing industry also has a prominent and highly visible role in adopting sustainable manufacturing practices and flexible packaging industry is committed to the continuous process improvement by adapting sustainability as a highly considered perspective. Environmental concerns regarding the global packaging issue, require more attention – because of the environmental aspect, footprint of the technologies and innovative technologies are now being adopted but they have to be developed and adapted with lower impact on the environment.

However, with changing customer behaviour, volatile demand patterns – sustainability related issues dropped down the agenda of package printing manufacturers. For the past year there has been a rationalisation in buying products, with a strong emphasis on FMCG products, hygiene and healthcare related core products. The main tendencies in customer behaviour can be translated to an effect to the package printing,

1. Panic buying and volatile demand – need for high-speed, short run package printing
2. High demand for core products (shifted product mix) – long runs from core product packages, high demand for efficient repeat work
3. Volatile demand – balancing volume, speed and flexibility in production

These changes cannot seem to be reversed in the foreseeable future so in order, for a package printing business, to remain competitive, new goals and expectations has to be set. The ability to remain agile,

to articulate the lessons learned and translate them to actionable strategies is the key into the future of package printing. Many experts believe that the current situation proves that digital transformation is the true answer to long term success. To create a flexible, agile, resilient business with efficient workflows, waste minimization and a motivating work environment the company has to invest and digitize, automate and connect people, use cloud-based solutions and take environment into consideration.

In the view of the above tendencies, how will package print develop? After the market consolidation occurring after the crisis, print businesses have to assess their processes to be able to perform and innovate at the least cost possible. Company-wide assessments will most probably lead to the conclusion that by improving environmental performance, a significant return on investment can be realized. Also improving overall performance – by automatization – will boost productivity, create economic savings and accuracy and efficiency in printing will contribute to the development of sustainable business performance.

Future oriented package printing

Folding carton, corrugated: The continuing growth in e-commerce, the highest demand for shelf-ready packaging ever, fragile supply chain and a sustainability-aware consumer will drive printing houses to further innovate in the direction of wide format digital printing.

Flexible packaging and labels: From a label converters point of view, customers are demanding shorter runs, faster turnaround times with an increasing pressure on prepress. With VDP becoming popular, jobs have to be regularly checked and made consistent and managing this increased workload is becoming more of a challenge. The key issue is how to boost digital press accuracy and output, without expanding workforces or increasing shifts being. The economical solution is to implement automated workflows. The result of automated workflows in case of flexible package and label converters can free up valuable resources by automatically optimizing complex press layouts, leverage predictive intelligence to ensure the best color space to boost your digital press to the max, can result in smarter, faster, safer and more efficient workflows and with assisted quality checks errors can be reduced by up to 80%.

The not so far future of printing industry is most probably the direction of environmentally conscious solutions. The ultimate goals are solvent-free inks, water-based adhesives and less polluting plate manufacturing, improved overall recyclability. As the printing industry has high hopes and serious expectations from the flexible package printing industry, consumer trends (healthy lifestyle, conscious eating and shopping, natural ingredients for the packages, clearly indicating terms 'organic' etc. onto packages boost sales) also influence the demand on package printing and pays off the investment in greener technologies.

What kind of working environment are you looking for? How could a printing company provide this?

I described how the digitalization will change the whole printing and packaging industry, and how important to implement all the changes for companies.

From my point of view the optimal working environment already have been digitalized and me or anyone else, who wants to start working in the industry are searching for companies like that. That's because in the digital space the workflows could be well organised, and you can work faster with less unimportant moves. It's because digitalization gives you the possibility of automatization and focus on the most important part of your jobs.

However, the existence of digitalization is not all. One of the most important things if not the most is the communication and feedback. From research we know that the fastest way to increase employee engagement is the face-to-face conversations which are real, honest, and meaningful communication. When you know well all your colleagues and employers, I go work every day with a way better mood, and I also enjoy my time spent at the workplace. Also, the workplace flexibility is a job trend according to Forbes, and I have to agree it's also important for me. Because life is not only about working, you need to have a balance between your work and life and if a company can provide you a partial autonomy for example about choosing shifts it's a really big benefit.

The collaboration is the next environmental specification what the entrants are searching for. Employees like to take bigger role when it comes to decision making in business. Companies can achieve it with setting realistic expectation together and clarify the team and company goals. In a well-organized collaboration, the recognition of the participants is also an important motivator. It helps them feel happier and do their job effectively. Next to the earlier specifications the small environmental footprint is an important question when I'm about to choose a company to work, it's also effected by the customer behaviour, cause the people like to buy goods from companies which are environmentally conscious, and only the companies like that has good opportunity and possibility to stay profitable in the future.

But the biggest motivator for entrants is the possibility of growing and learning. Employers and business owners can provide it honest conversations and frequently scheduled meetings where they dedicate full attention to the team. They must be sure about employees feel challenged but not stressed and allowing them to dream with questions like "How can we create the best working environment, together?". This can help retain talents and attract new talents.