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Actively tackling the media shift

Digital print with the KBA RotaJET— a new opportunity for newspapers?

In light of recent headlines, such as the sale of key newspaper titles by the Axel Springer group, some branch insiders might begin to question the future of the printed newspaper. The expectations for this century-old print medium vary considerably, and even in the industry range from “no future for print” to “look for opportunities and invest”.

The stance adopted by Koenig & Bauer (KBA) is clear: Printing is a customer service! Those who degrade their readers to co-printers by offering exclusively online information are easy to replace and throw away valuable customer retention opportunities. Apart from this, a purely online product portfolio has negative consequences with regard to reach. Every printed newspaper is read by up to three people, which is a key argument for advertising customers alongside target-group orientation and greater sustainability. Usage analyses show that print communication is not losing its value, despite the additional media offers. It is equally clear, however, that changing customer and reader demands must be taken into account accordingly.

Growing interest from the branch

KBA has gathered 200 years of experience with the printed newspaper. Countless ideas relating to current trends and future demands have been developed along the way, together with suitable solutions for a changing media world. With this in mind, it is hardly a surprise that the KBA RotaJET digital web press has attracted growing interest from prominent and opportunity-orientated newspaper publishers and printing houses since its

launch at Drupa 2012. All are enthusiastic to explore the possibilities for a contact-free print process free from plate and makeready concerns.

Four general points are responsible for the high level of interest shown:

- Given the partly dramatic fall in print circulations, even the most well-known newspaper titles are under pressure to react.
- The KBA RotaJET is the first digital solution to be offered by a renowned offset press manufacturer who probably understands the demands of newspaper production better than any other potential supplier.
- The precision engineering and robust design of the KBA RotaJET leave no doubts as to its suitability for use under industrial conditions.
- An increasing awareness – after many an expensive online adventure – that difficult situations also mean opportunities for new approaches.

Wherever newspapers were printed digitally on any perceptible scale in the past, this was usually in the form of so-called “island editions”. For such cases, inkjet systems generally emerged as the printing technology of choice, thanks to the significantly higher productivity compared to toner-based systems and the relatively low costs for short runs using a process which eliminates printing plates and the associated makeready costs. Until recently, however, the major suppliers of these systems had their roots exclusively in the IT sector (main focus: business forms). The systems were engineered accordingly, with all the attendant application limitations. It can scarcely be unexpected, therefore, that doubt was sown regarding the professional suitability and reliability for newspaper production, and that potential investors were unwilling to commit the required sums.

For example: None of these inkjet systems can process a web width of 800mm (31.5in), a standard format for newspaper webs. That means that newspaper printers must either spend considerable money to reorganise their logistics or else accept unnecessary format constraints (e.g. Nordic long-grain) and productivity restrictions (tabloid long-grain vs. short-grain). Features which are taken for granted on offset newspaper presses today, such as automatic webbing-up or non-stop automatic reel changes, are similarly unavailable for these systems derived from the IT sector, but are

offered as standard – or at least as options – for the KBA RotaJET. The reason: They enhance productivity, quality and economic efficiency.

New possibilities to tie readers

The most obvious possibility is also the most surprising: Given the current limitations on web speed, you wouldn't necessarily think of using the KBA RotaJET to produce newspapers. Wrong! Based on current circulations, which may be as low as 500 to 3,000 copies for some of the titles (or local sections) to be printed, realistic product analyses show that printing on the RotaJET is able to cut web press shift times substantially. This has several effects:

- Expensive offset press time can be saved or used for other purposes. Cost savings are possible because a fully automated RotaJET system is managed by a single operator and prints constantly changing jobs seamlessly, without plate and pre-press costs, without makeready time and without waste. The currently higher costs for the ink must naturally be deducted from the savings.
- Retrofits of older offset presses could be combined with a digital investment. The newspaper publisher then gains flexible options for reaction to the changing media environment, for example stronger target group orientation or even personalised print products. This opens up new opportunities to tie readers to a title or to realise direct advertising.

Taking up the results of joint deliberations with newspaper customers, KBA is already pursuing several projects which pair the benefits of a new, highly automated offset press line – or else retrofitting of an existing installation – with the strengths of the digital RotaJET press. Such investment decisions must naturally be preceded by sound profitability calculations based on the current and planned job structures of the user concerned. As KBA offers both offset and digital technologies, it is not unreasonable to assume a greater degree of objectivity compared to a supplier whose product portfolio consists of only offset or digital solutions.

More services for readers and ad clients

Once digital print is in place, further publishing and business perspectives materialise almost automatically: RotaJET systems are also suitable for

commercial-style work aside from actual newspaper production, which in turn enables publishers to increase their turnover by offering new, creative print products to their regional or local advertising clients, and in this way to strengthen their position as a leading regional media brand. Possibilities to be considered include:

- Advertising specific to a particular city district: The same advertising space can then be sold several times and thus becomes cheaper and more attractive for smaller businesses
- Selective, tailored supplements
- Additional products such as customer magazines, as a convenient “all-inclusive” service from content editing via print to distribution.

The printed newspaper continues to possess outstanding strengths and advantages, such as credibility, acceptance and sustainability, in today's modern media world. The big agencies and advertising companies are also aware of this. Passivity, frustration and resignation, however, are not feasible business options, given the online euphoria in certain parts of the newspaper world and irrespective of how difficult it may be to explain that state with economic facts. It is always worth listening to new ideas and recognising new opportunities. KBA will be providing further information on possible models at the newspaper fair World Publishing Expo in Berlin from 7th to 9th October 2013.

Photo 1: (Baum)

On the newspaper market, too, the sweetest fruits usually hang from the highest branches. With new ideas and the readiness to invest, however, they can still be harvested

Photo 2 and 3:

At the Hunkeler Innovation Days in February 2013, the KBA RotaJET printed the *Luzerner Zeitung* each morning using the original PDF data. The right-hand photo shows the offset newspaper on the left and illustrates the excellent quality of the digital edition on the right

Photo 4:

Offline finishing of the *Luzerner Zeitung* printed as a digital newspaper on the KBA RotaJET on the Hunkeler exhibition stand

Photo 5 and 6:

Short web paths, precise register, automatic webbing-up, an outstanding web speed of 150 m/min, the production of good copies during start-up and run-down, and the option of an automatic reelstand with integrated reel

logistics, which is unique to KBA, are features which immediately earmark the RotaJET for the printing of short or high personalised newspaper runs and other print products