

European 2018 GUA Conference focused on workflow and cloud innovations as well as opportunities to proactively shape the printing industry transformation

The European Conference of GUA (Graphic Users Association of Kodak Solutions), which has been an annual event since 2005, was held this year in Lisbon, capital of Portugal. Staged in the second week of October, it offered a tightly packed and very varied agenda over a three-day period. Attendees from all over Europe had a chance to get up to date with current industry trends and innovative KODAK technologies, and to obtain first-hand answers to questions.

The GUA Conference provides Kodak and its customers and partners with a valuable platform for intensive exchanges of experience and is a useful forum for discussing print industry and technology trends as well as all the latest developments in the field of KODAK Unified Workflow Solutions and related products. At the same time, the event is a unique opportunity for participants to engage in personal networking. GUA University classes round off the schedule with plentiful options for learning more about specific applications for KODAK's software products.

Cloud services, workflow automation, packaging integration and the integration of digital print production stood out as the most important among a broad array of compelling topics. Presentations and product demonstrations from partners like Creative Edge Software, Microsoft, Perfect Pattern, PrintVis and Ricoh added width and depth to the program. Conference delegates were able to directly address detailed questions and wishes regarding software products and features to developers and senior Kodak executives during a series of round tables. The Kodak Lab, which opened its doors parallel to the conference sessions, was a great place to engage one on one with solution experts to ask questions and receive support specific to their needs. The KODAK Professional Services team, who support users with bespoke integration, process optimization and programming services, had four stands in the Lab.

Print is changing – but exciting opportunities still abound

The keynote speech by Dr. Sean Smyth of Smithers Pira included a comprehensive overview of the current economic situation in the printing market in general in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, which is predicted to continue growing overall between now and 2023 in spite of a slight decline in Western Europe. “The printing industry is changing,” he asserted; “business models are changing in all industries,” and printers are now called upon to adjust accordingly.

Smyth identified huge opportunities for doing print outside traditional print areas: packaging for commercial printers, printed textiles, ceramics and tiles, decorative printing, functional printing (printed electronics, solar panels, biomedical industry) and 3D printing (additive manufacturing). “These are all things that printing companies with an understanding of project management, how to generate a master and reproduce it, are very good at,” he concluded. And against the background of unrelenting price and time pressures, Smyth sees the digital workflow as a central success factor: “The growth in web to print, web to wall, web to whatever is determined and only made possible by workflow.”

Big data, data analytics and cloud services are all the rage

Allan Brown, General Manager Unified Workflow Solutions and Vice President Software Solutions Division, Kodak, confirmed the good growth prospects for print: “Our view is that print is actually booming, we see growth instead of contraction. Kodak heavily supports digital printing both by reducing printer's barriers to add capacity and in making digital more profitable. We are also expanding into the packaging market which is significant as well.”

Brown emphasized that when it comes to software applications, there is an increasing trend towards subscriptions, which are a core aspect of new SaaS solutions like Dynamic Print Planning or the Ink and Plate Usage Service for the PRINERGY Cloud. These also give users more flexibility in terms of their cash flow because no major initial investments are necessary.

Brown simultaneously emphasized the relevance of big data and data analytics: “Big data is very important. Our vision was that we wanted to aggregate the big data that comes out of the shop and make that data usable in order to make the shop smarter. We look at applications in print shops, CTP platesetters, digital printing devices, software, and servers. All of them generate an immense amount of data, and you need data analytics and artificial

intelligence to dig into that data and to interpret it in order to give printers helpful insights and identify sources of savings. We bring things together: smart devices, big data, AI, analytics. This means we are entering the era of smart manufacturing. That is the evolution that we see going on in the industry today.”

Carlo Sans, Worldwide Director of Product Management and Marketing, Software and Solutions Division, Kodak, remarked in his rundown of current technology trends that cloud computing is firmly established today in many industries and is nothing new anymore. And as the cloud, data analytics, machine learning, and the Internet of Things become more readily available, smart manufacturing is rapidly turning into a reality. According to Sans, print service providers who embrace solutions leveraging these cutting-edge technologies will be more competitive in the long run.

Stephen Miller, Product Manager, Software and Solutions Division, Kodak, concurred with this assessment in his review of PRINERGY Cloud services: “The benefits of the cloud far outweigh the challenges. PRINERGY Cloud services offset labor from your IT or prepress teams, put it in our care and automate it.”

Miller also addressed the printing industry’s reservations with regard to cloud data security. He stressed the extremely high level of Cyber Security Protections enjoyed by users of PRINERGY Cloud services based on Microsoft’s Azure Cloud. Miller cited the PRINERGY Cloud Archive and Backup service as an example, where three data copies are automatically stored at a data center in Amsterdam and three more at another data center in Dublin. “The data is encrypted at rest and encrypted in motion and only your PRINERGY server can access it.”

Luis Calado De Sousa, Cloud Solution Architect at Microsoft, was yet another speaker who reported that cloud use has meanwhile gained widespread acceptance across virtually all industries: “The picture has changed totally over the last two years, and we’ve noticed an enormous increase in acceptance of innovative cloud solutions. The fact that in 2018 there are around 5000 partner solutions based on Microsoft’s Azure Cloud is clear evidence of this – and the Kodak solution is one of those.”

Lisbon was well worth the journey

All in all, the attendees returned home well satisfied with the high technical standard and the broad range of issues covered by the GUA Conference 2018. A visitor who works for one of Germany's leading online printers praised the quality of the sessions hosted by Kodak and its partners, stating that the conference had generally been immensely helpful. In the same vein, César Correia, Programmer Analyst at Lidergraf, a Portuguese print service provider, commented: "The value of GUA is great for us. This was our second time here and we value the conference highly. The direct exchange with other people in the industry, especially from other countries, is very useful. We liked the round tables, too, where there was a chance to suggest new features or report problems." His colleague Bárbara Lopes added: "We also took part in the GUA University. I learned a lot about tools that I knew existed but without any idea of how to use them efficiently. Those insights will profit not only me personally but also my co-workers."

Stephen Lavey, President of the EAMER GUA Board, concluded: "I believe this year's GUA Conference has been very enlightening, especially in the light of the changes that are happening to our industry, the demand on resources and education. We have seen here at GUA some great innovation that is coming about; we had a view of what the future is going to look like. We've had great support from the Kodak Lab and KODAK Professional Services and some top-class keynote speakers. This event fundamentally captured the spirit of GUA in knowledge sharing and supporting one another." Finally, he appealed to all Kodak users who are not yet GUA members: "Come and join us! We welcome you with open arms and we are really interested in hearing your problems if you have any but also in showing you how you can help us, share your knowledge and become a member of our community."

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