Owner-operated printing company Druckerei Speh GmbH has been based in Öhringen for over 30 years. Initially operating solely as an offset printer, as a modern print provider the company now offers its customers a wide range of products with a comprehensive, expert service offering.

Druckerei Speh grows to meet the challenge

“With Fiery-RIP we have consciously sought out growth opportunities and added them to our portfolio”
—explains John-Mark Hatton

Druckerei Speh is expanding its digital printing operations with a bizhub PRESS C8000 from Konica Minolta, combined with a Fiery-IC-3600 colour controller from EFI, opening up a host of other growth opportunities for the company.

At first glance, Druckerei Speh in Öhringen looks like any other of the many, typical small and medium-sized print shops in Germany. The company has around 20 employees and offers both offset and digital printing. The service provider’s customers, primarily from the Hohenlohe region, are offered a complete range of printed communications. The service ranges from design through to the finished printed article, with the focus on custom solutions and maximum flexibility as well as guaranteed quality and on-time order processing.

This is why we consciously avoid outsourcing, emphasises boss, Harald Speh: “Customer loyalty is important to us, so our staff members keep in direct contact with our customers. Taking the ‘direct route’ means that queries can be quickly resolved, which ensures smooth-running workflows for both parties.”
Around 70 percent of sales relate to offset printing, with the digital print volume very much on the increase. This can be traced back primarily to the trend for smaller runs and personalised print. This is why the focus of investment is firmly on digital printing. With the recent investment in the bizhub PRESS C8000 digital colour production system, actuated via a Fiery-IC-3600 colour controller from EFI, the company has considerably expanded its capacities and set its course towards further growth in digital printing.

Product and business development is a management issue
So far, the history reads like so many others. However, Druckerei Speh differs from common or garden print companies in one key point. What stands out is how intensively the company is focussing on product and business development. Daniel Speh has made it a management issue, and as a result is driving things forward personally. Here the company is dedicated to not only selling printed products to its customers, but offering total solutions extending beyond the printed page. For example, they are working closely with a retail consulting group and developing products for sales promotions. Another example of this is the in-house agency project, Vision, that in addition to standard agency services, offers a special full service for IT companies with the tailored production of manuals, packaging and software CDs. Ready-made complete packages are available to customers on request. Druckerei Speh is currently concentrating heavily on the issue of how the internet can be used to implement an additional sales channel. Here the aim is to create both open and closed shop solutions. The intention is to generate additional volume for digital printing via these sales channels.

The attractive price/performance ratio was the deciding factor
The bizhub PRESS C8000 was installed in July, and new business followed immediately afterwards. The new projects included a student newspaper of around 250 pages and a run of 500 units. “Previously we only used to produce the colour covers for student newspapers. With the bizhub PRESS C8000 we can now offer customers an attractive price for products with multicolour throughout, and it also enables us to manage large volumes efficiently for such projects”, assures John-Mark Hatton, Head of Digital Print. The entry into colour digital production printing around seven years ago for Druckerei Speh was achieved with a system from Konica Minolta, specifically a CF 5001, where the company gained its initial experiences.
As the company’s Head of Digital Print reiterates, the next system generation, the bizhub PRESS C6500, represented a quantum leap in terms of quality, productivity and availability. “Konica Minolta has done its homework and is an appealing partner from our point of view, able to provide us with expertise in business development for digital printing, but also actively supporting us with standardisation issues.” This positive experience and the attractive price/performance ratio ultimately tipped the scales in favour of the bizhub PRESS C8000. “With 500 brochures we don’t even have to think about it any more, we simply produce them using digital printing. And the issue of substrate is becoming less and less important”, highlights Harald Speh. For example, coated offset papers can be processed considerably better using the machine, which in turn gives the company much more flexibility to move orders from offset to digital printing – although this is not the primary goal in itself, but rather to reel in additional jobs with the system.

A new level of quality assurance
In the first three months alone, the service provider has succeeded in tripling the print volume with the new system. The original plan to decommission the bizhub PRO C65000, had to be abandoned. It is now used as a back-up and to cover production peaks. In addition to the high level of performance, John-Mark Hatton particularly values one feature of the bizhub PRESS C8000 in particular; the CRS technology that automatically measures the density and modifies the setpoint values accordingly. This represents a new level of quality assurance for digital printing because with this solution the paper is also included, not just the transfer belt.

The basis for solid, offset-equivalent quality is provided by a resolution of 1200 x 1200 dpi at a colour depth of 8 bit. Various raster algorithms also provide a very attractive quality level. The Öhringen company is also impressed with the variety of media: The range extends from 64 to 350 g/m², across all cartridges. Thanks to the relatively low fixing temperature, the choice of media has been increased once more. From every sheet, the bizhub PRESS C8000 detects the paper position and directs it accurately, where necessary. The result is a baseline alignment of +/- 0.5 mm. From John-Mark Hatton’s point of view, these features are blurring the boundaries between offset and digital printing. “We buy printing services and not printing methods. Just because a customer only needs a small run, he is not prepared to accept reduced quality”, reflects the Head of Digital Print.
Druckerei Speh has gone full throttle with the implementation of the bizhub PRESS C8000 right from the start, and decided in favour of the Fiery-IC-3600 colour controller from EFI. Staff members were already familiar with using the Fiery platform, so not a moment’s thought was given to considering any other RIP system. Staff can use the Fiery Command WorkStation to send print jobs to both digital printing systems directly from their workstation, increasing flexibility in the entire workflow.

Growth opportunities introduced at the company
The server is fundamentally designed for challenging production environments. Four processors ensure efficient data preparation, even with complex projects such as personalisation. In comparative tests against earlier Fiery platforms, it has been shown that the server is around 60 percent faster. “We have designed the RIP to avoid hitting our performance limits right at the start. In addition, replacing an RIP whilst a project is underway is simply not an option for commercial reasons. With the Fiery-RIP we have consciously opened up new opportunities for growth at the company”, explains John-Mark Hatton, at the same time providing an example of what he wants to utilise this potential for. He now has his sights on personalised printed materials that he would like to see the company moving forward with in the next few years along with their customers.

In terms of the range of functions, the Head of Digital Print assures us that the Fiery is functioning without a hitch, but that not all the opportunities are being exploited as yet. In connection with the planned internet shops in particular, the subject of process automation and preflight is gaining in importance, and the Fiery platform has a lot to offer here as well. Much is also promised by the Fiery image optimisation that automatically corrects all the images in a document and standardises the quality level, reiterates John-Mark Hatton. In addition to all the technical features, the fact that the company is now partnered with EFI, who is backing the company all the way and helping drive the organisation forward, is a very positive development. All this taken together makes EFI an important partner for Druckerei Speh.