



Photo and collage: agency Flächenbrand, Mainz

# Potentials of digital print – how to tell my kid?

**The digital print branch certainly doesn't do itself any favours: First of all it doesn't look beyond its own technology-nose, and secondly the contact to the next generation, the wrights of tomorrow, is missing, which was discovered recently by the Digital Printing Forum (DDF) in Mainz, Germany. Therefore, there was an invitation extended to the first DDF Next-Generation roundtable in Mainz, whereby offspring from both the marketing and the creative side were invited to enter into discussion with the old guys from the industry.**

Claim and reality gape apart: The next-generation ambassadors of marketing and creation, as well as the print buyers, are not appropriately – or sufficiently – informed about the advantages and the benefits of digitally printed products.

Digital print isn't sweepingly positioned as 'new media' technology. Digital print products (especially with variable data and controlled via print platforms via the Internet) are not profiled as a new communication channel. With digital print, the benefit and return on communication are neither qualifiable nor quantifiable.

The consequence is: digital print is still not a natural part of the communication era.

## First things first

The impulse to the round table was given by a meeting of Rodion Amin, corporate communications executive of Océ Ger-

many; Heiner Stix, director of the agency konzeptundform; and DDF spokesperson Andreas Weber, Mainz. It quickly became apparent, that the claim to digital print as an innovation-technology and reality gape far apart. Andreas Weber designates the status quo: "The individual communication, the personal address of the customer and new working communication models with print are missing." Digital print still isn't a natural component of the communication period and least of all part of our "digital lifestyles".

An important cause is that the industry is mainly busy with insider issues. Technology-developers mostly bring the dialogue with printers to the question: Which one is the better printing method? Offset or digital print?

Instead of comparing apples and oranges, we should ask ourselves – as a basic idea – why digital print and the deriving new communication forms with print still aren't part

of the education of the offspring in the era of networking. It's a fact, that the new generation doesn't come into touch with the chances and possibilities of digital print, neither in marketing nor in their creative education. Reasons, therefore are on the one hand, the lacking measureability of the return on communication as a concrete use for commercials, as likely as the fact that digital print wasn't noticeable as a new media technology and positioned comprehensible until now.

According to Rodion Amin that's the reason why everybody in this industry has to rethink radically to be able to face the challenges of the new generation. An important step towards this for Amin was the DDF round table, at which for the first time, young creatives and marketing professionals were given sight of marketing opportunities and challenges, which are, or at least should be, the focus.



### Creative offspring: digital print matches with Web 2.0

It is hardly ever, or not at all, recognised that digital print is an important possibility of the one-to-one, or respectively, one-to-few communication. A campaign invariably contains TV-spots, notifications and the Internet indeed, but only rarely includes digital print. Kai Geweniger, communication designer and partner in the young creative agency Flächenbrand, Mainz, stated: "Digital print is completely missing the sexiness and attraction of the World Wide Web. Every company wants to create something for its brand on the Internet without knowing exactly what Web 2.0 means. This enthusiasm and dynamic is missing with digital print." And he continues: "Creatives cannot estimate the overvalue of digital print because they don't learn anything about it in their (college or) university-education."

Indeed digital print contains very versatile possibilities especially for extraordinary commercial-forms, but, however, for Geweniger the association predominates, that the biggest profit is made by the highest possible print volume. So there have to be new ideas and one of these would be the topical isolation of digital print and the normal print technique. The closeness to Web 2.0 indicates the transfer of similar concepts to carry out crossmedia - scenarios with print and online.

### Marketing offspring: facts are missing

But how can digital print convince as a device for the innovation of brand communication? Agencies and marketeers are

scared because of nescience, not to be able to achieve the wishes of the customers, for example like concerning quality claims and assurance. Therefore, digital print isn't even offered as an option. Especially agency-creatives and costumer consultants usually don't have sufficient technical know-how.

Melchior D. Bryant, Research and Teaching assistant, department of business administration and marketing, University of Mannheim, explains: "The agency is not able to communicate the overvalue, the advantages to the customer without (some level of doubt?) doubts. The brand manager needs numbers, facts, certificates... to set up his budget-decisions." Concerning this issue it would be useful to verify the overvalue which can be offered by digital print, in a study. That's because customers can only be convinced by something new when you can show facts and possibilities to compare.

It's a fact that there are no longterm-studies about the subject of digital print. Normally there are only individual studies about single cases- and this only every three- to four-years. But not only significant numbers and facts are lacking. "At the expositions print samples and machines are shown. Furthermore, there are no efforts made to document the real benefit. The simple comparison to the other print methods hardly shows the advantages of digital print," underlines Andreas Weber.

### Consequences: Create facts!

Despite all efforts an appropriate know-how-transfer has not taken place in the 15 year old history of digital print. To give corresponding arguments not only to the offspring but also to the commercial driving

forces and the brand owners, "prototypes, which reach also the marketing decision maker" are missing, says Melchior Bryant. He states, that there is an urgent need for an independent certification instance, to check the benefit of digital print.

The first DDF-next generation round table has consequently set important impulses to re-position the *brand* "digital print" anew. But there is still essential and convincing work to do, so that digital print can take the part in the communication period, which it is finally able to afford: a new media technology, which develops new communication channels.

Océ Germany communication chief Amin believes that the next generation round table is on the right track. At drupa 2008 they are going to meet again to discuss intensively, the structure and the financial possibilities concerning the favoured digital print study, as likely as the issue education contains.

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### About the author

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