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Company headquarters in Steinhagen-Brockhagen, Germany

Trailblazing in flexographic printing applications: CEOs Andreas Kotthaus and Günther Weber (from right to left) have helped to make Flex-Punkt Druckformen GmbH a prominent figure in the market

Various products: Flex-Punkt printing plates and sleeves are used to print packaging film, paper bags, labels, napkins and table coverings

A PARTICULAR STRENGTH: SUPPORT RIGHT UP TO THE PRINTING MACHINE

Flex-Punkt, located in the west of Germany, has found excellent leverage for winning over new customers in the flexography market with DuPont™ Cyrel® round technology

Andreas Kotthaus and Günther Weber founded the company in 1994 that specialized in the manufacture of analogue flexographic printing plates. As Günther Weber recalls "In the beginning we basically worked on overnight 'snapshot' jobs for well-established companies. Then in 1995 we brought a ground-breaking idea to the market. We combined flat printing plates with sleeves which we mounted on site to ensure a more precisely registered job was delivered directly to the printing machine. It soon became necessary to set up a repro department with a Macintosh and a license for ArtPro by Artwork Systems. In 1998 the first foray into digital technology (with the first CtP exposure unit) was finally complete. Flex-Punkt Druckformen GmbH employed more than ten workers in the first five years of the new century and had already doubled its production area three times over by then. Günther Weber, CEO, is proud to announce today that "our company has consistently and steadily grown year after year."
The printing plate manufacturer has been serviced by DuPont Imaging Technologies, a division of DuPont de Nemours Deutschland GmbH (Neu-Isenburg, Germany), since its foundation. This cooperation extends beyond the implementation of modern manufacturing technology and the use of various plate materials. For example, user training sessions are held regularly at the system supplier's premises. "Flex-Punkt has always been a trailblazer in major projects, and we have supported the company along its path with our technical knowledge and individual solutions," announced DuPont.

Register accuracy is only one benefit

One of the most important investments was the DuPont™ Cyrel® round technology equipment in 2004, designed to manufacture continuous seamless photopolymer sleeves. The costs of this new procurement amounted to € 750,000. Air cylinders and adapter sleeves for imaging of the print forms as well as spindles and end caps for handling within the manufacturing line needed to be procured, in addition to properly equipped transportation vehicles. Yet the benefits were obvious to the printing plate manufacturer and their customers as in the end the technology helped to standardize the flexographic printing process. Because there is a wide variety of printing plates, adhesive tapes and support devices in the market, Flex-Punkt needed to narrow down their offering to two products (Cyrel® round Classic and Cyrel® round Thin) to improve consistency and standardisation. Register accuracy utilizing the Cyrel® round system has consequently reached a level of precision that has impressed customers to the extent that several of them now use polymer round forms even for jobs requiring only a few thousand running meters.

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"Advancing Flexography"

And this dynamic company has not curbed its investments over the last few years either: the capacity of the repro department was increased to seven ArtPro stations in 2006 and, that same year, a GMG proofing system for professional colour management was integrated into the workflow. A year later, the company relocated to Steinhagen-Brockhagen, Germany, from the city of Halle, to provide improved working conditions for a smooth workflow in its expanded production area (nearly 1,200 m²). In addition it purchased a new drying unit and a second CtP laser exposure unit. "We also purchased high-performance measuring equipment and expanded our quality management system in accordance with DIN ISO 9001:2000, which we had been regularly recertifying since 1995. This move made it possible to acquire major customers," notes Günther Weber.

DuPont™ Cyrel® round manufacturing plant

The customer base at the company is broad: it includes packaging printers for tobacco products, soft drinks, and personal hygiene products, manufacturers of paper bags for animal feed, and narrow web label printers. The customers are located in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Holland. Flex-Punkt has specialized in printing plates for flexible packaging (accounting for around 70 percent of the business), including heavy-duty shrink film for beverage packaging, high-quality printed and coated packaging film, and "sensitive" products for tissue production (e.g. napkins). This last business activity has become highly focused and energized due to Flex-Punkt's specialist knowledge and the ability to vary substrates to match the various customer requirements. The technicians within the company have gained lots of experience and have become highly proficient in their technical skills which have been gained over several years of on-the-job experience. According to the company, the DuPont™ Cyrel® round technology has aided them in reaching this position with their customers. The overall commitment made by the supplier and user together has paid off well to both companies' mutual advantage.

Partner for printers and their customers

Today Flex-Punkt mainly processes plate materials from DuPont (and also from two other providers), manufacturing plate heights ranging from 0.045 inch to 0.185 inch (1.14 to 4.7 mm). It also offers a variety of sleeve widths (14.17 inch to 61.81 inch, or 360 to 1,570 mm) available with the corresponding sleeve circumferences (11.81 inch to 35.43 inch, or 300 to 900 mm). Support services for printers also take on a prominent role. All details of colour management are well coordinated with customers, print characteristic curves are established and test forms are provided, helping customers to keep close control over even the most difficult orders. "We sometimes even stand over the machine in the evening to make sure that the print order begins on time and is carried out without problems," emphasises Günther Weber. "We've coordinated and managed numerous success stories over the years, including ones not involving printers directly." Company personnel are often involved in providing direct support to brand owners from the soft drinks and personal hygiene sectors when they require promotional packaging for product launches. In this case the printer who is working with the end customer receives the materials directly however the order is generally processed by the commissioned advertising agency. "We are lucky to be able to have a say in the concept and design stage of development, for example, if current technology stands in the way of an idea being implemented using flexographic printing or if our technology may help or improve a particular design feature," notes the CEO.

Final "test run" at manufacturer: Individual printing plates were combined to form complete print forms on this round assembly machine and proofing press

This ambitious German company is well prepared to face the future due to its broad customer base, in particular its partnerships with printers. Turnover has nearly doubled over the last five years. In turn this situation provides long-term job security for workers, and company trainees can join their ranks as the need arises. There are currently 22 employees on the team, including 2 new trainees specifically employed for the repro department and the manufacture of printing plates. Andreas Kotthaus and Günther Weber are confident that because of the difficulty of finding highly qualified personnel the training that they can give to their employees will ensure continued business growth for the company as well as high skill sets for the individual.

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