

ORWO leading the conversion from silver halide to HP Indigo Digital solution



AT A GLANCE

Industry: Photo Specialty

Business name: ORWO Net GmbH

Headquarters: Wolfen/Germany

Website: www.orwonet.de
www.pixelnet.de
www.fotoquelle.de



www.pixelnet.de

CHALLENGE

- Converting high-volume silver halide production, due to rising costs of materials, to an efficient, high productivity and lower cost digital print solution.

SOLUTION

- HP Indigo press 5000
- HP Indigo 7000 Digital Press
- HP Indigo 7500 Digital Press
- HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press

RESULTS

- Annual sales growth of 40 per cent through digital printing business.
- Rapid processing of incoming orders at peak summer and winter periods thanks to high-performance HP Indigo Digital Presses.
- High customer retention due to the exceptional quality of the digital photo products.
- Swift realisation of new digital printing product ideas thanks to close relationship with HP.
- Excellent customer service thanks to efficient, integrated production lines comprising HP Indigo Digital Presses and downstream machines.
- Low manual effort due to integration of digital presses and cutting systems.
- Thirty per cent cost savings for printing 10 x 15 photos digitally compared to using silver halide.

“The HP Indigo Digital Presses allow us to produce and deliver digital photo products, such as photo calendars and photobooks, in high volumes swiftly and without compromising on quality. Thanks to the HP Presses, we are able to respond fully to demanding market requirements and therefore offer both our retail partners and the end consumer a premium service.”

– Peter Ulbricht, managing director of ORWO Net GmbH



ORWO is one of Germany's largest photo laboratories, with a staff of 280 and revenues of more than €36 million. It is based in Wolfen in the German state of Sachsen-Anhalt, and operates laboratories in Wiesbaden, Germany and Tønder, Denmark.

The company has two distinct sales channels; it targets consumers direct through its own online portals, ORWO direkt, PixelNet and Foto Quelle and as a third-party supplier to established retail partners. Approximately 90 per cent of sales are generated from the business-to-consumer segment. Revenues have grown 40 per cent per annum in recent years, largely thanks to its digital printing business.

Tackling 10,000 calendars a day, with capacity for more

Digital products account for around 20 per cent of ORWO's total sales, with this segment rising by 40 per cent a year. ORWO has used HP Indigo Digital Presses since the early days of digital, buying an HP Indigo press 5000 as its first system. “It was apparent to us even then that traditional silver halide photos were on the way out and the future would belong to the digital print business,” explains Peter Ulbricht, managing director of ORWO.

ORWO now has five HP Indigo Digital Presses to keep up with the growing demand for photobooks, calendars and greeting cards. In addition to two HP Indigo press 5000s, it has an HP Indigo 7000 Digital Press, an HP Indigo 7500 Digital Press and recently acquired a roll-fed press, the HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press.

The company purchased the HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press to produce photo calendars, including premium photo calendars formerly produced on silver halide. ORWO uses E-Photo Lustre photobook paper from Felix Schoeller, which is specially developed to offer true photographic quality for prints from HP Indigo presses. Once printed, the photos will be automatically transferred to a laminating machine, connected downstream of the HP Indigo, to add a high-gloss finish. Ulbricht couldn't be happier. “For the first time, we'll be able to produce high-gloss photo calendars with comparable quality to calendars printed on photographic silver halide machines.”

The HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press not only delivers photographic print quality, but its larger image size of 980mm x 317mm enables oversize calendars, large lay-flat books and efficient imposition for 10 x 15cm prints.

As the company's only simplex press, the HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press demonstrated its high print capacity during the peak period at the end of 2011, printing the majority of December's 200,000 photo calendar orders at a rate of about 10,000 calendars a day. During this period, the press was fully operational for about 18 hours a day. According to Ulbricht, “everything went like clockwork; the press excelled during continuous operation, printing at a speed of 30 metres per minute. The press performed admirably and delivered an exceptional print quality.”

Ulbricht adds, “In fact, without the HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press, we simply would not have managed. The HP Indigo Digital Presses allow us to produce and deliver our products in high volumes within a very short time frame – without compromising on quality.”

HP production line incorporates a Hunkeler cutting system

ORWO's efficiency in calendar production is due, in part, to its high level of automation, including roll-related and downstream activities. For instance, the HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press is connected to a cutting system made by Swiss company Hunkeler AG, which cuts the calendars to size for the final product.

“Thanks to this integrated production line, we no longer need to have two employees to cut and sort the sheets during every shift,” says Ulbricht. To further improve efficiency, he plans to connect the HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press to the calendar punching machine. This will avoid placing the calendars in temporary storage before transferring them to the punching and binding machine.

This quest for greater efficiency is the reason ORWO uses an HP SmartStream Production Pro Print Server, a RIP and print controller for handling large quantities of jobs, including complex print jobs. This offline solution separates the workflow from the print process and transfers it to the pre-press environment. This allows ORWO to control its digital presses with automatic load balancing.

For the future, ORWO plans to use the HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press to print new products, including 30 cm x 30 cm calendars, 30 cm x 90 cm calendars, square digital photobooks with customised covers, lay-flat photobooks and even bigger book formats.

The company's ultimate ambition is for the HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press to print 10 x 15 photos. “The number of silver halide photographic prints we're producing is falling all the time,” says Ulbricht. “At some point, the process is going to die out. Once we have the technology, it will happen very quickly.”

Digital photo production around 30 per cent cheaper than silver halide

Replacing silver halide represents an attractive option in financial terms. The investment costs for digital presses and peripherals are approximately the same as for the silver halide process. However, with the rising price of silver and unchanging page impressions, digital photos cost approximately 30 per cent less to produce than silver halide.

Furthermore, by scaling back its silver halide photo production, ORWO can reduce the environmental impact of the waste water and electrolysis procedure for recovering silver. “By comparison, photo production using the HP Indigo Digital Presses is incredibly clean,” says Ulbricht.

“HP Indigo is helping us to continue growing – both through the quality of the print products and the efficient production operation. Our partnership with HP ultimately enables us to keep making new product ideas a reality, ensuring we continue to remain ahead of the game in this highly competitive business.”

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