



Eclectic ambience instead of modern architecture - the conversation in the coworking space Würzburg starts with a look into the past. However, Peter Reich and Holger Fröbel (from left) prefer to talk about the current challenges in the packaging industry.

“Packaging is a printed product with a future”

Peter Reich from Constantia Flexibles knows all the packaging trends – he has worked for what feels like an eternity for a company that is undoubtedly one of the leaders in the industry. He accepted TrueColors’ invitation and met Holger Fröbel – a packaging expert himself – on this sunny afternoon in the Würzburg coworking space. His company, Fröbel Medientechnik, supports packaging service providers with know-how and intelligent solutions to optimize their processes – especially in the area of color management.

TrueColors: Mr. Reich, how does that actually fit together – you actively experienced the beginnings of digitization. And today, many years later, the subject is more topical than ever. Is the digital future a thing of the past?

Peter Reich: In any case, the digital future and my vita are a great match! I started my career as an information electronics engineer. With my know-how, I was pretty far ahead when digitization was still in its infancy.

Holger Fröbel: That’s a funny coincidence! I studied information technology in Chemnitz. Immediately after graduation, I incidentally ended up in the graphic arts industry.

Two old hands meet in Würzburg ...

Holger Fröbel: Digitization has a lot to do with information processing. That’s my background. Even though we started selling DTP systems in 1995.

A lot has happened since then, right?

Holger Fröbel: Massively! In fact, our business has changed completely since then. Today we would be better described as engineers who develop and implement customized solutions. We are very specific about the hardware and software we sell. In addition, about 15 years ago, we made the radical decision to concentrate fully on the packaging market. Many printed things can be converted into digital media very easily. Packaging is different. For me, packaging is a printed product with a future.

Constantia presumably has the same opinion.

Peter Reich: Sure. That’s why everything for us revolves around packaging – with a specific focus on pharmaceuticals and consumer packaging. Around 60 percent of our business is consumer products. Roughly 80 percent of all yogurt lids in Europe are produced by us.

Where our market share for chocolate Easter bunnies and Santa Clauses, is circa 80 percent globally.

Sounds like most of the leading brands practically hold the door open for each other at Constantia.

Peter Reich: Yes, that’s fair to say. Of course, we are proud of that and we take this role very seriously, for example with regard to confidentiality in connection with new products. There really isn’t anything confidential lying around.

Mr. Fröbel, in your role as a solutions provider, you liaise with both large and small companies. 80 percent market share in any industry is exceptional. Can you say to what extent the challenges of smaller market players differ from those in the Constantia League?

Holger Fröbel: The range is, of course, huge – from small companies with two or three employees to large internationally-operating companies with multiple sites. All the same, companies large or small have very similar or even identical challenges. All of them have to serve their customers as best as possible and deliver highest print quality. Of course, the large, global players do have many unique challenges.

What are you thinking of?

Holger Fröbel: I notice the increasing concentration of providers in many market segments. Company acquisitions lead to ever larger organizations with new challenges, such as the flexible fulfillment of orders across different locations with varying production conditions. This requires unique solutions, not least in the area of color management.

Consistent results across multiple locations and varying production processes require sophisticated color management solutions.



Holger Fröbel: On the whole, I'd say that packaging print is of very high quality.

How can small packaging printers sustain their position?

Holger Fröbel: Small firms can score points with more individuality in service and products. In terms of quality, however, the bar is just as high for the small providers as it is for the big companies. On the whole, it can be said that packaging printing is of very high quality. After all, the quality of the packaging is a direct reflection on the quality of the goods inside, and correct color reproduction is one of the most important criteria.

Mr. Fröbel, based on your experience with large and small companies in the packaging industry: can you describe an overarching trend?

Holger Fröbel: Low volume productions. Clearly. Short run packaging projects are on the rise!

Peter Reich: Absolutely correct. This is a huge topic for the packaging industry.

What are the reasons for smaller volumes?

Holger Fröbel: More diversification, shorter launch cycles and more frequent offers. Legal requirements are changing more often. Warehousing is a thing of the past as more and more manufacturers strive for on-demand production. Instead of 20,000 folding boxes, the client now orders just 680 pieces.

Peter Reich: We see this trend too. Although not quite to that extent. We definitely wouldn't print 680 pieces. At least not analogue – in digital printing we produce even a one-off. This is certainly not possible in flexo- or gravure-printing.

Does Constantia then look more to digital printing?

Peter Reich: Our sales team are estimating how often we will deliver these 680 pieces. Could we possibly print



No sight of convenience – Peter Reich (left) and Holger Fröbel (right) know that the packaging industry has to keep moving.

4,000 pouches analogue, store them and deliver them on demand in batches?

Logistics make it possible.

Peter Reich: In theory, yes. We are very well placed in that respect. We have a large warehouse for the storage of finished goods.

Holger Fröbel: Print jobs move between the different printing processes depending on where they can be most efficiently produced. For instance, we are seeing a shift from gravure to flexo and from flexo to digital, but we equally experience projects moving in the opposite direction. Whichever the printing process, as a manufacturer, I have to be able to achieve comparable color results across all processes.

Efficiency and quality must be seen as equal and with reliable color management, print approvals should merely be a formality. Mr. Reich, are your customers still planning overnight stays when they come to approve a job on press?

Peter Reich: I have the impression that the number of overnight stays is decreasing (laughs). After all, a lot has happened in recent years, including a change in our mindset. In the past, a digital proof was only used as a guide but today, with the support of GMG, we have reached a level in color management where our proofs, including special colors, are accepted by all parties as a binding reference.

And what about the hotel stay?

Peter Reich: It's not a case of starting to get the machine ready when the customer arrives. No, the first sheet is ready and waiting on the light box. And this sheet is very, very close to the proof. The tweaks we make now are really about design nuances. I guess, that's unfortunately bad news for our hoteliers.



Photo: Johannes Kiefer

Peter Reich: Whatever is approved here, we can guarantee to reproduce exactly that.

With digital printing there isn't anything to adjust – does prepress therefore have more responsibility?

Peter Reich: Definitely yes. My vision is to pull the print approval further forward. To the screen and the proof. Whatever is approved here, we can guarantee to reproduce exactly. We can easily do this at distance via a remote proof. Something we already do across sites internally and with various customers with great success. This is of course a hot topic when dealing with a global pandemic.

The solution has long been there. GMG ColorProof GO, GMG ColorServer, GMG OpenColor, and the plugin – are we only talking about perceptual barriers?

Peter Reich: It's our job to establish trust. The first three have to bravely cross the glass bridge before everyone else follows.

Holger Fröbel: Correct! Technology is great, but acceptance is key, even within the company. In principle, we should bring all stakeholders around the table and dispel any possible reservations. Due to the complex value chain, this often remains a hopeful wish.

Innovation is part of the graphic arts industry like color is part of printing

Holger Fröbel: Nobody will argue that. However, it takes time for new ideas to become established.

Take multicolor print for example. We've been working with that for a while but it has only recently been fully embraced by brands and manufacturers alike. One reason for this; the growing acceptance of digital printing, which is multicolor by default. Another reason is the time and cost pressures that the packaging industry constantly has to deal with.

Peter Reich: Multicolor is coming. But now machine manufacturers have to step up to the plate too. In gravure printing for example, 'fit' is one of the biggest issues. Color isn't an issue, as with GMG we are in full control. At our site in Mexico, we produce bags of chips with multicolor in flexo printing for instance. No issues at all.

Constantia Flexibles is embracing new technologies, especially in prepress. How do you do that?

Peter Reich: We try to get everyone involved and motivated. Younger operators are also much more open-minded. That generation grew up with automation and standards. The whole company benefits from this. The standardized work – for example with GMG ColorPlugin – also takes pressure off. Jobs can now be shared within a team or even across different sites and the results are always identical.

Holger Fröbel: Definitely. The tasks in prepress are changing. We are talking more and more about controlling and optimizing processes instead of working with a paintbrush. It is the prepress that ensures efficiency in the pressroom. One thing is certain: The opportunities of digitization are huge for everyone in the packaging industry.

Mr. Reich, Mr. Froebel, thank you very much for this interesting exchange.