



24.03.2020 / Melanie Suhner

## “I think working with machines is cool”

**Even as a child, I always liked to do things by hand. At school, my favorite subjects were handicrafts, visual, technical and digital design. However, I never thought at the time that my professional path would one day lead me to paper and machines.**

When I'm asked what kind of training I'm doing and I answer, "print media processor specializing in binding technology" (that is what it is actually called today – it used to simply be called industrial bookbinder), I often see a great deal of amazement in my friends' faces. "Print what...?" is their initial reaction. When I explain my work in more detail to my colleagues, many respond with surprise: "Oh, that sounds interesting, I'd never have imagined that."

### **Such a petite woman on such massive machines**

There are probably two reasons why many of my friends are so surprised. One reason is a manufacturing one. In fact, many people think that a product is finished after printing and do not know that the signatures still have to be saddle-stitched or perfect-bound after leaving the printing press. The other reason probably has to do with me: Many are astonished that such a petite woman handles such massive systems. But I find it cool to work with machines.

Back in my childhood, I liked doing handicrafts. I always made presents together with my mother before Christmas, Easter and birthdays. At school, my favorite subjects were first handicrafts, and later also visual, technical and digital design. But, to be honest, at that time, I'd never have imagined that my professional path would lead me to paper and machines.

### Golden tip from the elder brother

When it came to choosing a career, I first tried out the retail trade because my mother works in that sector. But – sorry, mom – I didn't like it much. Nevertheless, the golden tip for my professional career came from my family. My brother, who is two years older than me, was in the middle of his apprenticeship as a print media processor specializing in binding technology (he still works in our industry) and said: "Why don't you take a look at this – I think you might be interested."

Because just like him, I'm as good at math as he is (interjection Hansjörg Dietrich\*: "When we recruit apprentices, we always look at the math grade first") and logical thinking. And we both have a flair for craftsmanship and no fear of dust. And no sooner said than done. I wrote a few applications to bookbinderies (interjection Hansjörg Dietrich: "That's how we find most apprentices") in my region and promptly landed a bull's eye at the [An der Reuss](#) bookbindery in Lucerne.

Hansjörg Dietrich invited me to a one-week trial apprenticeship. As it suited both sides, I was accepted shortly thereafter and signed the apprenticeship contract. (Interjection Hansjörg Dietrich: "Four of our last five trainees have been women. We also count on women power to manage our family-run business. My wife Catherine, who is responsible for controlling and personnel administration, is a member of the Executive Board, Sandra Hirschi is a member of the Board of Directors")



*Melanie Suhner also acts as a „model“ for advertising apprenticeships at the An der Reuss bookbindery in Lucerne.*

### The vocational school as a fun factor

In the meantime, I'm already in the final months of my four-year apprenticeship. Once I'd gotten to know the company better, I gradually acquired the courage to work on the various machines. First cut, then fold - 4s, 8s, 16s, zigzag. That gave me a good feeling for paper. By the third year of my apprenticeship, I'd reached the point where I was able to work as an independent machine operator on the Primera E140 saddle stitcher from Muller Martini. It felt really cool to get such a big machine running by myself. I really like working on this saddle stitcher, as it has a simple control panel and can be set up quickly. Next May, I will also take my final practical apprenticeship exam on the Primera E140.

Speaking of examinations: Parallel to my practical work, I'm also attending the [School of Design](#) in Bern. In the first and second year of apprenticeship, there were two school days per week; in the third and fourth year, there was one more day. There, too, it was first about paper before we increasingly went into the technology of all finishing systems in more depth – including booklines, although we don't make hardcover products at all at An der Reuss. I also learned about operational accounting. For me, school has the same fun factor as working on the machines. I have never enjoyed going to school as much as I do now and have acquired a great deal of expertise over time.

### **The forgotten ruler in the cutting machine...**

I talk about this in greater detail with Patrick Strotz, the apprentice officer at our company, and his deputy Peter Meier. I maintain a lively exchange of ideas with both of them and learn a lot in the process. They're also forgiving when I make a mistake – like at the beginning of my apprenticeship, for example, when I forgot to remove a ruler from the cutting machine and promptly made a big nick in the knife.

The corporate philosophy at An der Reuss is based on constructive criticism and is solution-oriented – and family-like interaction is a trademark. I know practically all the other 40 employees and enjoy coming to work every morning. That's why I'd like to stay at the company after my apprenticeship. (Interjection Hansjörg Dietrich: "The last three apprenticeship graduates are still working at our company and I expect that we will also continue to employ Melanie Suhner.").

### **Longer, more complex texts preferably on paper**

I don't have an actual career plan as far as my further professional career is concerned. I'll see what the future brings and, after completing my training, I look forward to continuing to show what I've learned every day. I find it fascinating to make finished print products that others then have in their hands. I've also been in bookstores where I've thought to myself: "Wow, I made this book!"

Of course, we often discuss the importance of print in today's world at vocational school and that the boom years in our industry are likely over. But I'm convinced that print has a future. Sure, I'm also more likely to read short news items from around the world on my smartphone these days. But I like to have a book – I'm especially fond of mangas – or a magazine in my hand, and I much prefer to read longer, more complex texts on paper. That's why I've also subscribed to the Swiss magazine [Reportagen](#), which appears six times a year and contains interesting stories from around the world.

### **Live at the installation of the new perfect binder**

Of course, I'm pleased as an employee that the An der Reuss bookbindery also believes in the future of the graphic arts industry and its recent investment in a new [Alegro](#) perfect binder sends a sign of strength not only externally but also internally. I may not be a huge softcover expert, but it was exciting to see live how the Muller Martini technicians set up such a large machine in our company. And I think it is cool to see the new possibilities in product design – Swiss brochures, for example – that the Alegro offers us.

"Hansjörg Dietrich (Head of Operations & Technology), together with his brother Urs Dietrich (Head of Sales), is the owner of the bookbindery established in 1946 on the Reuss river, where he has also been responsible for apprentice recruitment and further training for many years.

Your

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