



Pascal Ruch

## Online Components Will Remain Important Even After the Corona Crisis

**The corona pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation in the graphic arts industry as well. For example, more and more machine demos for customers are taking place online. Pascal Ruch, Head of the Print Finishing Center at Muller Martini in Zofingen, is convinced that virtual components will remain important even after the corona crisis.**

My job has changed a lot during the corona pandemic in two ways. On the one hand, the numerous online demonstrations keep me on my toes. Second, planning instructor assignments has become much more complex due to global travel restrictions.

### **Professional video equipment**

With the online demos, we address not only customers who are interested in a new machine, but also our internal service technicians. Of course, we don't jump around the machines with our cell phones during the demonstrations. Instead, we very quickly acquired professional equipment: three cameras (two with tripods, one mobile), the best sound technology and a mixing console with screens for the „director“.

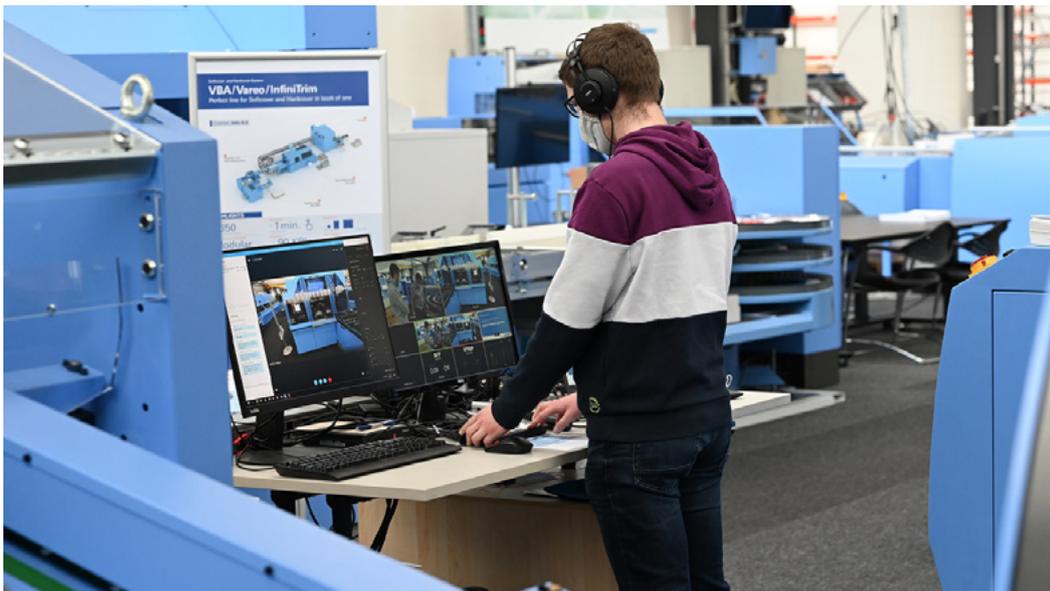
The technology is supervised by our own video team, which very quickly learned how to operate the individual elements in a learning-by-doing process. I have also learned a lot myself over the past few months. We often use trainees for the online demos. Not only do they enjoy this work – which is quite physically demanding, by the way – but they also see it as the perfect complement to their apprenticeship at Muller Martini. This is because they learn

a lot about the individual machines, get to know a lot about the sales process and see live how digital transformation is also gaining importance in the graphic arts industry, which is dominated by paper.

### **When online demonstrations lead to sales**

The fact that in Zofingen in the corona year 2020, thanks to online demos, we have not seen a decline in machine demonstrations compared to the previous year is one positive conclusion of our virtual offensive. Just as pleasing, in addition to the many positive feedbacks from our customers, is the fact that various demonstrations resulted in successful sales – also of larger projects. For example, because the customer was so enthusiastic about the online demo, we sold even a highly complex system requiring explanation, such as our SigmaLine III digital book block production system.

Online demos undoubtedly have their advantages. For example, customers and our regional sales staff, who usually accompany them, do not have to travel to us at the Print Finishing Center in Zofingen or the Blue Salon in Rahden, which saves time and money. But preparing virtual demonstrations is much more time-consuming – not only because of the communication technology used, but also in terms of planning and preparation. If spontaneity is somewhat lost during an online demonstration due to the lack of exchange of ideas between the customer's machine operators and our instructors, all the more flexibility is required in terms of planning. From time to time, a customer cancels his visit at short notice and switches from an onsite to an online demo.



### **Hybrid demos are also possible**

The virtual component of machine demonstrations also opens up completely new possibilities for us. This is because we not only do online demos by appointment with customers, but also offer such demos in the form of webinars for different regions. Customers in the relevant countries are informed in advance about the event and then log in. We have even done hybrid demos: some of the customer's people were with us in Zofingen, and some of their colleagues were in front of the screen at the company.

Whatever the online format, there is one aspect that cannot be shaken: Such demos must always be live in picture and sound. Of course, we sometimes include animations, but the customer must not get the slightest impression that we are faking or covering up something. If the customer wishes, the demo is recorded and he can watch it again afterwards at his leisure. However, we do not make any recordings without the customer's consent.

**Commissioning is not possible online**

While demonstrations in our demo centers are nowadays often a combination of virtual and real elements, little has changed during the corona crisis in terms of the use of instructors with our customers – for whom I am also responsible in my role as Head of the Print Finishing Center. Because online commissioning of a new press is impossible for a number of reasons – one keyword being complex end products, for example – and online training for press operators is very difficult, operators are still introduced to newly installed equipment on site.

This is still possible despite the restrictions on international travel. But the planning of foreign assignments – if you think, for example, of the quarantine regulations when entering the customer's country and returning to the home country – has become much more time-consuming.

**Online lacks personal exchange**

One of the undeniable disadvantages of online events, as already mentioned, is the difficulty of personal exchange – both between Muller Martini experts and customers, and among the customers themselves. If, for example, there are two dozen webinar participants in a call at a regional event, it is difficult to have a discussion and there is a risk of a monotonous monologue. After all, the presenter can't see how the participants react to his presentation.

In addition, travel not only costs money, it also creates amenities – and it offers the opportunity for valuable personal contacts even outside the reach of a machine shop or an executive office. And it's not uncommon for a machine sale to be sealed over dinner.

**On-site training remains important**

Nevertheless, the corona pandemic has also created new facts in our industry. And many a skeptic felt (and still feels) compelled to jump on the digital bandwagon. In this respect, it is also interesting for me to observe the extent to which the various regions of the world differ in terms of online mentality. Indeed, there are countries that traditionally have a high affinity for digital transformation – and their customers are correspondingly more open to online demos.

However, there is one thing that no Geiss licks away (as a Swiss saying goes): operating a saddle stitcher, a perfect binder, a book line or a thread sewing machine will always be done physically – i.e. with your hands. That's why I'm convinced that on-site training – whether at our training centers or at the customer's plant – by expert instructors will continue to be of great importance in the future, and that we will again travel more.

**You can choose!**

But equally, I am convinced that at the stage of a machine evaluation by customers, virtual components will remain important even after the corona crisis. Be it as a pure online or hybrid format, where for example only the decision makers travel to Zofingen or Rahden and the machine operators watch the demo on the tablet.

In the future, our customers will be able to choose which presentation format they would like – we at Muller Martini are open and ready for all solutions!

Cordially,

Yours, Pascal Ruch, Product Manager Saddle Stitching and Head of Print Finishing Center  
Muller Martini