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## Plant engineering is a whole different world

**On March 31, Reinhold Achtner will retire after 32 years at Muller Martini. As “Mister Mailroom”, he was closely involved in the implementation of numerous large projects in German newspaper houses. In this blog, the 63-year-old looks back on three exciting decades in a truly wonderful industry and explains why free weekly newspapers with many supplements are a great success model, particularly in Germany.**

My childhood dream was to make a career as a handball player in the German Bundesliga. However, since my plans as a professional sportsman came to nothing, my path led me into the graphics industry. Although nobody in my family worked in printing or bookbinding, the graphic influence in my personal environment came from friends and acquaintances who motivated me to also go into the printing industry profession. After all, the largest employer in the region where I grew up was Illert Graphische Betriebe AG, which employed some 500 people at the time.

And so, in 1982, after specializing in printing technology at a technical school in Frankfurt and graduating as a state-certified printing technician, I started my professional career as a department manager at that traditional company in Steinheim, which unfortunately no longer exists today. Three years later, I became sales manager at Heinrich Baumann Graf Centrum in Frankfurt, before joining Muller Martini Germany in Egelsbach (Hesse) in 1988 as branch manager. In 2003, I also took over the branch office in Neuss (North Rhine-Westphalia) and in 2006 the one in Oberschleissheim (Bavaria). After merging the sales regions, I first became

Sales Manager Germany South, subsequently Germany North, and finally Head of Sales for Germany, which included overseeing the most important key account customers.

### **At first I didn't think I could do it**

Encouraged by Klaus Futterer, the longstanding Managing Director of Muller Martini Germany, I have been responsible for supporting key accounts since 2003. It goes without saying that this included, in particular, the newspaper publishers. Although I knew about perfect binders and saddle stitchers, mailrooms were completely new to me. Plant engineering is a completely different world and has a completely different scale with high and complex requirements. And investment volumes also took on new dimensions. After all, handling an order worth 500,000 or 30 million euros makes a big difference. Frankly, at first I didn't think I could do it.

But then came my first big project with the [Rhein Main publishing group](#) with three NewsLiner newspaper inserting systems – at that time the first machines of this type. Everything went well, and I got infected with the mailing virus. Over the years, I have enjoyed working with our customers on implementing numerous projects in this exciting segment.



### **Muller Martini guarantees undeniable benefits for its customers**

The great challenge in plant engineering lies, on the one hand, in the technical possibilities and solutions. On the other hand, of course, it is also a matter of structuring the contracts for such large projects so that both partners are satisfied. And third, we're always looking for solutions and variants that set us apart from the competition. They are often just nuances, such as a more optimal design of the entire production process. But Muller Martini also has innovative machines, which guarantees undeniable benefits for its customers.

A typical example is the [Pro Liner](#) inserting system used by numerous satisfied newspaper producers – not only in Germany but across the world. The ProLiner marked a technological quantum leap thanks to the new technology of inserting pockets, which allows the inserts to be securely guided without having to turn the newspapers, and thanks to the quadruple gripper, which is particularly important for thin products.

This also applies to the efficient [FlexPack](#) bundle processing system. It combines all processes such as stacking, bottom sheet feeding, bottom sheet labeling, bundle wrapping, top sheet printing and application as well as bundle strapping in one compact system and plays out its strengths particularly in the processing of insert intensive and highly regionalized products.

### **Partners became friends**

But it was not only technology that fascinated me during all these years. I have also met many impressive figures in the newspaper and print industry. Although we had tough negotiations in some cases, I am still in contact with some of them today, such as Uwe Günther, Managing Director of the [Münchner Merkur media group](#) (who I'm standing with in front of the ProLiner newspaper inserting system in Munich in the first image above) and Klaus Heist from the [Heira Group Gernsheim](#) (see second image showing me with Klaus Heist in front of the high-performance Tempo E220 saddle stitcher). I wouldn't have wanted to miss these special experiences.

When I started my new job at Muller Martini in 1988, there were still numerous regional newspapers. This has changed radically since then. As a result of declining circulations, many of these regional newspapers have been taken over by larger publishers in recent decades. Meanwhile, consolidation is increasing, as the volumes of almost all daily newspapers have also declined. Pure news can now be brought to the reader much faster electronically, which is why the average age of newspaper readers is constantly rising.

In this respect, the famous slogan of the New York Times, „All the News That's Fit to Print“, has lost much of its power. I see that in my own family: My son mainly uses e-media, but I also need my newspaper. For us, as plant engineers, this trend means: the cake is getting smaller, fewer machines have to provide the same output, the projects are even more fiercely contested, and prices are under pressure.

### **Boom in inserts: we Germans are bargain hunters after all**

Fortunately, the still unbroken insert boom in German weekly newspapers stopped this negative scenario somewhat and opened up a new business segment for newspaper publishers – as well as for us system manufacturers (see my ProLiner example above). I'm not surprised that the weekly newspapers delivered free of charge with their many inserts, which is a unique phenomenon worldwide, are so successful in Germany. After all, we Germans – according to the saying „cheap is cool“ – are thought of as bargain hunters and are always on the lookout for special offers in brochures. That's why many larger publishers have bought direct distributors and integrated the brochures into weekly papers that serve as carriers – which, in turn, has helped Muller Martini to win many orders.

No wonder the insert boom, which in my experience will continue, is the investment driver in the German newspaper industry. To exaggerate a little, investments are almost exclusively made in increasing insert capacities. The machines that are in demand are flexible in size, easy to operate and stable in performance, which are all strengths of the newspaper inserting systems from Muller Martini.

I only hope that this boom will not be slowed down by external influences, for example by new laws, requiring it to be explicitly noted on letterboxes whether inserts may be delivered. This would not be such a promising development for the entire printing industry.

### **Retrofits are becoming increasingly important**

I'm getting a clear sense of this development at customers that service is becoming increasingly important. As a major investment no longer pays off so easily today in view of the decline in print runs, the operating times of existing plants are extended. Retrofits are therefore becoming increasingly important – as is perfect (maintenance) service, which enables our customers to reduce their maintenance personnel and shift services to suppliers.

Why I have remained loyal to the same company for half of my life is quickly and easily explained:

Muller Martini is a stable, reputable family-owned business with a large product range. I have spent many exciting years in a truly wonderful industry, I have never been bored in all these years, and I'll miss the many contacts with people in the printing industry. That's why I'm turning to the third stage of life with a tear in my eye.

**At the tenth drupa in a private capacity**

But there is also a lot to be happy about. I am looking forward to no longer being stuck in traffic jams on some motorway every day, to finally having more time for my family and also for myself, and to working on improving my golf handicap. But there's not really anything that I have missed that I really want to make up for. Because you shouldn't save that for retirement either. However, I can't tell you yet what my future everyday life will look like in detail – my wife is still working on this plan...

However, I am not going from sixty to zero. I'll be available to Muller Martini as a consultant for some time to come. And I'll also be going to drupa 2021 - my tenth time, I might add. However, in a private capacity and primarily to say goodbye to my many (work) colleagues.

Your  
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