



Frank Baier

## Specialization as a Business Opportunity

**When modern postpress technologies are now integrated in almost all print stores: What raison d'être do service providers geared to industrial finishing still have today?**

Just a few years ago, many service providers in the German printing industry regretted that there was no longer an association for industrial bookbinderies. In fact, the Association of German Bookbinders for Publishing and Industry has been history for well over ten years. Hardly anyone in the field laments the fact today. So the question arises: does our industry still need such an interest group?

Print processors have no lobby at all, but craft bookbinders do. A few industrial print finishing companies are members of the print and media associations in the DACH region. Individual craft bookbinders are organized in the federal guilds and similar associations in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. However, the number of (industrial and craft) companies has continued to decline for many years. It is also no longer possible to determine numerically how many of them there are at all at present.

### **Changing consumer behavior**

The number of bookbinding companies in Germany alone is below the mid three-digit range, and the number of industrial print finishing companies in Germany amounts to a few dozen at most. Due to the significantly changed structures within the companies, a clear categorization has been completely unthinkable for a long time.

Due to the digital transformation in society and increasing possibilities of online media, consumer usage behavior has changed and led to an equally different, more targeted approach to print media. The various postpress service providers are also responding to this by drawing the appropriate conclusions in terms of business models and product portfolios, as well as equipment and technologies.

### **Digital transformation opens up a new world**

A bookbindery is often no longer a „pure“ bookbindery. As is well known, some industrial companies integrate the craft, and some bindery workshops, meanwhile, are partially industrialized. Industrial converters, for example, include the production of packaging and displays in smaller runs in their portfolio and thus expand their range of print products.

Bookbinding workshops are supplementing their range with digital printing for print-on-demand services, for example, and see themselves as holistic print service providers. While the „industrialists“ have to compensate for the significant decline in the production of advertising printed matter, the craftsmen have to replace missing orders for the production of library volumes, annual volumes and anthologies. But the digital transformation is also opening up a whole new world.

### **Alignments with special products**

An inevitable development is the shift of postpress technologies to „pure“ print stores. The question always arises: What *raison d'être* do industrial bookbinding and print finishing businesses still have today? Even if the model for success simply does not exist and no one can look into the proverbial crystal ball: Specialization is often the chance of survival.

Specialized products (e.g. packaging, restaurant menus, photo souvenirs), brand-related or (B2B or B2C) online order stores that focus on specific product groups, the integration of digital printing solutions for personalized products in short runs, and cooperative ventures with advertising agencies or publishing houses are just some of the possibilities for specialization.

Yours,  
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