

Kaizen

A second business mainstay built upon quality work, automated prepress workflow and steady optimisation.

Schmidt Digitaldruck GmbH is a print shop based in Wörth a.d. Isar, Germany. The company is purposeful about its continuous improvement process – and garners success in result: the team is retaining B2B customers and simultaneously developing its B2C presence. Powering this progress is a trio of flatbed printers, coupled with sharp focus on quality and automated processes.



In an alcove stands the antique Heidelberg – a reminder of the company's origins. Stefan Schmidt grew up in the analogue environment of his father's offset print shop and is himself a trained print technologist. He now runs the enterprise and has digitalised it through and through. "We print on demand for B2B as well as end customers." Processes are largely automated, with digital printing used in production. Orders arrive via four online portals: foto.online , digitaldruck-fabrik.de , fotobutler.de and schilderdrucken.de . The B2C side of the business – offering high-quality wall art and stand-up photo prints – is relatively new, having gained momentum during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021.

Automated workflow

Prepress workflow at Schmidt Digitaldruck GmbH is fully automated. When a customer uploads an order to one of the portals, a rule-based system starts work in the background: "The data is checked, corrected and forwarded for further processing – all without manual intervention", explains Stefan Schmidt. The RIP even includes logic that determines which flatbed printer to use for production and then dispatches the data accordingly. "All the operator needs to do is work through the daily folder, with no prepress concerns", says Schmidt with a smile.

No warehousing

Each incoming order also triggers an automated ordering process with the material suppliers. "We lack sufficient space to warehouse boards", is the straightforward explanation. Instead, a delivery truck pulls up every day with a cargo of pre-cut and coded boards. Depending on order requirements, they may have drill holes or rounded edges. Stefan Schmidt points to the identification code on a board: "This is how the operator matches substrate to a particular print job." Part and parcel of the standardised process is a clearly-defined collection of materials: conventional aluminium composite panels or types with a gold, silver, anthracite or rosé butler finish; acrylic glass, rigid foam and corrugated plastic board; cardboard and honeycomb board.

Standard and fine art

"We basically classify our production into standard and fine art", says Marco Stuhlfarth. He works in product and process development and is well aware of growing demand for fine art productions. "Thanks to the Nyala 4, we can offer customers in this segment shorter delivery times and lower prices", he says happily. Nyala 4 operates with the latest print head technology. The flatbed printer achieves a maximum resolution of 1350 dpi and is exceptionally productive, even in quality modes. Stefan Schmidt confirms this: Time taken for printing our fine art products has reduced by one third."

Continuous improvement process

Schmidt Digitaldruck was a beta user of the swissQprint flatbed generation 4, officially launched in autumn 2021. They had just recently installed a Nyala 3 in 2019. "The Nyala 4 gave us opportunity to take our print quality to a yet higher level", explains Stefan Schmidt. Even prior to the pandemic, the team had begun offering photo and fine art products to private customers. "The learning curve was steep and is still ongoing", says Schmidt. "Every feedback or complaint is a welcome opportunity for optimisation." He notes how customers more than

ever expect no-compromise quality, an aspect that the major suppliers increasingly neglect. "This is exactly where our strength lies."

One photo product in particular exploits every advantage of the Nyala 4 flatbed printer. A photo is printed with a white backing layer onto black acrylic, and a printed varnish layer around it simulates a grooved surface. "For this personalised imitation vinyl record, we rely on the Nyala's outstandingly opaque white and its maximum fine art resolution", says Marco Stuhlfarth. The originally styled cardboard packaging - which dispenses with glue and plastic - is printed on a first-generation swissQprint flatbed printer: an Impala that has performed faithful service since 2014.

Signage clientèle

B2B customers appreciate the consistency in materials and dependable quality levels they get from Schmidt Digitaldruck. Stefan Schmidt states: "Good print quality and reliability keeps customers on board." Doubtless also contributing to customer retention is one-on-one support with prepress issues that they occasionally find a struggle. Marco Stuhlfahrt mentions spot colours and multilayer prints. "Both of those are our everyday bread and butter." The fact that the company serves 14,000 B2B customers in the DACH region speaks volumes. The possibility of achieving even higher-grade results or using printed varnish effects is giving new ideas to these customers - typically agencies and adtech businesses. And it makes photographers on the lookout for an independent supplier sit up and take notice.

A silent partner with high quality standards

To quote its own words, the 40-strong team basically acts as a 'silent partner' in the background. "End customers don't notice our role as a subcontractor", explains Stefan Schmidt, "because we ship such productions in plain packaging." But what Schmidt Digitaldruck GmbH achieves and how the company is organised is plenty worth seeing. Resting on one's laurels, however, goes against the company culture. "Our goal is to constantly improve product quality and keep pushing ahead with automation", concludes Stefan Schmidt.

DIGITALDRUCK
FABRIK



Company	Schmidt Digitaldruck GmbH, Wörth a.d. Isar, Germany
Website	www.digitaldruck-fabrik.de
Segment	Signage & photo products
Established	1981
Employees	40
Printer	Impala / Nyala 3 / Nyala 4
References	<p>Agencies, name-brand companies, adtech: POS, advertising signs, company nameplates, hiking trail signage, house numbers, stadium perimeter advertising, corporate media, etc.</p> <p>Retail trade: POS and elements for seasonal campaigns</p> <p>Photographers: Photo prints on aluminium composite panels or behind acrylic glass, gallery prints</p> <p>Private individuals: Personalised photo products</p>