7 days, 3 shifts, 5 Impalas

Year after year, high season is the acid test for all the machinery – and all the workforce.

CEWE Stiftung & Co. KGaA, Germany.
Europe's largest photo finisher has relied on swissQprint for large-format printing since 2011. Five Impala printers are in service at two CEWE production sites in Germany, where they operate with utter reliability even through peak periods of three shifts, seven days a week.

CEWE is Europe's largest photo finisher, employing 3800 people at 14 production sites. Total sales in 2018 amounted to 653.5 million euros. A significant portion of that came from the CEWE PHOTOBOOK product, with CEWE CALENDAR, CEWE WALL ART and CEWE CARDS also high on the popularity scale. Completing the consumer line-up are photo gifts, miscellaneous personalisable items and the good old photo print, with everything available to order on CEWE web portals or via retail partners.

Impala for CEWE WALL ART

Large format printing joined the product range starting in 2011, when acquisition of the first swissQprint Impala large format printer started the expansion of CEWE's offering: canvas to begin with, posters soon thereafter, then direct printing onto board. The CEWE WALL ART

line of business has seen such strong growth that five Impala printers are now operating at full capacity. Customers can have their favourite photos printed individually or as photo collages on paper or rigid foam boards. They can also opt for premium acrylic glass or gallery prints, self-adhesive film or canvas, posters, or even prints on wood. The number of variants is enormous, especially since there are umpteen format increments from 10×15 cm all the way up to 100×150 cm.

The latest product in the CEWE WALL ART line is called hexxas: hexagonal rigid foam boards, available in two sizes and different packages. Customers can use them to decorate walls as they please, expanding their creations or rearranging tiles to taste thanks to a magnetic fastening system.

The CEWE culture of optimisation

hexxas started as a prizewinner at one of CEWE's in-house innovation fairs, was first shown to the public in 2018 and then successfully launched. The innovation and optimisation process at CEWE is institutionalised and covers the online portals, ordering software and internal workflows, which are largely automated. All this is daily bread for several hundred IT employees at CEWE headquarters in Oldenburg. Customer satisfaction is paramount: their feedback flows directly into the improvement process. CEWE is passionate about fostering a culture of reliability with the human touch. Silke Beißel, CEWE WALL ART and gift items production manager at Oldenburg, is the embodiment of these values. After more than 40 years of service, she is anything but tired of setting an example in her area of responsibility and taking a 360-degree approach to pushing forward with continuous change.

First LED printer proves its worth

The longest-serving of the five Impalas at Oldenburg was replaced in 2018 by a new UV printer featuring LED technology and numerous mechanical enhancements. All five machines have a white channel for printing on transparent media. The white laid down by the new LED printer is optimised as the result of having special heads. «The 30-picolitre heads have more than proven themselves,» says Silke Beißel enthusiastically. Standard droplets are normally 14 or 9 picolitres, depending on the print mode.

Savings in power and ink consumption, plus advances in terms of printing speed and quality – resolution, gradients, opacity, colour rendering and colour gamut – are basic plus points of Impala LED that have also proved themselves in practice. Further strong arguments in its favour are zero ozone emissions and the elimination of components containing mercury.

hexxas, the latest product in the CEWE WALL ART range: Individually printed hexagonal rigid foam boards form an overall picture that can be expanded or rearranged at any time.

Silke Beißel: “With Impala LED in particular, the operators are happy and satisfied.”

Fully-automated workflows

Production of CEWE WALL ART is based on standard media formats. Individual orders are automatically clustered; after printing, Kongsberg cutters trim items to their final format. Silke Beißel points out: “The aim is to utilise material to the full and reduce waste to a minimum.”

No manual actions are required; automated workflows handle the entire prepress stage. Downstream from the printer too, recurring processes are performed wherever possible by automated machinery. Some of that was developed and built by CEWE's in-house technical teams, for example a device that rolls up posters and wraps them in a sleeve before they go to the shipping department.

Motivated operators

There are indeed still people working on the swissQprint machines. They take great pleasure in the task because the printers are operator friendly and easy to use, as Silke Beißel is well aware: "With Impala LED in particular, the operators are happy and satisfied." The new printer has brought a clear improvement in the workplace. Six employees in Oldenburg are trained to use the swissQprint machines. "We rotate so that there is no boredom, attention stays high and the error rate low," explains Silke Beißel.

Year-end proof of capability

The high season runs from November to December. This is when both the machinery and the workforce must prove themselves anew each year, as the whole plant runs flat out to handle the pre-Christmas rush. Which means: a holiday freeze, a doubled production workforce over the six to eight weeks in question, and three-shift working – even on weekends in December.

Reliability is the killer criterion

Orders received during the high season run at four to five times the usual level. Then in particular, everything must operate smoothly. "We can't make up for a lost day," stresses Silke Beißel. The in-house technicians are on standby and their counterparts at swissQprint are likewise on call. "Fortunately, nothing has ever happened," says Ms Beißel, "the printers are utterly reliable." Which is yet another reason why CEWE plans on staying with swissQprint.

Company	CEWE Stiftung & Co. KGaA Oldenburg, Germering near Munich, Freiburg, Mönchengladbach, Germany
Website	www.cewe.de
Segment	Photo finishing
Established	1961
Employees	3800 across Europe, 1100 in Oldenburg
Printer	4 × Impala / 1 × Impala LED
References	Large format photo prints for customers of Amazon, BIPA, Carrefour, Mediamarkt, Migros, Saturn and others