

User Report

VB-H, Sonnenbühl-Udingen, Germany

Successful enterprises needn't necessarily get started in the legendary garage; a kitchen can do just as well. This is exactly what happened with a specialist operation that handles packaging projects from start to finish, and continues to forge big plans after 15 years in business.

It was 1998 when Ursula Hage ventured into self-employment with her company, Verpackungsberatung Hage. She filled the first orders working out of her Tübingen apartment. At the time, these were mainly for commodity packaging material with customer-specific adaptations. But trading alone was not her thing. She sought to offer a value-added service, and as a result doors started opening everywhere. Orders grew quickly in volume, size and complexity. Fast forward to the present, where VB-H employs around 30 people. Under the management of Ursula Hage and her partner Karl Müller, the company generates annual sales in the order of five million euros. The outgrown kitchen table was left behind long ago; today's premises are a former embroidery factory in the Swabian Jura hill range of southern Germany, which provides plenty of space for creativity along with first-rate infrastructure.

Short run production in-house

To meet the expanding need for individualisation, VB-H acquired its first Zünd G3 cutter in 2008, followed by another in 2009. One year later the company moved into digital printing, with the arrival of an Oryx flatbed printer. Right from the start it had plenty of work to do. The printer currently operates for an average 12 hours a day, frequently overnight or on weekends. This is especially the case with printing jobs using special film on rolls, which the machine processes unsupervised. Karl Müller is enthusiastic: "The machine is totally reliable in operation and shows barely any signs of wear." The roll to roll option was a decisive factor during evaluation. Robust build quality and the level of precision give Karl Müller a feeling of having made the correct choice. "The



The Oryx UV digital printing machine transformed the status of VB-H from merchant to manufacturer. The machine operates untiringly and reliably for twelve hours a day.

Oryx offers just the right format dimensions", he adds, explaining: "It is flexible in terms of the materials it can handle, and makes optimum panelling possible." The 2.5 x 1.6 metre large printing table does indeed play host to widely differing substrates: corrugated and solid board,

light alloy, aluminium sandwich panels, glass, leather, plastics, magnetic and plastic films - whatever the needs of the moment. The output partly goes for project work in making samples of packaging material, and partly for short run in-house production of folded boxes and POS items. Besides process colours, white ink and effect varnish are frequently applied to the printing substrate. The Oryx offers eight freely configurable colour channels, of which VB-H uses six at present. The two spares could be retrofitted with spot or light colours at any time if needed.



Example of a product launch: Display and samples printed and assembled at VB-H.

Most printed items go on to be trimmed, fluted, perforated or scored. A recently-installed third Zünd cutter is equipped with a fully automatic board handling system, which avoids numerous manual interventions that would otherwise be necessary for handling larger batches. Sheet stock is loaded and unloaded as if by magic, while personnel can attend to other tasks.



Ursula Hage, founder and business manager:
"Further growth is our aim."



Karl Müller, business manager and a seasoned packaging professional, is completely satisfied with the Oryx large format printer from swissQprint.

4-D packaging

Ursula Hage reflects on business: "The Oryx transformed our status from merchant to manufacturer. At a stroke, the extent of our service offering expanded considerably. That also broadened our reach to include the sign making and agency segments." VB-H handles all stages of packaging development and production, and summarises its offering as '4-D packaging'. This means sketches of ideas and graphic design in 2-D, final design and visualisation in 3-D, plus the crucial fourth D in the service dimension. If requested, VB-H can coordinate all aspects of production. Runs may range from 100 to 80,000 units. Another important business arm besides printing, finishing and assembly is logistics. This accounts for around 80 per cent of company output, with many customers who appreciate and make use of the just-in-time service. Blanket orders are called up in small batches, so the purchaser can conserve warehouse and logistics resources. Hage and Müller draw on a network of tried and tested partners for project execution, buying in services where this is necessary and makes good sense. Their objective is to assemble an optimum package for filling each customer order.

Displays, cartons and folding boxes make up the bulk of end products. Joining these are exotica such as drilling templates for machines, personalised closures, and printed wooden dowels. VB-H has even delivered thematically decorated wood cabins for market stalls. The Oryx takes care of logo printing or numbering on pre-printed sheets and manufactured items,

one noteworthy example being a 5,000-copy limited edition of the Ferrari calendar: here the swissQprint machine applied a unique serial number to each one.

On course for growth

With its full workload, the Oryx paid for itself within a year and is now a money earner, according to Hage. The business itself stands on a firm footing and is on course for growth. This will primarily entail deepening and broadening professional know-how. Training courses are planned, and fresh creative minds will be supplementing the present team. 20 new jobs could be created in the long term. VB-H also intends to reorganise and develop its strengths. Hage and Müller perceive the greatest potential in digital production, meaning end-to-end print and cut workflow. In this regard, the duo is already flirting with the idea of acquiring yet another table - obviously the type used in printing, not the kitchen variety.

Info Box

VB-H Verpackungsberatung Hage GmbH,
Germany
www.vb-h.de
Segment: Packaging services
Established: 1998
Employees: 30
References:
- Festool Werkzeuge (displays, pilot production, magnetic signs)
- Interstuhl Büromöbel (product packaging)
- Rieber Küchen (product packaging)
- Greiner Labortechnik (pilot production)
- Mondi, Duropack (limited-lot production)