

AN EVOLUTION FOR PACKAGING PRINTING

MANROLAND'S NEW 'MR LARGE FORMAT', BERNHARD SCHAAF, SPEAKS EXCLUSIVELY WITH NICK COOMBES ABOUT HIS NEW JOB AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE ROLAND 900 EVOLUTION SHEET FED OFFSET SERIES, AS THE COMPANY PREPARES TO CELEBRATE ITS 150TH ANNIVERSARY.

You have a 30-year background in print, but tell us a little about the man behind the name.

BS: I was born and grew up in south west Germany, which was a wonderful place to live as a youngster who was keen on outdoor activities like cycling, swimming and running. I was also into culture and went on to study at the Hochschule der Medien, known as HDM, in Stuttgart. These days I'm married and have two children.

What attracted you to print?

BS: I've always been interested in information and communication and when I started work back in 1995, the Internet was still in the future and print was the prime medium for people to acquire news and information. I started my career as a consultant for the print media sector for Eurografica in Munich. Coincidentally, the company was a subsidiary of MAN Roland at the time, and I worked

on key international projects in the field of strategic investment and planning new newspaper plants and production facilities all around the world – it was fascinating!

What prompted the switch to sheet fed from newspaper and magazine production?

BS: I could see the way the Internet was growing and the effect it was going to have on the flow of information

Bernhard Schaaf brings more than 20 years of large format experience to his new position at Manroland Sheetfed.





The new large format press series is designed to combine high quality print with high efficiency operation – this one is at a carton converter in the USA.

– and I couldn't see a positive future for newspapers. So, I set up a new business unit in Offenbach with a small team of experts and specialists, and we called it Eurografica Sheet-Fed. The contrast between the two technologies was marked because sheet fed machines are physically so much smaller, but crucially the print products they produced had a longer life cycle.

How do you assess the current market for sheet fed offset?

BS: It's not encouraging overall, because print volumes are decreasing especially in the commercial and publishing sectors. In commercial, small format offset has largely disappeared owing to the industrial approach of the online-printers, so-called 'web-to-print' and under the flood of digital press technology. The whole print scene has become more industrial with high-performance printshops leading the way on price and delivery in what is now a very cut-throat market. On the bright side, print for packaging is alive and well and continuing to grow even through the global COVID-19 pandemic – in fact it's proven that after a crisis demand for packaging comes back at the same level, even growing, but demand for commercial print never fully recovers.

Is that what attracts you to large format presses?

BS: Partly, because the majority of large format sheet fed presses are

sold into the packaging sector, but also because large presses are part of my background and I feel comfortable with their size and the part they play in the industrialisation of the print industry. I like their material logistics systems and their level of automation – it comes as second nature to me.

Why are you so confident of growth in this sector?

BS: Because of two major global trends – the first is that there is a clear shift in the market towards more sustainable packaging like carton and corrugated and a growing awareness of pollution. This is not exclusive to flexible packaging, but plastic and foil substrates do not decompose like natural fibres. The second, is that the world's population is becoming more affluent overall and moving away from what some call the 'brown paper bag' type of shopping, especially for food products, and this is driving the increased demand for high-quality printed packaging as shopping habits switch more to supermarkets – and preferably cartons!

This growth in demand for packaging surely applies to all sizes of press, so how do you see the medium versus large format debate panning out?

BS: It's an obvious thing to say but product size is the main determinant. Both format sizes are more than capable of handling a high proportion of the workload,

whether it's commercial, publishing, or packaging, but only large format can produce large boxes! We have the ROLAND 700 Evolution Series to cope with all that medium format requires, but in reality the two format sizes don't really compete because there is little overlap in box size and volume requirements. More than 70% of large format presses are installed to produce packaging and that's the growth sector.

We're talking about large format as if there is only one size, but that's not the case, is it?

BS: No – the term 'large format' embraces 145cm, 162cm, and 185cm sheet sizes. Traditionally, at Manroland, the 145 has outsold the 162 and 185 by two to one, and almost all of the 145s go into package printing. But there are exceptions – take China for example, where the 162 and 185 sizes are popular in packaging because they produce a large volume of litho-laminated packaging and POS material and the larger size is a better fit for these products.

Do Western and Asian markets differ much in their requirements?

BS: They have done historically. In Western Europe and the USA, most print companies are looking for high levels of automation, because production is focussed on output, especially in package printing. This industrialised approach demands



This press is at Tamir Sp Z.o.o. in Poland.

enhanced material logistics, press automation and preventative maintenance contracts to allow 24/7 operation. In Asia, and to a certain extent Eastern Europe, the focus is on print quality and Manroland is the leader in so-called 'ultima' presses that have complex specifications with a large number of print units and coating stations for a high degree of product enhancement. But we are starting to see the Western market trends growing in these parts of the world too, and I'd say Asia and Central and South America will be areas to look out for in years to come.

How does traditional offset compete against the rise of digital printing?

BS: If you look at production costs and productivity, offset is almost unbeatable – and this is largely thanks to the pressure that digital technology has brought to the market – it made offset up its game. But to me the two have different USPs – offset is about the industrial production of volume work – digital brings unique individualisation and print-on-demand capabilities, but in both format size and running speeds it does not compete. Where you can link processes in the traditional offset market, the technology is still not

Packaging is alive and kicking, so we are well placed to benefit from that stability and growth potential.

available to do this completely digitally. In the short to medium term, I don't see this changing – the two should be seen and used as complementary not competitive processes.

What attracted you to take the job as Head of Large Format at Manroland?

BS: In simple terms, the quality and innovative nature of its technology and its portfolio of presses. As you know, I had been with Heidelberg for almost 15 years working with their VLF presses and competing hard against Koenig & Bauer in this sector, while Manroland stayed somehow under the radar. When it was decided to close the VLF programme at Wiesloch, I had to choose between Heidelberg and large format – and one look at



The ROLAND 700 Evolution range is already a strong seller for the company in medium format – this is the top of the range Elite model.

what Manroland had to offer in this sector made the choice for me.

It sounds like perfect timing.

BS: Definitely! There are now only two manufacturers competing in a sector that is predicted to grow – and with Manroland’s long history of excellence in packaging and large format sheet fed, and the way it has quietly developed its technology to deliver high quality print with high efficiency in what is an increasingly demanding global market, is the mark of a leader and one that I’m delighted to be back with as the new ROLAND 900 Evolution Series is rolled out.

What do you bring to the company?

BS: I’ve been working in large format, both web and sheetfed for more than 20 years and have acquired a wealth of varied experience from different countries, markets and cultures, and this is invaluable in today’s global economy where priorities vary and certain approaches work better than others – you can’t teach this, you have to learn it from experience. I also have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of

many of the major international customer groups and their set-ups in different industrial environments.

You have joined at a difficult time with the pandemic affecting global markets – how will Manroland cope with the recovery?

BS: The slowdown in business and investment since March 2020 is there for all to see and not just in our industry. But my discussions with the major international groups indicate a serious backlog in their investment programmes that will flood onto the market once the virus is under control internationally. I can see us doing really good business over the next few years in the large format sector because our technology is innovative and based on high quality produced with high efficiency – these are the two key criteria going forward and our new ROLAND 900 Evolution Series is the perfect fit.

Where do you see the market in five years’ time?

BS: Well, the good news is that packaging is alive and kicking, so we are well placed to benefit from that

stability and growth potential. Nobody should underestimate the growing desire for environmental protection, and natural fibre-based packaging has a key part to play in that movement. The pressure is coming from consumers via the brand owners to the converters, and you can expect to see some dynamic developments in this sector in the years ahead.

And the future for Manroland Sheetfed?

BS: We’re celebrating our 150th Anniversary this year and we’re looking forward to reinforcing our pre-eminent position in the sheet fed offset market with the Evolution Series for folding carton converters around the world. The ROLAND 700 Evolution is already selling well, and we have the first three ROLAND 900 Evolution presses up and running at packaging printers – one in the USA, one in Italy, and one in Poland. We also have two more of the new presses in our showroom in Offenbach that we’re using for demonstration and print test purposes. Overall, I’m very happy to be here and very excited about our future prospects. ■



Ready to leave the Offenbach factory, and sporting the 150th Anniversary celebratory logo.