

Key Issues for Future Book Production

*Oliver Kranert
GGP Media/Bertelsmann
Poessneck, Germany*

1. Introduction

Particularly in the last few years the technological development has been focused on so intensely that the crucial question is secondary: what does the market demand from the publisher and how in turn can new possibilities for economic operations emerge for the various technologies.

In this context it is necessary to consider two marginal conditions for the future book production:

- the development of the book market and the production technology
- the development of the workflow.

When we mention book production in this article, we mean the production of hardcovers, softbacks and paperbacks. In the following production means the placement of the order through the order processing, data handling, printing, binding to the distribution of the books.

2. Book Market

Since the rapid and successful development of electronic communication over the past 15 years, the print medium book has an opponent which has to be taken seriously. On closer examination of the book market, three trends can be generally recognised:

- there is a continuous growth in the number of titles,
- the structure polarises on few mega-sellers and a wide variety of special interest titles with small print runs,
- the new printing technologies (e.g. personalisation) are used to make the books more attractive.

These fundamental market trends are flanked by the demands of the publisher to optimise the book production under following criteria:

- economical for both small and large print runs,
- prompt availability
- constantly high product quality.

3. Work Flow

It has not been possible in the last years to promote the rise in productivity on the workflow level to the same extent as on the technological level. The communication between the publishers and the book producers does indeed show a positive tendency to development – automated inquiries and order confirmations – but, at this

intersection, the era of faxes, imprimatur, blueprints and a manifold of colour proofs in every possible version still dominates. This generally leads to a delay in the high-tech production process. The efficiency of the work flow nowadays still represents a constricting factor for the technological economical book production.

4. Prepress Technology

Electronic data are indispensable today for the modern book production. On the other hand, making the electronic data available does not always facilitate the production process as the rules that are necessary for the data handling are often not observed or insufficient. The market demand indicates clearly that in future media neutral data will be required, serving as a basis for all kinds of production processes.

5. Printing Technology

The analogue and digital printing technology already established on today's market has to be further developed to meet the demands for productivity and quality. The demand profiles can be categorised in three areas:

- black&white and colour printing,
- small and large print runs,
- analogue and digital printing.

The crucial point in the digital area of black&white printing is to optimise the printing performance in order to produce economically even of up to 3,000 books, whereas market demands are far more a question of product quality in the digital colour printing.

Offset printing and rotogravure technology will still be in use on long term aspects, but must be optimised in respect to the set-up time mainly.

6. Binding Technology

Within the machine-orientated production areas it is the binding processing that sets the greatest challenge as this will have to remain analogue on a long term basis. The added value chain comprising perfect binding, case making, embossing and casing-in covers up to 50% of the total added value and could, at least in the last decades, only be optimised in small steps – a digital revolution in this area would appear to be unrealistic for the close future. The main requirement for the market is the accommodation of machines which require minimal set-up time and provide technology for smallest print runs

which can eliminate the century-old manufacturing processes.

significance that the development on the technological level is continued and that the workflow is optimised in order to challenge the competition with electronic media.

7. Prospect

Economical production is a basic requirement for the medium book to be able to stay competitive. It is of great