



Playground for developer

360 Degrees – Totally in the Picture

The lecture in the big conference room of the kölnermedienfabrik AG¹ has been going on for an hour now. The statistics, graphics and tables projected on the wall visualise the results of potential consulting funded by the Arbeitsministerium NRW. It has shown what resources in the medium-sized company are not yet being utilised. But now the board member sales and distribution puts an abrupt end to the theoretical part. With the words: “Better take a look on-site at the practical relevance of the potential consulting”, he invites the guests from economy, science and politics to a spontaneous tour of the company.

Complete solution

On the way to the production departments the manager once more talks about the previous events. Because the market increasingly demands complete solutions, a classical printing house, a typographic high-tech-company and a modern photo-studio merged to the kölnermedienfabrik AG (kmf). It is now one of the technology leaders in cross-media-publishing. From the printing product to internet programming and screen design the customer gets everything from one hand. A lady among the visitors asks about

the highly complex video system, which was mentioned in the lecture. “That is our latest technical innovation”, Jörg Prüfer explains. “With our patented IPIX-technology we are able to show a 360-degree panorama view of a space on CD-ROM, on the Internet or as a PowerPoint presentation, be it the inside of a car or the whole of Kölnarena².”

Faster information

The board member evaluates the successful merger of the companies even higher than the Europe-wide unique equipment: “Take alone the bringing together of totally different data bases! A real challenge! Now we want the potential consulting to help optimise the production process together with the employees.” Says he and makes way for a hasty employee in the narrow hallway. “You see for yourselves”, he uses the interruption to point to an initial result of the consulting, “the man is taking a so-called order pouch with a customer’s short-term alteration wishes to the electronic image processing, abbreviated EBV³. A time-consuming and not very efficient method.” In future the potential consultants advise that all production information should be available for all employees

¹ Media Factory Cologne AG[=joint stock company]

² Cologne Arena

³ elektronische Bildbearbeitung=electronic image processing



any time in a computer supported information system. "A maximum information flow", according to the board member, "speeds up the order processing and provides more transparency. But let us just follow our man on his way to the EBV!"

Higher quality

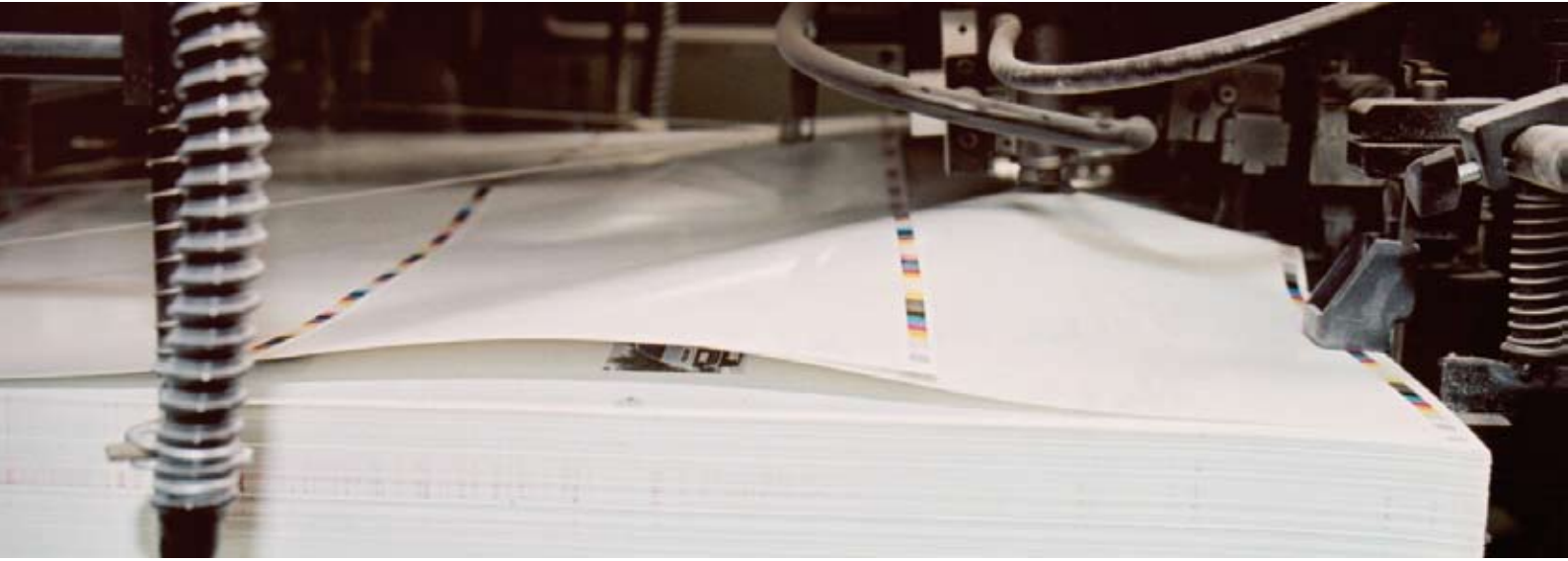
The EBV is one of the best-staffed departments of the koelnermedienfabrik. The high-technology open-plan office is lined with rows of computers. 'Media designers for digital and print media with emphasis operating' – that is the official job title – work here on the processing of the photos for printing: scanning, retouching, clipping, or editing the photos according to the customers' specifications. A well-known car manufacturer, for instance, wants his company logo to generally appear round, no matter from what perspective it has been photographed. No problem. The quality work of EBV is widely recognised, orders come in without canvassing. The employees, however, evaluate their own research and development potential rather low, according to the analysis. The board member sales gives the reason: "High productivity and full capacity utilisation leave hardly any time for the employees to try out new things. Cost-effective production is more important than innovative ability." But the potential

consultants recommend to give the employees more leeway in order to test in peace innovations that make sense from the production point of view, or software-updates. Board member Prüfer agrees with this advice and supports its realisation. "What part will the employees play?" one of the participants of the tour wants to know and learns that the department will be developing self-organisation regulations for so-called 'F-und-E-Spielwiesen'⁴. "Don't be deceived by the harmless term", the manager warns, "this is going to be a demanding task! This is about keeping our head start over the competition or even better developing it. The employees thus expand their responsibilities and we increase the quality of our products!"

More flexible staff

The board members continues: "The potential consultants have pointed out another development chance for the interface electronic image processing and photo studio over there, and they have supplied the solution approaches, too." It has to do with the interaction of the departments. There is a banal realisation at the bottom of this: When you are well informed about the job of your colleagues you can communicate better with them. To put it precisely: When a photographer knows what happens with his photos

⁴ Research and Development Playgrounds



during setting or in the EBV he will probably choose another colour for the lighting, which is easier to re-touch. The boss: "Everybody here is perfect in their own tasks. If something does go wrong, it is usually due to a lack of communication." The concept of the potential consultants: In the 'slacker times', off-season, employees of successive departments should swap working places. Jörg Prüfer reckons, that this temporary staff exchange or internal job rotation will bring 'greater flexibility in the use of staff, more qualified employees and a better operative cooperation in the production process'.

New markets

"All in all" the board member draws a sort of intermediary balance on his way to the next stop through the spacious factory, "the potential analysis has achieved utilisable results in all investigated areas, here in the CTP, too – please come in!"

CTP means 'computer-to-plate', also called direct printing plate output , a technology which was only

put in production last year. Jörg Prüfer asks an employee to explain the advantage of the new technique to the group: The 'digital print master' – whose qualification, a combination of sound craftsmanship and high-tech knowledge, is symptomatic for the department – explains, "Traditionally a film is first exposed, and then it is exposed onto a printing plate. With CTP the data goes directly from the working place processor to the plate exposer. One whole intermediary step, the film production, is left out." The koelnermedienfabrik owns one of the first big plants of this kind in NRW, it works cost-effective. The potential consultants are not satisfied with that, they turn their attention to the external market: "Extend your services!" is their idea. "The CTP department could offer the exposure of printing plates. Customers could be all those printers that could thereby save a whole production line, that is the production of printing plates." The manager has already taken up that suggestion. He also sees a considerable demand on the market. If the koelnermedienfabrik puts this into operation, new workplaces will necessarily ensue.



Intelligent methods

One of the participants of the group, who is herself an entrepreneur with a medium-sized company, wants to know how the consultants found out about the potential. The board member passes the question on to Kurt-Georg Ciesinger of the Dortmund 'gaus medien bildung politikberatung GmbH⁵'. The manager of the labour and economic sciences consulting institute played a decisive role in the potential analysis. He summarized the employed methods concisely: "We started with initial explorative talks with the decision makers, that is the management and the department heads, as well as a work satisfaction analysis, then we determined the company status and the company targets regards decisive competitive factors like innovation and creativity, flexible staff use as well as research and development potential with ICUT, our self-developed interactive software tool for strategy planning. From this you can deduce what potentials still have to be developed." "Does a consulting like this achieve more than doing your own analysis?", the entrepreneur digs deeper and turns to the board member again. "Definitely", is the categorical answer, "we were amazed that the consultants were able to make so many good suggestions. We are now going to develop the suggestions by the gaus together with the employees and the works council according to priority. First steps on the way to realisation have already been taken. Of course, we had thought of one or two things our-

selves before but we couldn't have done this in such a systematic form for all departments alongside everyday business. Our company seems to profit from the 'panorama view'", and with this allusion to the exclusive 360-degree-camera system of the company he closes the guided tour of the company.

⁵ gaus media education policy consulting ltd

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