

Application to Intergraf's 2021 Young Talent Award

How will print develop in the future?

In 2020, the world experienced a global pandemic that widely impact all industrial activities. Digitalisation quickened and our everyday life was deeply altered. The printing industry was not spared with the cancelation of the Drupa, the world's leading trade show for print technologies. In this context, it is justified to wonder how print will develop in the future.

Printing is used for various purposes: communicate, inform, secure documents, differentiate products. It is therefore possible to distinguish several market segments: publication (books, newspapers), packaging (corrugated cardboards, labels, flexibles, metal), graphics (advertising, photo) and security printing (identity documents, brand protection).

All segments are undergoing transformations due to changes in consumption trends or technical innovations.

Publication may be the sector suffering the most. Newspapers or magazines now offer digital versions of their content available from any electronic devices at lower price than the printed edition.

In the same time, other printing sectors benefit from the rise of digital printing to innovate and offer new products. Digital printing is now able to compete with traditional printing for small and medium runs due to lower cost and a satisfactory printing quality. Its versatility enables to reduce time from creation to printing in a wide range of substrates. With no need of printing plates, digital printing is the perfect technology for personalisation and creation of unique designs. In 2014, a renowned brands of soft drinks produced 2 million unique bottles for the Israeli market using a special algorithm and a digital printing equipment.

This is a key growth lever for digital printing: giving the opportunity for brands to make the consumer feel unique, buying a special and non-reproducible packaging. Packaging is a growing sector in need of "greener" products less polluting. To achieve this goal, packaging developers and printing companies must develop new designs using recycled raw materials as well as water-based inks or at least with less solvents. Key points for the packaging sector are therefore eco conception and creation of re-usable packaging.

The last division considered is security printing which is a specialized sector with few stakeholders. Their challenge is to propose innovative securities that are not reproducibles.

As the fraudsters master more and more techniques, printing factories should have consequent research and development departments as well as important investment resources to be equipped with cutting edge machines.

Printing could also become an alternative technique in other sectors due to major innovations in 3D printing and printed electronics.

Thanks to 3D printing, manufacturing products on demand is greatly facilitated. The computer aided design softwares enable the creation of tailor-made pieces. It could be useful in the medical sector to make adapted prosthesis or in the industry to substitute parts that no longer exist. Today, any individual can buy his own 3D printing machine to bring its creation to life.

Printed electronics consists in printing electronics components like resistances, electric circuits or photovoltaic cells. The main challenge is to deposit a continuous ink layer to allow the current's passage. To success, the three key parameters are the printing process, the substrate and the ink. Currently, many applications are considered by laboratories and start-ups as printing could be an alternative to subtractive processes producing much waste.

To address all those market segments, several company typologies exist.

Let's first talk about international printing companies with important investment capacities. They are often established in different locations, each plant having its speciality. Therefore, they are able to address many markets at low cost and worldwide.

A second typology of company consists in smaller groups with presence in few countries addressing only a specific sector. Regarded as specialised, they inspire confidence to customers even if their prices may be a bit higher. Today, many printing companies develop online platforms to target individuals looking for personalized souvenirs (photos, calendar, mugs, magnets). Thanks to integrated softwares, the user chooses the characteristics of its product and the road from web to print is facilitated. Those companies must deliver high quality products in a competitive environment where customers choices are driven by prices and other customers' opinions.

The last typology covers all companies who have survive until now due to the high demand for printing documents but who are now facing difficulties. This can be explained by an unclear business model with diversified products but not any flagship product. Throughout the years, they slowly lost orders and miss the shift to other technologies as digital printing losing possibilities to address new markets. This is an upsetting observation I can ever make in my own area where closure of printing plants occurred.

Though, the coming years could be valuable to the rise of new business models combining communication agencies and printing plants to offer multi-channel strategies to brands. Such models enable to create standardize content for all communication mediums and choose the right support to reach the targeted customer. This rapprochement between print and digital can already be seen with an increasingly use of QR codes to link a printed document to information stored online.

Based on those observations, it's realistic to consider print have a promising future. It is still a tool widely used by brands to communicate and spread their images. Moreover, individuals are always looking for unique and customized products for which new technologies as digital or 3D printing can be useful.

What kind of working environment are you looking for? How could a printing company provide this?

I recently graduated and I am currently looking for exciting opportunities. I have many expectations but fortunately all are reachables and printing companies have many assets.

Most of my generation is not looking for a company for life as it was the case some years ago. Young talents are looking for experiences to blossom both in their professional and personal lives. To achieve this goal, they are open minded and ready to relocate in various countries.

Among the main criteria is the general atmosphere in the company which must be caring. In my opinion, it is important to be trusted by your manager but also to be able to express your doubts and ask for advices. Work is a contract between the company and an individual. The worker gives the best of himself to accomplish his tasks while the company gives him the possibility to grow. Among the solutions to make collaborators evolve are, giving them more responsibilities, letting them manage bigger projects or offering them courses regularly.

International companies attract young talents because they have a wide network of locations and as many possible opportunities to evolve toward other missions in the future. But a significant number of young graduates turned to smaller companies like SMEs and start-ups. Those organizations enable to be deeply invest in the company's future and have more responsibilities. For many young talents, the versatility of tasks in small companies is a significant advantage.

Another criterion for young people today is to find a company whose mainspring matches their personal beliefs. Feeling useful and having tasks that make sense are key factors to choose a job before the wages. In my case, I am looking for a company which understand the

industry has a significant impact on the environment and which is trying to reduce progressively its impact relying on eco-design.

To provide all this criteria, companies must consider every single employee as an individual and not only as a component of the workforce. Each worker has qualities and defaults but once those elements are known, it's easier to find the job where the person will be able to give her best.

To increase the productivity of employees, the working environment plays an important role. Therefore, companies can provide a canteen, a sport centre, an online network to create leisure clubs, a nursery or any infrastructures facilitating the everyday life of workers. To be efficient, those measures should be open to all employees no matter their positions.

Collaborators who invest their time in projects for the company must be acknowledge for their works. In fact, bad outcomes are often underlined contrarily to good performances. To motivate workers, managers should praise success. Some companies even introduced annual awards rewarding projects and initiatives. But, those awards should not become a source of competition that can impact team spirit.

During one of my experiences, the manager set up an informal meeting every two weeks to give a chance to each staff member to comment on his ongoing projects or to share any relevant information. It can be a good idea when the team exceed twenty people as it's last around 15 minutes and enable to communicate efficiently inside the team.

Another manner to strengthen the feeling of belonging in a company is to organized special events. This is even truer in large corporation to facilitate encounters between employees of different teams.

Finally, every printing company has the ability to attract young talents. The working relationship should rely on trust and the employees should have opportunities to take over their future within the company. Printing companies have assets to provide a pleasant working environment: projects are varied with possibility to learn continuously, interaction with clients and operators are instructive and it's a sector moving forward to reduce its environmental impact.