



Richard Hofer

## „If You Invest Right, You Will Be Successful“

**Richard Hofer worked for Muller Martini for 37 years – first as production manager in the advertising department, then as sales manager Switzerland. At the end of November, he will retire early at 63½. In his very personally colored blog, the trained printer looks back on his richly filled professional life in the graphic arts industry and reveals his plans for the third phase of his life.**

Cameraman, journalist, detective superintendent – during my childhood I dreamed of professions for which there was no apprenticeship at that time. I didn't have a graphic background from my family. Although the fact that I ended up in this industry had something to do with my father. One of his colleagues in the music society was a web offset printer and encouraged me to take up this profession. I first did a trial apprenticeship as a bookbinder. But I liked printer much better.

So, I first completed a four-year apprenticeship as a book printer and came into contact with Muller Martini machines for the first time – a Grapha continuous forms printing press and two saddle stitchers. Immediately afterwards, I did a two-year additional apprenticeship as an off-set printer. I completed both apprenticeships with the Swiss Federal Certificate of Competence, and I completed both of them at a renowned print shop in Basel, where I worked as an offset printer for one year after my apprenticeship.

Because I always wanted to go to an English-speaking country, I went to England for three months in 1980. During this time, I also attended IPEX in Birmingham. This was my first visit

to a trade fair and of course I stopped by the Muller Martini stand. After that, I went to New Zealand, where they were looking for specialists for the printing industry in the 1980s. At that time, the graphic arts industry was flourishing in New Zealand because a lot of printing was done for export (Australia/Singapore) thanks to customs and tax breaks.

### **New Zealand: my second home**

Through an agency in Lucerne, I got an employment contract in a print shop in Auckland, the largest city on New Zealand's North Island. It was an old-fashioned company with English management. Later I moved to another print shop in Auckland, which was run by young New Zealanders and had a much more modern setup. There I also came into contact with the New Zealand representative for Muller Martini and Heidelberg machines. He offered me a job as an instructor, but I preferred to travel when my contract ended. And so, I visited every corner of New Zealand with two Swiss colleagues whom I had met there for only three months. During this time, I met my future wife, who later came from the Zurich Oberland, in a youth hostel. Afterwards I traveled for three months through the South Seas, Hawaii, the USA and finally to England and Paris.

I still feel closely connected to New Zealand – yes, it has become my second home. I am still in contact with New Zealand friends and have travelled the country several times since then – also with my family. Also, this year I spent several weeks there, fortunately shortly before the lockdown. By the way, I met the New Zealand Muller Martini and Heidelberg representative again later at drupa and he renewed his job offer. But by then I had already signed with Muller Martini.

### **An award-winning advertising video**

In 1983 – after having worked as an offset printer for a year after my return – I became aware of a job advertisement from Muller Martini Marketing AG and became production manager in the advertising department in Zofingen. For twelve years, I was responsible for the production of all advertising material in print, audio, video and film.

This was an extremely exciting time for me, as I had the opportunity to make recordings at many graphic arts companies around the world and at the same time to experience live what interesting end products our customers produce. We shot the videos and made the slides for presentations on site. The highlight was undoubtedly the image film „Sweet Uncle Harry“, for which I worked as project manager and which you can find on [YouTube](#). The film received no less than 14 international awards and was awarded the prize for best advertising video at the renowned Locarno International Film Festival in 1997.

“Sweet Uncle Harry“ had its premiere in 1996 on the occasion of Muller Martini's 50th anniversary. The year before, I was introduced at drupa as the new Sales Manager Switzerland. It was the ideal time for me to change jobs. Because at that time, the advertising department was switching from analog to digital. And instead of having to deal with the technological generation change and having to struggle with the Mac and image editing, I decided on a completely new field of work.

### **Many exciting field tests**

To be able to sell capital goods successfully, I have always followed three golden rules. First: You have to be a good listener. Second: You have to be a good analyst. Third: You have to provide objective advice in order to develop a project together with the customer.

Over the years, I have come to know the Swiss market inside out. In Muller Martini's home country, the graphic arts industry is very important. It is still an important industry that should not be underestimated. Because of the high wages, particularly high productivity is required

for the graphic arts companies in Switzerland. Customers are correspondingly demanding when it comes to automated systems.

Because of the geographical proximity to Muller Martini, it was always exciting when my customers completed field tests with newly developed machines. This year, for example, the [Kyburz AG](#) printing house in Dielsdorf near Zurich, which specializes in mailings, again used our new [Primera PRO](#) saddle stitcher. It always fascinated me how both sides benefited from these pilot projects in terms of optimizing the machines.

### **Investing in finishing as well**

Of course, the graphic arts industry in Switzerland changed enormously during my 25 years as sales manager. On the one hand, it shrank significantly as a result of structural change (keyword: digital media) and the great competitive pressure from surrounding countries. On the other hand, keywords such as standardization, performance and full level from PDF to dispatch became increasingly important.

All those who a) not only invested in printing presses, but also in postpress, b) occupied niches and c) found the right mix between offset and digital printing at the right time are on the road to success – such as photo book pioneer [Bubu AG](#) in Mönchaltorf in the canton of Zurich with its end sheet feeder/Vareo perfect binder/InfiniTrim three-knife trimmer solution from Muller Martini for the industrial in-line production of first run hardcover book blocks.

This enables Swiss businesses – coupled with high flexibility, top quality, full service and close proximity to their customers – to survive even in a high-wage country. And with these recipes they will continue to be successful despite the limited market. After all, the current corona crisis in particular proves that printed quality products are in demand as a counterpart to the many electronic fake news.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that the transformation process is far from complete and that new workflow solutions and even greater automation are needed to reduce manual intervention and thus manpower. Those who make these investments will continue to be successful in the future. I am also confident that print will remain important – even if print products will no longer have the same importance in terms of volume as they used to.

### **Customer contact at eye level – with two exceptions**

What I have always appreciated is customer contact at eye level. Only twice did it happen to me that Swiss customers treated me from above – which is not so easy with my height of 2.01 m. As a consolation, I am left with the fact that both companies have disappeared from the scene.

A German customer proved that style (and a pinch of humor) is also possible, who welcomed us with a typical Berlin snout to a photo reportage about PrintRoll in his mailroom with the following words: „Your system runs like your Swiss reserve.“ Which was, of course, expressed in a reserved and elegant way, because in fact the good man had real problems with our buffer system.

Would I do everything exactly the same again in my professional life? A big question! But one thing is certain: I would do a lot of things exactly the same again. I had the privilege of working in an exciting industry – from my learned profession as a printer to the salesman of saddle stitchers, perfect binders, booklines and mailrooms. That's why I look back on my professional career with great satisfaction and also gratitude. I will especially remember the many interesting encounters with countless customers – from small to large companies and

from bookbinders to newspaper publishers.

I always kept to the title of our 16 mm image film „In the service of the graphic arts industry“. Although this dates from the 1980s, the motto still applies to Muller Martini and to me today – especially in view of the current situation with Corona.

### **From “even faster” to “Finishing 4.0” and “Smart Factory”**

The fact that Muller Martini is a family-run company – just as I perceive the entire graphic arts industry as a big family – is something I notice every day in the special company culture. The employees are highly valued and enjoy great trust. In addition, the management has a great sense of responsibility towards the employees - especially in difficult times like this corona year. That’s why I went to work every morning motivated.

What has fascinated me over all these years is the technological innovations developed by Muller Martini – especially since finishing has become increasingly important in recent years. We always manage to show the graphic arts industry new ideas so that they can produce high-quality end products economically. In the past, the motto was „even faster, even higher cycle times“, but today, as a result of smaller volumes, the catchwords are „Finishing 4.0“ and „Smart Factory“. So, if there’s one machine I remember as a particularly big hit, it’s our variable-format, highly efficient [InfiniTrim three-knife trimmer](#).

But I also remember our SigmaLine digital book production system, which was presented at drupa 2004 as a world premiere and met with a great deal of response from the trade. And of course – like the [ProLiner](#) – the newspaper inserting systems for the mailroom, where not only the mechanics impress me, but also the control and monitoring systems.

I was really sad only once in all this time: When Muller Martini stopped production of variable size web offset presses in 2014, my heart, as a trained printer, was admittedly bleeding.

### **Drupa has a high status**

And of course, I would have loved to go to drupa again in June – it would have been my ninth. Even though there is a lot of talk of digital trade fairs now because of the corona crisis, I still attach great importance to drupa as a reflection of the graphic arts industry. It is particularly popular with Swiss companies because of its proximity to Düsseldorf. They all travel to Düsseldorf – from company owners to apprentices.

Can the next drupa take place in April 2021 as planned? I have my doubts about that in view of the current corona development. Whether I would go again as a private person depends on whether Muller Martini gives me an admission ticket. All joking aside, I wouldn’t rule out a visit in order to catch up on this highlight.

There are many things I will miss from today, some less – such as the increasing tendency to have to fill out Excel files. And of course, the last few months of my professional life were not so much fun due to the corona pandemic, structural adjustments and reorganizations. Although: Only disadvantages did not have this time again. Since I was confronted with short-time work for the first time in my life, I was able to prepare myself even better for my retirement.

### **More time for community politics**

I am looking forward to the third stage of life in a positive way. Time goes by so fast, so I will enjoy every day of my pension and have more time for my hobbies brass band music, photography and reading (of course from print!). In addition, as a convinced supporter of the Swiss

political militia system, I am active at my place of residence as a municipal councilor and vice municipal president. Now I can do my work for it comfortably during the day instead of in the evenings and on weekends. And I'm sure I'll travel to New Zealand again – when corona is over.

Sincerely,

Richard Hofer, Sales Manager Muller Martini Switzerland