

Mittelrhein-Verlag (Koblenz/Germany) invests in two new EasySert lines

## Every job holds a new challenge

**For a newspaper publisher to invest in a totally new production plant with two new presses and an extensive mailroom, which is to say investing in growth, was courageous and rather unusual for 2012. So it has to be a minor sensation that five years on, the same publishing house extended its operation with a new building, a third printing press and the largest inserting capacity in Germany at present. Such is the road that Mittelrhein-Verlag in Koblenz has gone down – with evident success.**

Post-press planning is at full speed even before Mittelrhein-Verlag in Koblenz starts up the press for freesheet production on a Monday at 1.30 p.m. How many inserts are there for a given edition? Which inserts are destined for which delivery route? What are the formats and weights of the advertising media, and when do they arrive?

Even before production gets under way, all these parameters come together in the Ferag Optimizer planning software. As part of the Navigator control software at Mittelrhein-Verlag, Optimizer organizes and streamlines insert picking on two brand new EasySert lines that have been in production in Koblenz since the end of 2017. The system sets up the best processing sequence for the editions and delivery routes, and optimizes the distribution of inserts between a total of 36 hoppers so that stops and laborious change-overs are reduced to a minimum. The system delivers a sequence that is already in very good order, so the machine operator only needs to fine-tune for the vagaries of a particular production run.

If the EasySert inserting drum is the heart of the system, then Optimizer and Navigator are the brains behind production, calculating the most efficient sequence repeatedly. After all, as Technical Manager Thomas Köhns says, “Every job holds a new challenge. You never know exactly what’s coming, we’ve been learning every day since the new EasySert lines went into operation at the end of 2017.”

### Freesheets with more demanding requirements

The two new EasySert insert lines from Swiss manufacturer Ferag are part of the second major investment programme that Mittelrhein-Verlag has put together at Koblenz in the space of seven years. As recently as 2012 the publishing house moved into new printing premises equipped with two Koenig & Bauer Commander CT 6/2 presses and two MultiSertDrum lines with nine and six feeders respectively, also from Ferag. Total investment: 42 million euros. At a time when newspaper circulation figures tend to be declining rather than rising, this could well be considered a spirited move – but it is one that has definitely proved a step in the right direction: Sundays excepted, the daily run includes around 162,000 copies of the *Rhein-Zeitung* and, since 2016, the *Bonner Generalanzeiger* with around 64,000 copies. The plant is capable of printing and processing 45,000 newspapers per hour.

Thomas Köhns reports that in addition to the dailies, the publishing house has developed its freesheet business very well. In-house weeklies have been joined by another one also covering the Bonn area, and the freesheet distribution territory is constantly growing. The volume of inserts per edition also grew, to a point where the hopper capacity of two high-speed MSD lines could no longer cope so well. The two printing presses likewise had reached their capacity limit after just five years and fresh investments were on the horizon.

A third Commander CT press from Koenig & Bauer was added in 2017, along with a further hall for insert picking and freesheet logistics equipped with an identical pair of EasySert lines. The result is a small record: with 36 hoppers each and an additional unwinding station, these are the largest lines of their kind in the whole of Germany. "Of course, the EasySert conveyors are not as speedy as the MSD lines", explains Thomas Köhns, "but they offer us the greatest possible flexibility for our insert volume." The MultiSertDrum produces 45,000 copies per hour, while the EasySert runs at a top rate of 30,000 cycles per hour – and with the volume and variety of inserts delivered, this means enormous throughput.

So the MSD lines are now used exclusively for processing dailies, while freesheet production mid-week and at weekends runs completely on the two EasySert lines. "With an expansion of our distribution territory and a 20 per cent increase in circulation of in-house products, we will have 50 hours of production in the future," reports Köhns. "That means the EasySert runs non-stop." Up to one billion inserts a year will be processed like this, with around 1.5 million freesheets a week.

This is where the scale of the two Ferag inserting lines comes into its own: not only do they allow handling a large number of inserts in a single production run, the conveyor is also designed so that the subsequent production can be set up in advance while the current operation is still in progress. Thus, production can continue without a hard stop – a distinct advantage given the tight time frames between delivery of the inserts and dispatch of the finished editions. The system is used for quality control as well: it detects missing inserts and automatically feeds incomplete products to post-processing. The finished products then flow into one of five groups of packaging units where they are bundled complete with topsheets and barcodes, ready for dispatch.

The EasySerts currently operate at around 50 per cent of their capacity, so there is room for further growth. However, as Thomas Köhns explains, one hundred per cent capacity utilization is not feasible for reasons of production reliability. "We put a lot of effort into cleaning and preventive maintenance to ensure that production systems are always available." The newspaper publisher depends on this permanent availability – one of the reasons why it again opted for Ferag systems when it came to investing in expansion: high reliability, high availability and Swiss precision. Köhns, who joined Mittelrhein-Verlag in 2017, praises not only the technology's intelligence and precision, but also Ferag's professional project management. Köhns reports that the entire installation was executed with a high degree of Swiss thoroughness. "Ferag planned each step almost exactly to the hour – and then kept perfectly to this schedule."

## Images



The Mittelrhein-Verlag printing and logistics centre is conveniently located by the Koblenz junction on the A48/A61 motorway.



The two EasySert lines currently produce around 1.5 million freesheets per week.



With 36 hoppers each and an additional unwinding station, this makes the two EasySert lines the largest of their kind in Germany.



Chain systems transport products to bundling.

Photo credits/photos: Jens Weber

**About Ferag AG**

Ferag AG, with its headquarters at Hinwil in Switzerland, has for over 60 years been known and respected in the printing industry for high quality, absolute dependability and perfect customer support. The traditional, family-owned company is seen as the undisputed market and technological leader in the development, manufacture and marketing of postpress processing and direct mailing systems. Ferag is also a specialist in innovative conveyor and processing technology for the most varied industrial applications and goods distribution systems. Through its worldwide sales organization, the company is active in more than 20 countries with its own sales and service companies or agencies.

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