

# ORWO's digital printing business accounts for more than 50 per cent of sales, thanks to the premium print quality from HP Indigo presses



## At a glance

**Industry:** Photo Specialty

**Business name:** ORWO Net GmbH

**Headquarters:** Wolfen, Germany

**Website:** orwonet.de  
pixelnet.de  
fotoquelle.de



[www.pixelnet.de](http://www.pixelnet.de)

## Challenge

- Efficient, high-performance, cost-effective digital print solutions for producing photo calendars, photobooks and digital photo prints.

## Solution

- HP Indigo 5000 Digital Press
- HP Indigo 7000 Digital Press
- HP Indigo 7500 Digital Press
- Two HP Indigo 7600 Digital Presses
- HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press
- HP Indigo 10000 Digital Press

## Results

- Average annual sales growth of 33 per cent through digital printing business.
- High efficiency in the production of layflat photobooks due to integration of digital presses and cutting systems.
- High customer retention due to the exceptional quality of the digital press printed photo products.
- Swift realisation of new digital printing product ideas thanks to close relationship with HP.
- Excellent customer service from efficient, integrated production lines comprising HP Indigo digital presses and downstream machines.
- Low manual effort achieved with the integration of digital presses and cutting systems.
- Distinct cost savings for press printed 10x15cm photo prints compared to the silver halide process.

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– Peter Ulbricht, managing director,  
ORWO Net GmbH



ORWO, one of Germany's largest photo laboratories, continues to go from strength to strength. Based in Wolfen, Germany, the company also has outlets in Wiesbaden, Germany and Tonder, Denmark. Over the past eight years, the company has seen an average annual sales growth of 33 per cent – driven first and foremost by its B2C digital press business with products such as photo calendars and photobooks. The company targets consumers directly through its own online portals - ORWO direct, PixelNet and Foto Quelle - and is also a third-party supplier to established retail partners.

According to ORWO managing director, Peter Ulbricht, “This year, for the first time, digital printing will account for more than 50 per cent of our total sales. This has been an incredibly swift development.” By way of a comparison, in 2011, digital press photo products accounted for just 20 per cent of the company's total business.

From the very beginning, the company has used HP Indigo digital presses for all of its digital press print products, including photobooks, calendars, greetings cards and jigsaw puzzles. Starting out with HP Indigo 5000, ORWO now has a total of seven HP Indigo digital presses in operation. The HP Indigo 5000 is still used to print jigsaw puzzles and labels for toiletry bottles. The HP Indigo 7000 Digital Press is used primarily for greetings cards and card game motifs that are subsequently transferred onto cardboard backing. For photobooks and calendars, the company has been using the HP Indigo 7500 Digital Press, two HP Indigo 7600 Digital Presses and now the HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press. A new addition is the HP Indigo 10000 Digital Press.

### Automatic production of layflat photobooks

While many consumers are still satisfied with offset quality photobooks, market research sees an increasing demand for premium photo products. For example, the share of premium layflat photobooks is expected to reach eight to 10 per cent of all photobooks printed in 2013. The share of profit is even higher, because premium layflat books are up to 50 per cent more expensive than their conventional counterparts. With these photobooks, the pages lay perfectly flat, making them ideal for double-page panorama photos. “Layflat photobooks are very popular with the customers. Until recently we were confined to offering silver halide photos for these. Thanks to the HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press, this is no longer the case,” explains Ulbricht.

ORWO decided to use HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press together with Imaging Solutions fastBlock finishing line and photo paper from Felix Schoeller. The Felix Schoeller E-Photo Lustre 135gsm photo paper is the latest addition to the company's E-Photo range of media for HP Indigo digital presses. As with all E-Photo papers, it is water and dirt resistant and features superb folding and creasing properties, without any cracks or magenta lines in the crease. With its thinner base, it allows the production of layflat photobooks with up to 150 pages.

This is greatly appreciated by Ulbricht: “Thanks to this integrated production line, we no longer need to have two employees to cut and sort the sheets during every shift. The HP Indigo WS6000p excelled during continuous operation, printing at a speed of 30 metres per minute. The press performed admirably and delivered an exceptional print quality.”

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To begin with, ORWO will be offering these photobooks in four different formats: 20x20cm, 27x27cm, A4 portrait and A5 landscape. The books will all have a maximum of 120 pages and will be printed on Felix Schoeller 135gsm E-Photo Lustre photo paper. Wilhelm Imaging Research certified a dark storage photobook permanence rating of more than 200 years for HP Indigo prints, with excellent long-term stability and freedom from gradual yellowing when stored in albums or other dark locations.

At ORWO, the requisite data formatting is completed on dedicated servers. From here, the data is sent to the HP SmartStream Production Pro Print Server, a RIP and print controller for handling large quantities of jobs including complex print jobs. This offline solution separates the workflow from the actual print process and transfers it to the pre-press environment. It allows ORWO to control its digital presses with automatic load balancing.

The HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press then prints to roll in a continuous run. This roll is then transferred directly to the Imaging Solutions fastBlock layflat book binding machine, where the pages are cut from the roll, folded and individually glued into the photobook in a fully automated process. At the same time, ORWO makes and laminates the book cover and transfers it onto cardboard backing. The content and cover are then bound. Ulbricht explains, “Thanks to roll-to-roll processing and the high level of automation, we are able to achieve a highly stable production process that also offers clear advantages over printing on photographic paper. For example, there is no longer any need to combine the sheets and feed them through the adhesive binder. We no longer have to use end paper because the body of the book is glued directly into the cover. We can now produce a greater number of books using four - and even six-colour printing than would be possible using conventional photographic paper, which increases productivity.”

Further benefits compared to silver halide photobooks, according to Ulbricht, include a 10 per cent reduction in production costs and a lower environmental impact due to the reduction in water waste, for instance, and the elimination of the electrolysis procedure for extracting silver from the fixing bath.

It is still too soon for Ulbricht to estimate just how many layflat photobooks ORWO will produce in the future: “I am confident that, with this additional offering, we will far exceed the 700,000 photobooks we sold last year, especially when you consider that the print quality is equivalent to that of silver halide photobooks.”



### Digital Press photo prints to replace silver halide

Another major project in the pipeline for the HP Indigo WS6000p Digital Press is the digital printing of 10x15cm photo prints. Ulbricht believes that, over time, silver halide printing will become “increasingly less relevant.” Financially, this is certainly good news for ORWO. While the investment costs for digital presses and associated peripherals are roughly the same as for the silver halide procedure, with the rising price of silver and unchanging page impressions, the costs of digital photograph production are distinctly lower.

ORWO is currently testing out its new HP Indigo 10000 Digital Press in a number of other innovative areas alongside photobooks. For example, a particular area of interest is the printing of larger 50x70cm or 60x40cm calendar formats. Ulbricht says, “I’m sure we will come up with a great many new product ideas for this new press. Thanks to HP, we once again have a great opportunity to stay ahead of the market. Our technological relationship with HP is extremely close and robust. Their products have helped to pave the way for our strong growth in the digital printing business – and will continue to do so!”

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4AA4-8874EEW, October 2013

