

Flexibility, Sustainability, Printability: Steffen Ohr, Sihl

Steffen Ohr is Vice President, Innovation at Sihl, a producer of media for digital printing. In this interview, Steffen talks about how Sihl serves its varied customer base with its innovative media



solutions, the future of digital inkjet in packaging, Sihl's environmental responsibility, and the future of the business.

**PLEASE EXPLAIN A LITTLE
ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL**

BACKGROUND IN THE PRINT INDUSTRY.

Before I joined Sihl, my connection to the print industry was driven by packaging applications, and I used piezo technologies for other applications. I joined Sihl Group in 2017 as Vice

President of Innovation, and I'm responsible for technology management, research and development and business development. Prior to joining Sihl, I worked in the paper and packaging industry at Cham Paper Group, and I also previously led innovation and technology management for flexible packaging and consumer goods applications at Omya. I hold a degree in chemical engineering, and also completed a Master of Advanced Studies in Business Administration in 2012.

PLEASE EXPLAIN SOME BACKGROUND ON SIHL; HOW THE BUSINESS GOT STARTED, SOME COMPANY HISTORY, THE SOLUTIONS IT PROVIDES, AND THE AREAS IN WHICH IT OPERATES.

The roots of Sihl date back over 500 years, with the first reference being "the old paper mill on the Island" in Zürich. Sihl was founded in 1935, taking its name from a

river in Zürich, and the Sihl corporation had the perfect site for a mechanical paper factory.

Now, Sihl is the leading expert for printing media solutions in a fast-growing digital imaging market with locations in Bern in Switzerland, Dueren in Germany and Fiskeville in the USA. Most of the production is “made in Germany” with a direct sales company for the DACH sector. As a high-performing, international company, Sihl offers all-important technological expertise and in-depth, comprehensive knowledge of the industry.

The company’s core competency lies in developing and applying inkjet coatings for different applications. These are developed for all inkjet technologies, applied to numerous kinds of material, and are suitable for labels, tickets and tags, commercial printing, and other graphic arts applications. Packaging is a more recent addition to our portfolio, having launched at the start of 2018.

WHO ARE SIHL’S CUSTOMERS, AND HOW DO YOU SERVE THEM?

Sihl customers come from many different business areas and are faced with a wide range of requirements. One major area we assist our customers with is advertising;

innovative technologies in large-format inkjet printing today enable countless applications in advertising and point-of-sale. Roll-ups, displays, signs or posters can be printed digitally in short runs, but also automatically in larger series. With this high degree of flexibility, inkjet digital printing has taken a significant share of the market away from classic printing processes such as offset or screen printing in recent years. Time pressure is becoming increasingly apparent here: Print service providers and advertising technicians are confronted with the challenge of having to offer very good quality in a short time and at the best price. High productivity combined with the best possible printing results are crucial factors in success. Sihl supplies print media that strike the right balance between impressive quality and high productivity and thus represent the professional solution for these requirements.

Labels based on Sihl facestock technology withstand extreme conditions. The transport of goods by sea is usually chosen when long distances have to be covered and trucks and rail are not an alternative. The shipping of containers is then cheaper than transport by air. By sea, containers are often exposed to extreme weather

conditions. Some of them have also gone overboard at one time or another.

Another example are the squeezable facestock inkjet films from Sihl are optimised for water based inkjet print, adaptable and easy to process. Thanks to its 'squeezability' and deformability, it is ideal for the labelling of various PE containers and bottles. The coating is stretchable and does not break.

Please explain more about the Artysio solution and what kind of challenges it solves.

Artysio is a revolutionary solution for digitally printed flexible packaging films with water-based inkjet technology, which meet the requirements of the packaging market through targeted functionality. Sihl's unique and brand-new packaging films enable a wide range of packaging applications that can be printed with water-based inkjet printers and sealed with heat and ultrasound.

The backing layer meets the requirements for barrier function, touch and feel, printability, suitability for machine use, conformity, sealability and user-friendliness with "easy open" function for instance. It's an ideal packaging solution for smaller quantities and for strongly varying print designs, and allows for

individualised print designs whatever the size of print run without additional printing costs. On top of that, it enables completely new sales concepts for your products using functional packaging materials which create value, and means there is no waiting time for packaging with 100 times less setup effort compared to analogue printing processes. There is also significantly lower capital commitment compared to traditionally printed packaging. All this makes Artysio a perfect solution for small and mid-sized producers of goods who are suffering because of high minimum order quantities of their packaging material, and it supports mid-sized companies and big brands who are adapting their production processes to meet the needs of a modern consumer society.

What are your thoughts on the future of digital inkjet in packaging? Is inkjet becoming more widely accepted in the market?

In the next few years, the fast-growing market for digital printing of packaging will continue to grow rapidly, opening up completely new opportunities to increase emotional customer loyalty and create new earning opportunities. As a result, brand manufacturers and design agencies can become more creative and develop

innovative campaigns to increase customer acceptance.

There is one main advantage that makes digital printing so attractive: small series become more economically interesting. The ability to work without a minimum print run meets exactly the needs of our modern society. As a result, it makes e.g. high-quality packaging accessible to many new players and will allow the market volume to grow significantly. Customer loyalty, and thus individualized packaging, is also an influential factor that will make the market grow strongly.

Furthermore, it enables just in time production without the need for long production planning in advance. Synchronizing the food production and the consumption with the availability of exactly the right packaging material in terms of layout and volume is a very sustainable approach because it avoids waste – food and packaging.

How important is environmental responsibility to Sihl?

Sustainability is a key element of Sihl's corporate strategy and an important factor in our success. Our key environmental goal is the continuous increase in energy efficiency. Sihl

photovoltaic systems generate approximately 770,000 kWh of emission-free electricity, and additional energy is generated by combined heat and power.

Many Sihl paper-based products are based on Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®) certified sources. The mission of FSC® is to promote the environmentally friendly, socially beneficial and economically viable management of forests. With the FSC® Chain of Custody Certification, Sihl proves that incoming goods, processing and warehouse operations and goods issues are controlled so that there is no permissible mixing, interchanging or false declaration.

Media such as our Enduro range have a high paper content depending on the application, and grade up to 80 per cent, and therefore consist largely of renewable resources. In comparison to fully synthetic media, film content is significantly reduced, our goal being to supply no more film than is necessary, and as little as possible! The paper fibres are recoverable through standard paper-recycling. Sihl uses only chlorine-free bleached, PVC- and BPA-free papers.

The independent auditing company Interseroh has confirmed the excellent recyclability of both single-material polypropylene films of packaging

from Sihl's Artysio range with the 'Made for Recycling' certificate. Both products score a maximum of 20 out of 20 possible points in the audit. Assignability to the collection system, the sorting capability of packaging, suitability for material recycling and provision of secondary products to the collection system are assessed as part of the audit.

Sihl, therefore, presents the world's first-ever fully recyclable packaging films for environmentally-friendly aqueous inkjet digital printing. The plastic films have strong barrier properties and excellent sealing properties. Our products can be used in many different printing machines for the vertical and horizontal form fill and seal production of different packaging formats. The Artysio range is also environmentally friendly, as only the number of packages that are actually needed are printed.

What are some of Sihl's priorities and long-term goals as a business?

Sihl is looking forward to a successful market launch of the Artysio packaging solution. On top of this, we aim to play a key role in establishing digital printing in the furniture and flooring market for film-based decorative materials, adding to our portfolio with market-relevant and sustainable products and pushing forward

the industrial use of digital printing into other markets through innovative products and business models.

Contact [Steffen Ohr](#)

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PRINT

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