

We deliver herewith a series a series of articles, from designers, brand owners, printers, converters, journalists and influencers. We look forward to working together with experts, who enrich our drupa Essentials with fresh impulses, sound expertise and remarkable experience. All these articles will allow us to understand a world that has changed dramatically since the creation of drupa in 1951 and will continue to evolve. Different observations and perceptions of an industry seeking innovation in a fast-changing world. Give free rein to your instinct under the adage: "to each his own drupa".

We are happy to provide you with this expert article and we would be pleased if you publish it.

Be inspired! _____

Good reading.

Sabine Geldermann & Team

Sabine Slaughter – Wide Format Printing: destined to grow and with ever more applications!



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Sabine Slaughter

Sabine Slaughter is a renowned international editor, consultant and journalist who for decades has monitored the transformation in the printing industry. She works in close relationship with printer manufacturers, brand owners and PSPs and has written thousands of articles, stories, related analysis in various trade magazines inspiring the entire industry.

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Sabine Slaughter – Wide Format Printing: destined to grow and with ever more applications!

The wide and super wide format market has undergone its digital transition while certain analogue printing technologies, such as screen-printing, continue to complement the overall mix offered by large format print service providers (PSPs) to their clients. In this regard, there's clearly still so much to be explored, compared, reviewed etc and that's why drupa 2024 is such an unmissable opportunity. Covid-19 has changed a lot within the printing industry and many new applications, even a new category – Social Distancing Signage – have evolved. All the key manufacturers, such as Canon, Epson, HP, Mimaki, Roland DG, Konica Minolta, Agfa, and many others, will showcase a multitude of applications and their latest developments all aimed at driving new business opportunities for PSPs. Predicted to reach a volume of US\$11.2 billion by 2025 (Markets and Markets), the wide format printing market is mature, but it has certainly not yet reached its heyday.

Hand-painted signage always was a rare sight and is even more so nowadays - if you can find it at all. Developments in digital technologies - starting with the first digital wide format printer introduced in 1999 and presented at drupa 2000 - have since accelerated and come a long way. Even so, for PSPs today there are more and more new feats to be accomplished as client-demand increases for more surprising, more individual means of communication, for faster turnaround and for even more applications to be created. You could say in this sense that inkjet has no limit.

While long print runs are still more viable overall on analogue machinery, they are not being ordered as often as in former times. The digital transition means that more and more applications will become digital and this itself leads to highly specialized wide and super wide printers, many of which will be shown at drupa 2024. Such printers can deal with traditional applications, but more interestingly they enable innovative PSPs to showcase their ability to cater for new and unexpected market-niche jobs. And most of all, to be able to viably produce short runs, personalized and customized projects, even one-offs, that help brand owners to do things not previously possible so that their branding efforts reach their full potential.

Another big growth-factor in this sector is of course the environmental agenda, a global topic that extends far beyond drupa. As the world tries to reduce its negative climate impact, so printer manufacturers, PSPs and moreover the client ordering print (be it in a small or large corporation) are all considering how they can contribute to the environmental imperative. The global pandemic has accelerated these client-driven requirements. Inks and consumables for wide and super wide printing, as well as the printers themselves, will be judged by visitors to drupa 2024 as to how well they fit into this context and into their own print shops. Many brands are willing to pay the extra dollar in order to obtain a more sustainable product, a trend that will continue into the future and which is likely to be reinforced by new regulations. So be sure to check new ink and substrate developments at drupa 2024.

Wide and super wide format printers have been mainly developed to cater to the signage, advertising, marketing and communications industries. However, they can also make an entrance or even a slight dent in other markets thanks to their versatility which enables certain (mainly short run) jobs within the commercial, packaging and label industries, as well as proofing jobs later to be carried out on analogue machinery. Some can even make forays into areas formerly covered by lithographic equipment such as solar, printed electronics, RFID and all kinds of conductive products.



For the digital printing community and those considering entering the large format market, it is important to understand this a market based on a

myriad of unique applications requiring specialized know-how. The list is long and varied - be it vehicle wraps, posters, art, interior or exterior signage, PoP and PoS, décor printing, directional way-finding, home furnishings, wallpapers, murals, any kind of displays, event and floor graphics, one-off signage from a large order that must be customized to fit the exact location where it will be installed (eg. bus stops with specific directions, info or offers) – and many others. Digital printing enables cost-effective, fast turnaround of orders while at the same time offering environmentally friendly solutions with no or next-to-no waste. In addition, it is starting to make inroads into the industrial printing sector. And there is no sign yet that it is slowing down.

Social distancing signage as a new category within the wide format sector developed rapidly during the pandemic. In many cases it meant and still means that certain jobs had and have to be produced immediately at very short lead times, quite often with regional or individual customization. Those kind of jobs will continue to be in demand for some time to come as the world battles the SARS-COV-2 virus.

Even the individual home consumer is not excluded or overlooked when it comes to digital printing applications. PSPs already offer web-based order portals – so called online print services – not only for companies, advertising agencies etc, but also for the end consumer who can order individual one-off prints – be it as a mural, poster, wallpaper or even a floor graphic.

In this way, drupa 2024 will see a host of new applications being offered by printer manufacturers. In truth, the driving force behind such new applications is not really the printer manufacturer, rather it is the marketing and communications community as well as the PSPs that actually drive application innovation (it is true, however, that manufacturers can influence PSPs in a certain direction). In the end, the result is often quite astonishing as to what can be done with a wide or super wide format printer. And as the manufacturers are listening - to their clients, to advertising and marketing experts – so in turn comes the next wave in applications, all of which will be shown at drupa 2024.

Even within the specific area of embellishment, traditionally referred to as the finishing sector, such printers are stretching their own boundaries. Whether you want matt or gloss, haptic surface, spot colouring or digital embossing, cutting, cross-cutting, all just to name a few. Nowadays it is no issue as many PSPs have embraced these abilities.

Within the digital wide format printing market and distinct from the printer's very own abilities, inks

and consumables are playing another decisive role. Should it be UV or UV LED, aqueous, Latex, solvent or even pigment inks? Here the application context and the client's usage scenario decide what is suitable for what application.

Substrate developments have moved on significantly, opening the door to new applications as well. Not every substrate is suitable for a certain ink-type or a certain type of printers. So, visitors to drupa should also watch out for the specific ink and media spectrum which is relevant to them, as presented by the respective manufacturers and vendors. Every wide and super wide manufacturer exhibiting at drupa will be eagerly looking to help PSPs and potential clients in finding the right combination for their intended application mix.

That wide format printing does not only encompass roll-to-roll or roll-to-sheet applications, but also the market for rigid substrates, means that a wide array of additional applications will be shown at drupa 2024. Be it for printing on glass, plastics, PVC, PET, cardboard, foam, forex or any other kind of board or film, there are so many stunning effects that can be produced and which will be showcased further. Once again drupa will highlight the advancements in print technology related applications to prove how PSPs, brand owners and ultimately consumers can benefit from flatbed wide or super wide format printing. As always, the rule applies - the desired application determines the kind of printer that a PSP should consider and purchase.

The biggest advantage of a wide or super wide digital printer however lies in its application versatility - whether in terms of customization, personalization, individualization (when still viable and cost effective) and its efficiency, all together delivering a final customer impact that conventional technologies cannot achieve.

Many new applications will be highlighted at drupa, all with their own set of ink and substrate aspects, and all together taking visual communication to new levels. Indeed, taken all together we no longer know how to call in a single reference for all the various applications that can be done on wide format printers.

The boundaries of what digital wide and super wide format printing can do will be pushed further at drupa 2024 and PSPs will then be able to explore those applications even more deeply than they did before. The market is ripe for innovation, new applications and new machinery with associated technology enhancements including speed, colors, ink-types as well as substrates.