

Hostert Pro looks optimistically to the future with a host of new ideas

“Wet processing is far from dead”

German machine manufacturer Hostert has been an integral part of large-format and roll-paper processing in photo labs all over the world for more than half a century. After the short-lived merger with Gretag Imaging and a turbulent phase caused by Gretag's bankruptcy at the end of the 1990s, the new company Hostert Pro has now re-established itself as a reliable partner in the photo lab segment.



The feed and alignment unit for the graphics segment is one of the latest developments to come from Hostert Pro. It is installed with large-format inkjet printers between the dryer and the cutting unit to ensure that large-format prints can be cut fast and economically.



Lisa Mohr and Björn Wiene work in Hostert Pro's commercial department and are responsible for global customer contacts.

This success was made possible above all by the commitment of a group of former Hostert/Gretag Imaging employees, who acquired the Hostert name and the company's production facilities for building professional processing machines and started up afresh in July 1999 as Hostert Pro GmbH in Bad Marienberg, Germany. For Helmut Kraft and Gerd Wiene, who have been controlling the fortunes of the company since then as its Managing Directors, the restart was a case of “back to the roots”, because in 1999, both of them had been part of the Hostert team for several decades, and knew the company, the customers and the professional laboratory business inside out. With a well-trained team of employees (which has grown from five in 1999 to 15 today), Hostert Pro GmbH quickly succeeded in regaining a foothold in its traditional markets.



The injection molds for all the plastic parts ever produced by Hostert and Hostert Pro are stored in several cabinets.

The company's bread-and-butter business is, as before, made up of large-format and roll-paper processors for RA4, black-and-white and holographic applications as well as film processing machines (for example for the processing of aerial and microfilm), which are constantly being adapted to suit the changing market developments. Since 2003, for example, the product portfolio has included a compact and budget-priced LL mural processor (LLC 140/LLC

90/LLC 60), designed specifically for combination with digital laser or LED writers. 2004 saw the introduction of the Hostert Pro roll-paper machine HP-RP 12 with leaderband transport, featuring complete modification of all the dryer systems and a significant improvement in the racks so that speeds of up to 30 m/min per web are possible without problem. The smallest Hostert Pro microfilm processing machine from 2005 was also developed in-house.

Niche products for other industries, too

Apart from that, the company's product range has plenty of evidence that time has not stood still for Hostert Pro despite its traditional background. Precise observation of the imaging market, careful analysis of customer needs and, last but not least, excellent cooperation with industry partners such as Neschen AG (Bückeberg, Germany), Fotoba International s.l.r. (Quaregna, Italy) and Express Imaging Systems, LLC (Seattle, USA) ensure that new niches are opening up all the time for which the company has been able to develop exactly the right products. More recently, some of



Before second-hand units leave the plant, they are given a thorough going-over and all the wear parts are replaced.

them have also been outside the classic photo segment. In 2001, for example, the mobile C900-2 paper conservation machine was introduced onto the market, which is used to protect paper from deterioration by deacidification of the paper. Seventeen of these units have since been installed throughout the world, and many archives and museums around the globe are urgently awaiting their turn. The Economics Minister of the German State of Rhineland-Palatinate, where the company is based, honored this new development by awarding the company the State's Innovation Prize. The most recent development is a transport and alignment table for the graphics sector. It is placed between the dryer and the cutting unit – for example with Hewlett-Packard's large-format inkjet printers – to ensure that large-format prints can be cut much faster and with less staff (and thus more economically) than is possible by hand.



Apart from the sheet metal working, all machine parts are made in-house. This picture shows a new Hostert Pro LL, assembled by hand.

Corporate philosophy as a success factor

"The fact that Hostert Pro has grown within a relatively short period to regain its position as a highly reputed company is due primarily to the corporate philosophy," said Björn Wiene, who, like Thorsten Kraft, joined the company as the son of a managing director, talking to INTERNATIONAL CONTACT. "This philosophy focuses on constantly developing new products and holding on to its core business. It means we will continue to serve as a reliable partner in all the areas in which we formerly had such a good name." Whether in large-format, roll or film processing, customers can be certain of getting absolutely any service they want for their machines. "Even with very old machines, we can make any spare part. We guarantee our customers that they will be able to get spare parts from us for as long as their machine is in operation," said Wiene jr. For this purpose, the company has its own toolmaking shop, and the injection molds are also produced in-house when needed. Wiene jr.: "We



The racks of Hostert Pro's roll-paper machines have been improved and now ensure an even more stable production.

have in store all the casting molds that Hostert has ever produced and can, if need be, produce even the oldest plastic parts made with them quickly and without problem."

"Made in Germany"


The "made in Germany" quality criterion is another aspect of the corporate philosophy. Apart from the sheet metalwork (for example for the housings of the machines), all the parts are produced at Hostert Pro and the machines themselves are assembled manually in-house. "This method of manufacture naturally has its price, which is higher than that of competitive products," said Wiene jr. On the other hand, he continued, anyone who looks solely at the purchasing price was committing a fatal mistake by not considering the wear and tear on spare parts, with inferior quality, production losses and machine downtimes due to their susceptibility to repair. Wiene jr.: "If we include all the costs factors after procurement, our machines turn out in the long term to be more economical than what, at first sight, might seem to be cheaper competitive products." The management by the Kraft and Wiene families has stamped a positive mark on the company's development. Hostert Pro

A new Hostert Pro LL (in the foreground) is being assembled, and a second-hand one (in the background) is being refurbished. The more compact design of the new machine is very striking.



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is managed by two generations, "but", says Wiene jr., "the entire team lives the philosophy of a family company." That means, for example, that working hours are handled more flexibly than in large companies when, say, an order has to be completely urgently. It also means that all the employees identify more intensively with its products, because everyone is involved more in the success and continuing existence of the company. "This attitude guarantees the high quality of our products," said Wiene jr. Another success factor is Hostert Pro's high innovative force. This, Wiene jr. said, involved tailoring solutions to suit the specific needs of every industry customer in the shortest possible time. "If such a problem is solvable, our bosses retire to their design office, and you can be sure that they will come up with a reliable solution to the full satisfaction of the customer."

Optimistically into the future

It is not surprising that Hostert Pro is looking to the future with so much optimism. "Many new products are at the design phase and will create a number of surprises when they come out. A few months ago, we also developed a special wet processing machine for digitally exposed baryta paper, which has since been installed at various places in the UK, the USA and France. We regard this truly special niche product as a sign that, even in the digital age, wet processing is far from dead," said Wiene jr. "Quite simply, the best results are achieved on proper photo paper, also with digitally captured pictures. I am certain that consumers will also recognize this fact when they have experimented with other possibilities and made comparisons." The company's plans for the coming months are a good indication of the confidence with which Hostert Pro is looking to the future. "We have reached our capacity limits, in terms of both space and personnel, so we intend to significantly increase the production area in Bad Marienberg by adding a new building. The number of employees will also grow over the next few months, said Wiene jr. "There is no other way to process the orders within a time that is acceptable to the customers."

The Hostert Pro roll-paper machine HP-RP 12 with leaderband transport was introduced in 2004. All the dryer systems have been thoroughly revamped and the racks significantly improved.

