

Felix Schoeller launches high-quality photo book paper

PHOTO QUALITY FOR DIGITAL PRESSES

The world market leader for imaging paper, Felix Schoeller, Osnabrueck, Germany, has invested its profound know-how in a new generation of photo book papers. The E-Photo “Lustre” paper, developed and certified specifically for HP Indigo, allows the production of photo books, calendars and greeting cards in true photo quality.

E-Photo “Lustre” paper has been specially developed for digital printing, and, with its satin finish, has the look and feel of real photo material. That is not surprising because the paper is PE-coated on both sides and has a structure largely similar to silver halide photo base papers, with which Felix Schoeller has been world market leader for several decades.

The success story of the German company, which,

with more than 2,400 employees, produced 340,000 metric tons of special paper in 2008, began more than 110 years ago with the production of the first photo base papers in Osnabrueck. The company gained the undisputed no. 1 position on the world market as a supplier to all the major manufacturers of silver halide photo papers.

The people at Felix Schoeller were quick to recognize the enormous market changes that would come from digital technology. As early as 1990, the company began developing and producing innovative specialty papers especially for the inkjet printing process. In the same year, Felix Schoeller added a second string to its bow by starting production of decor papers for the furniture industry, and is now one of the leading manufacturers in this segment, too. The total of eight production plants (five in Germany plus one each in the United States, Canada and Russia) are supplemented by sales and service centers in Shanghai (China), Tokyo (Japan), São Paulo (Brazil), London (UK), Paris (France), Milan (Italy), Budapest (Hungary), Waterloo (Belgium) and Helsingborg (Sweden), which ensure that the German specialty paper manufacturer enjoys a global presence.

Extensive imaging expertise

Felix Schoeller has consistently expanded its leading market position in the photo paper segment. The production of these materials is very complex and

demanding, necessitating top production standards and ongoing improvement. The team at Felix Schoeller is well aware of this. The quality management systems are certified to ISO 9001, and the high-grade materials are manufactured strictly in accordance with environmental protection guidelines. Felix Schoeller purchases the pulp to make the paper from sustainable forestry sources, from suppliers certified by the PEFC. The company’s environmental management system conforms to the latest standards and has been certified to ISO 14001 for several years.

The E-Photo “Lustre” paper is produced by Felix Schoeller at its factory in Weissenborn in the eastern part of Germany.

Here, the company operates an integrated photo paper production facility that is quite unique throughout the world. The actual paper production is supplemented by high-speed extruders for the double-sided PE coating of the material. Inkjet papers are subsequently coated with an ink-receiving layer for optimum absorption of the inks. After this, the special paper is cut and packed to suit the relevant applications.

Last but not least, the Weissenborn production plant is equipped with a highly efficient logistics center with a high-bay warehouse for punctual delivery of the materials – anywhere in the world. The introduction of the new E-Photo “Lustre” paper means that the factory now produces media for all the key imaging processes (silver halide, inkjet, dye sub and digital printing).



In Weissenborn, Germany, Felix Schoeller operates a unique integrated photo paper production facility. The actual paper production ① is supplemented by high-speed extruders ② for the double-sided PE coating. After converting ③, cutting and packaging, the highly efficient logistics center ensures punctual delivery of the materials – anywhere in the world ④.



“Top quality for all printing processes”

Interview with Guido Hofmeyer, Senior Vice President and General Manager of Felix Schoeller Imaging

With the new E-Photo “Lustre” paper, Felix Schoeller has extended its portfolio with a specialty product for digital presses. INTERNATIONAL CONTACT talked to Guido Hofmeyer, Senior Vice President and General Manager of Felix Schoeller Imaging, about the background behind this innovation.

INTERNATIONAL CONTACT: Mr. Hofmeyer, Felix Schoeller is the leading supplier of base papers for silver halide photo paper, high-quality inkjet photo paper and specialty papers for dye sublimation printing. Are you not creating competition for yourself with the new E-Photo “Lustre” paper for digital presses?

Guido Hofmeyer: Definitely not. As the leading manufacturer of imaging papers, we regard it as our duty to offer top-quality solutions for all imaging processes. Market developments in recent years have shown that more and more digital presses are being used in the field of photo services. Demand for photo books in particular has grown enormously: Only four years ago, it was a niche product barely worth mentioning. This year, we estimate the world market volume for photo books to be around 50 million. We are convinced that this growth will continue and that the market for photo books will double again in the next four years. With the new E-Photo “Lustre” paper, we provide our customers to take advantage of the rapidly increasing demand in the high value-added premium segment of the photo book market.

INTERNATIONAL CONTACT: Isn't the premium market already taken up the rapidly increasing number of photo books made with true silver halide paper?

Guido Hofmeyer: Today's consumers attach increasing importance to high print quality in their photo books. A photo book on true silver halide paper is an outstanding option. With our paper, service providers who concentrate on digital printing can now also benefit from this development. I am convinced that the premium segment will continue to grow at an above-average rate. After all, this trend is also evident in other areas such as the camera market, where digital SLRs and particularly high-quality compact and hybrid models are growing at a fast rate.

INTERNATIONAL CONTACT: Wasn't the quality of digital printing good enough before?

Guido Hofmeyer: I wouldn't put it like that. There is no doubt that digital presses can nowadays produce very good print quality on conventional paper, but there are certainly quality differences between the photo books being produced today by digital printing

on conventional paper and the fast-growing silver halide photo books. On top of this, consumers also connect the word „photo“ with expectations regarding the look and feel of the paper that conventional digital print papers cannot offer. That is why, with photo books made of these papers, we would prefer to speak of a “picture book”. Our new E-Photo “Lustre” paper, on the other hand, makes it possible to also produce real “photo books” with digital presses.

INTERNATIONAL CONTACT: Would silver halide photo paper then not be the obvious solution?

Guido Hofmeyer: It is certainly one obvious solution. The quality of silver halide photo paper is outstanding, and it is a very attractive solution for producing an excellent photo book. However, many present-day print service providers do not have the equipment or the capacity to process silver halide materials, which means that, from today's point of view, they can not comply with the trend towards higher-quality photo books. This is precisely where we come in with our E-Photo “Lustre”. With this material, we offer the possibility to produce premium products without any need to invest in additional machinery. And, of course, the E-Photo “Lustre” paper is suitable not only for top quality photo books, but also for photo calendars, posters, greeting cards and other high value-adding print products.

INTERNATIONAL CONTACT: You mentioned the affinity between the E-Photo “Lustre” paper and photo base papers. Does that mean you can simply take the new material „off the shelf“? Why then is it only available for HP Indigo machines?

Guido Hofmeyer: It would, of course, be very easy

if we could simply take innovations off the shelf, but printing with digital presses makes very special demands on the paper, especially if it is PE-coated like E-Photo “Lustre”. The printing inks have to be applied to the paper under the influence of heat, and polyethylene, as you know, is heat-sensitive. We have therefore developed a special formulation to ensure optimum print quality.

As far as the surface finish is concerned, we have oriented ourselves to professional photography. The structured gloss combines the advantages of a matte finish (reduced fingerprints, dazzle and reflection-free) and a glossy finish. We have focused initially on HP Indigo digital presses because they are used to produce well over 70 percent of all digitally printed photo books. That naturally does not exclude the possibility of developing suitable materials in future for other makes.

INTERNATIONAL CONTACT: How has the market responded to the E-Photo “Lustre” paper?

Guido Hofmeyer: When it was first announced at photokina 2008, the material immediately attracted enormous interest among photo service providers. Big companies are now using it and, to underscore the premium character of the books and achieve high added value, have developed special concepts for marketing photo books produced with E-Photo “Lustre” paper. Other providers are currently testing our material. We are confident that more and more of them will recognize the opportunities our paper offers them to stand out from aggressively priced competitors.

INTERNATIONAL CONTACT: Mr. Hofmeyer, thank you for talking to us.

The main advantages of E-Photo “Lustre”

With its special PE-coated satin “Lustre”, the double-sided printable imaging paper for HP Indigo digital presses has the look and feel of a true photo print. The special properties ensure excellent toner adhesion with brilliant color rendition and high depth of contrast. The low-reflection surface is dirt-repellent and prevents undesirable mirror effects. Compared with conventional digital print papers, E-Photo “Lustre” has much higher aging resistance so that consumers can enjoy their prints for a very long time. The new paper is available in weights of 190 and 250 g/m² in the 46 x 32 cm format for HP Indigo machines. Other formats (roll width 144.2 cm) are available on request.

Felix Schoeller's E-Photo “Lustre” paper is PE-coated on both sides and has a structure largely similar to silver halide photo base papers.

